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Young leaders drive environmental change

A new generation of Chinese is stepping off the beaten path to protect deserts, birds and biodiversity — turning environmental ideals into everyday action

Above: Sheng Tiancheng observes and photographs migratory birds in Yancheng, Jiangsu province. **Right:** Wildlife images captured by Sheng featuring various species. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



BY GUI QIAN

Standing on a sand dune in Minqin county, Gansu province, Zhong Lin, 27, gazed into the distance at rows of newly planted saxaul saplings.

"Turning a desert into an oasis might not be very realistic, but we can certainly protect the existing oases," he said.

In 2021 Zhong returned to his hometown from Lanzhou, the provincial capital, to start a tree-planting business. Since then he has become a key figure in local efforts to combat desertification.

His inspiration came from Minqin's long history of battling encroaching sands.

"My hometown has been fighting desertification since the Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, making it one of the earliest places in China to do so," he said. "Today it's up to us young people to take up the baton."

Zhong's path reflects a broader trend among young people who are breaking away from traditional career expectations. Instead of taking jobs in big cities, some are heading to deserts, wetlands and rural areas, turning environmental protection into both a mission and a livelihood.

Of course these choices come with challenges. "There was a lot of financial pressure," Zhong said. "My parents didn't understand, and my friends thought I was being silly."

The work itself is tough, too. After a sandstorm in March only a few dozen of the 500 newly planted saxaul trees survived.

However, Zhong is no quitter. In 2022 he started a social media account showing short videos of his daily planting work. The account drew a lot of attention.

His biggest breakthrough came last year when he appeared on the second season of the reality show *Become a Farmer*, planting trees alongside celebrities. Since then, planting trees in Minqin has become popular among young people, attracting many volunteers. Zhong even built steel-framed houses for the volunteers, which have since evolved into a "desert home base."

Li Yanyan, 20, of Xiangtan, Hunan province, is also a doer.

She is studying wildlife and nature reserve management at Beijing Forestry University and is head of the school's environmental club, and in September discovered that the glass buildings on campus

posed a fatal threat to birds.

This discovery led her to connect with broader efforts to tackle the issue, including the China National Anti-Bird Collision Network, with tens of thousands of participants.

Li quickly gathered data from the previous three years, analyzed it and submitted a proposal to the university president. She then began advocating for anti-collision window decals across campus.

By last December nearly 3,200 square feet of glass corridors had been modified. In April she and her team continued their work, expanding the project to more campus areas.

Her efforts have also inspired similar actions at other universities, including Peking University and Sun Yat-sen University in Guangdong province.

"Protecting biodiversity isn't just the responsibility of a few professionals," she said. "It's something everyone should integrate into their daily lives."

Joining Li in this mission is Sheng Tiancheng, who is studying finance at the same university. Although his academic background is not directly related, Sheng is an experienced wildlife conservationist.



From above: Zhong Lin (left) is a key figure in combating desertification in Minqin, Gansu province. Volunteers hike into the desert in Minqin, on April 22.

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Above: Sheng Tiancheng organizes bird-watching activities for primary and secondary school students. **Below:** Li Yanyan, another wildlife conservationist, observes birds with her team.



He began bird-watching when he was 12 and has since become a wildlife photographer, capturing images of sparrows in city parks, migratory birds at reservoirs and animals resting in forests. His work documenting the skywalker hoolock gibbon (*Hoolock tianxing*) even earned him a national photography award.

"Through my camera more people can appreciate the beauty of wildlife," he said. "That sense of wonder can spark love and compassion, and ultimately raise awareness about protecting the natural world."

Sheng is also a nature educator. Each year he organizes dozens of bird-watching activities, mainly for primary and secondary school students.

In Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, he created a bird-watching camp in which he invites experts of the Chinese Academy of Sciences to lead lessons and incorporate biodiversity knowledge into interactive games.

Sheng said that even in a "concrete jungle," humans and wildlife breathe the same air, so protecting nature is not a choice but a survival skill we all need to learn.

Nature protection and wildlife conservation may be relatively niche fields, but young people such as Zhong, Li and Sheng are dedicated and driven by the belief that life is not a one-way street, and that their efforts are yielding results.

More than 800,000 trees have been planted this year, covering about 330 acres of land targeted for desertification control, Zhong said.

Last year more than 7,000 volunteers took part in the initiative, and so far this year there have already been 34,000 volunteer visits. Half of these volunteers are university students and young people aged 20 to 35, coming from various professions and regions.

Nan Xi, 27, an art teacher from Gansu province, joined the tree-planting base and brightened the surroundings by painting murals on the steel-framed buildings. She also took on organizational duties and often serves as the first person to welcome new volunteers. She even brought in her parents to help with cooking, which has greatly improved meals for everyone at the base.

Pu Yiyu contributed to this story.

Documentary revisits ping-pong days of 1971

BY MINLU ZHANG

In 1971 the American table tennis player Glenn Cowan boarded the wrong bus during the world championships in Nagoya, Japan. He missed the U.S. team's bus and got on the next one, only to find himself on the Chinese team's bus.

On the bus a 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," the film producer Bill Einreinhofer said. "And their picture

was taken and traveled around the world. They started a dialogue between America and China that continues today."

Einreinhofer, a three-time Emmy Award-winning producer, documented the period in his new film *Your Serve or Mine*. The encounter led to what became known as ping-pong diplomacy.

The group of nine U.S. 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 streamed on the Public Broadcasting Service in the U.S. in May, and the New York Film Academy hosted a pre-

miere for the film on April 30.

"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 little about it. So Einreinhofer started researching and realized "how profound that moment in history was."

"I discovered how powerful it can be when college and university students from China and the U.S. 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."

The documentary also tells the stories of present-day people-to-people exchanges between China and the U.S.

Roxanne Roman, one of the characters in the documentary, who was a Schwarzman Scholar at Tsinghua University in Beijing in 2018 and is a

graduate of NYU Shanghai, said: "It is really great to see that there's still a lot of effort and desire in working on people-to-people relations. I think 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."

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," said Joy Zhu, executive vice-president for the China region at the New York Film Academy.

“
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.”

BILL EINREINHOFFER,
FILM PRODUCER

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Pace of trade in services picks up

Driven by burgeoning inbound tourism and robust growth in knowledge-intensive services, China's trade in services expanded strongly in the first four months of the year, underscoring the country's efforts to promote new growth drivers, analysts say.

China is committed to opening its door even wider and improving its global competitiveness amid uncertainties in international trade, they said.

From January to April China's trade in services continued to grow, the total value of imports and exports being 2.63 trillion yuan (\$366 billion), 8.2% more than in the corresponding period last year, the Ministry

of Commerce said.

China's trade in knowledge-intensive services grew steadily during this period, with the total value of imports and exports being over 1 trillion yuan, 5.5% more than in the corresponding period last year, the ministry said.

The value of travel services exports rose 79.9% compared to the first four months of last year, the fastest growth among all subsectors, it said.

The surge in travel services is largely attributed to China's visa-free policies. By the middle of this month China had unilaterally granted visa-free entry to 43 countries, signed mutual visa exemption agreements with 29 countries and

offered 240-hour visa-free transit to travelers from 55 countries. These measures have fostered a more conducive climate for foreign tourists coming to China, experts said.

"China's willingness to invite the world demonstrates the country's commitment to expanding openness," said Chen Jianwei, a researcher at the Academy of China Open Economy Studies of the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing.

In addition, the country recently upgraded its instant tax refund system for foreign visitors, which, coupled with its improved payment services, makes China an appealing destination for

both travel and shopping.

China has reduced the minimum purchase threshold for tax refunds to 200 yuan from 500 yuan as part of its broader efforts to strengthen the clout of its consumer market and, thereby, cement its position in global supply chains, he said.

"This will compel other countries and global companies to carefully weigh the costs of decoupling from China against the dividends of engaging with the Chinese market."

Meng Pu, chairman of the technology company Qualcomm China, said: "Amid China's fast-growing trade in services, we not only see greater efficiency and innovative applications brought

by technology, but also the tremendous potential for win-win cooperation. Technology can only unleash its maximum value within an open and collaborative ecosystem."

Zhao Jinping, vice-president of the China Association of Trade in Services, said that China needs to tap into its trade in services as a means of buffering potential headwinds.

China will push for the high-standard opening-up of its services trade by aligning with international high-standard economic and trade rules, and go ahead with the implementation of the negative list for cross-border trade in services, he said.

— WANG KEJU



A cargo ship carrying foreign trade containers heads out of the port of Qingdao in Shandong province, on May 12. YU FANGPING / FOR CHINA DAILY

Collaboration between U.S. and China seen as vital for international supply

Businesses that rely on goods made in the U.S. and in China are seeing blockages in global supply chains open up after the world's two largest economies agreed to a truce in the simmering trade war.

The global shipping and logistics company Maersk said ocean freight volumes from China to the U.S. had risen significantly after initial changes to tariffs last month following talks in Geneva. In April Maersk's freight bookings from China to the U.S. had fallen 40%, the company said.

The rise in freight would probably "add pressure to U.S. West Coast terminals, particularly Los Angeles, Long Beach and inland networks, as more cargo moves through key gateways in the weeks ahead", Maersk said.

The increase in volumes into the U.S. comes after output from North American and Asian manufacturers fell in April after an initial rush to stockpile goods, according to the GEP Global Supply Chain Volatility Index.

"The pause on tariffs is a major relief for manufacturers in both the U.S. and China," said John Piatek, vice-president of consulting for GEP.

The two countries held the first meeting of the China-U.S. economic and trade consultation mechanism in London earlier this month, agreeing in

principle on implementing the important consensus reached by the two heads of state during a phone call on June 5 and the framework of measures to consolidate the outcomes of the economic and trade talks held in Geneva last month.

The combined economies of the U.S. and China account for 43% of global GDP and nearly

"The pause on tariffs is a major relief for manufacturers in both the U.S. and China."

— JOHN PIATEK

48% of global manufacturing output, the World Bank says. Ironing out trade issues is vital not just for the two countries but for international business as a whole.

While the U.S. leads the way in supplying advanced technology, China relies on some U.S. components for its automobiles, electronics and technology products.

Other top U.S. exports include aircraft, appliances, food and beverages, minerals, nuclear reactors, oils and spacecraft. About 930,000 U.S. jobs depend on exports to

China, the U.S.-China Business Council says.

Tom Fullerton, an economist and professor at the University of Texas at El Paso, said U.S. tariffs on imports of steel, aluminum, automobiles and auto parts are problematic especially for key trading partners such as China, Mexico and Canada.

This is because the U.S. "does not make enough of those items to satisfy total demand for those products and imports make up the difference".

The 90-day pause on so-called reciprocal tariffs imposed on April 2 is set to expire next month.

Fullerton warns that going back to the "reciprocal tariffs" rates could cause a blowback to U.S. businesses or stagflation.

The global supply chain is also heavily reliant on Chinese companies for building ships and making ceramics and textiles because China is the world's biggest exporter of these products, says the International Trade Center, a United Nations-backed agency that focuses on open trade.

For the U.S. to find an alternative supplier of these goods, it could take years, billions of dollars, and depend on establishing many new supply chains outside of China.

The impact of the trade war in the US and abroad is being closely watched by economists.

Last month U.S. retail sales fell by the biggest volume recorded since March 2023, the U.S. Census Bureau says. Many consumers pulled back on spending after shopping ahead to avoid potentially higher prices because of tariffs.

— BELINDA ROBINSON

OLD WARRIORS PUT BEST FOOT FORWARD AGAIN

For Sean O'Harrow, president of the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, California, the return of the Terracotta Warriors is more than a curatorial milestone — it is the continuation of a deeply personal journey that began in his youth.

Guided by his father, a scholar of Chinese and Vietnamese philology, O'Harrow first visited Xi'an in Shaanxi province as a teenager, an experience that left a lasting impression.

"My father said that an educated person must know about Chinese history, and to know China, one must visit Xi'an and Shaanxi province," O'Harrow said. "We visited Xi'an for the first time many, many years ago, and it made me understand the importance and scale of Chinese history. Everything I saw blew my mind. It was an unforgettable experience that changed my life forever".

Decades later, O'Harrow now proudly welcomes the Terracotta Warriors to the Bowers Museum for a third time. The museum previously hosted the artifacts in 2008 and 2011. But this year's exhibition, *World of the Terracotta Warriors: New Archaeological Discoveries in Shaanxi in the 21st Century*, goes far beyond previous displays by tracing the origins of Chinese civilization and offering North American audiences a window into over 2,000 years of history.

The exhibition, which opened on May 24 and runs through October 19, marks the 50th anniversary of the discovery of the Terracotta Warriors, widely regarded as one of the greatest archaeological finds of the 20th century. It features more than 110 newly excavated artifacts from across Shaanxi province, many of which are being exhibited in North America for the first time.

"We aim to present the latest archaeological discoveries

from Shaanxi and explore how the Qin Empire was formed," said Jiao Tianlong, chief curator of the Bowers Museum. "This collection offers fresh insights into how the Qin unified China and the ancient civilizations that preceded it."

The immersive journey begins with relics from Shimao, one of the earliest known fortified cities in China, dating back to about 2300 B.C. From there visitors are guided through the Shang (c.16th-11th century B.C.) and Zhou (c.11th century-256 B.C.) dynasties, leading up to the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.) and the life-sized Terracotta Warriors that famously guarded the tomb of Emperor Qinshihuang after he died in 210 B.C.

In addition to the iconic warriors, the exhibition showcases exquisitely crafted chariots, ceremonial jade and gold ornaments, ritual bronze vessels and ornate fittings from royal tombs.

The exhibition also stands out for its use of modern technology. Through interactive digital elements, visitors can engage with the artifacts in new ways, including a painting station that allows them to color Terracotta Warriors using traditional palettes once used on the original figures.

Anne Shih, chairwoman of the Bowers Museum Board of Governors, said the exhibition is the fulfillment of a long-awaited dream. "We hope this will foster even closer ties between the people of China and the U.S. This exhibition is a powerful bridge for cultural exchange and mutual understanding."

The exhibition is jointly organized by the Bowers Museum and Emperor Qinshihuang's Mausoleum Site Museum, with support from the Shaanxi Provincial Cultural Heritage Administration.

— RENA LI



Visitors look at a bronze chariot and horses at the World of the Terracotta Warriors exhibition at the Bowers Museum in Santa Ana, California, on May 23. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

SOCIETY



A view of two green building projects in Nanjing, Jiangsu province. WANG LUXIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Express deliveries surge spurs eco shift

With express delivery ubiquitous in China, public and private sectors are taking steps to reduce packaging waste and forge a more sustainable path.

The 174.5 billion deliveries in the country last year were the most for any country for the 11th straight year, and 21% more than in 2023.

In 2022 alone about 9.92 billion packaging boxes and about 55.71 billion feet of tape were used by China's express delivery industry, the State Post Bureau says.

This has raised growing concerns about the environmental impact of packaging waste and excessive material consumption.

The State Council has called on express delivery companies to promote greener, reduced and reusable express packaging from June 1. This requirement stresses that environmentally friendly, biodegradable and reusable materials should be used in express delivery packaging.

In recent years express delivery companies in China and postal authorities have endeavored to reduce material use, recycle packaging materials and develop degradable materials.

Express delivery companies typically repackage goods using their own branded boxes, but more recently some shipments have been made using original boxes to save on excess packaging.

Gao Jiaqi, in charge of JDL Express' intelligent logistics park in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, said direct shipments are becoming more commonplace.

"When goods arrive at our warehouses from the manufacturers, we ship them directly to consumers without any repackaging," Gao said. JDL is the logistics branch of the e-commerce company JD.

In total, direct shipment helped JDL reduce the number of repackaged items by 1 billion last year.

ZTO Express, another express delivery company, has been promoting the same practice. "All warehouses give priority to shipping goods in their original packaging from merchants," said Xu Yonggui, head of the marketing and branding department of ZTO Cloud Warehouse Supply Technology.

Despite more efficient material use, single-use packaging still generates a significant amount of waste. To extend the life cycle of boxes, express delivery companies and postal services have introduced reusable circulation boxes.

Reusable plastic boxes are circulating in logistics stations of JDL Express, SF Express and Deppon Express for inter-station transportation, avoiding single-use packaging.

— LI SHANGYI

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Leading a green life makes absolute sense on all levels

As China pursues its dual-carbon goals and as people become more conscious of the importance of environmental sustainability, the green building industry is poised for significant growth.

Dual carbon goals refers to the country's targets of peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060.

Green building means a building that conserves resources to the utmost — such as energy, land, water and materials — protects the environment and reduces pollution.

Behind the rise of green building, more and more people are pursuing a greener lifestyle, with practices such as using their own mugs or bottles when buying coffee.

Moreover, cafes and restaurants following the principle of leadership in energy and environmental design, or LEED, are becoming highly popular as shoppers pay special attention to whether stores identify as adopting LEED practices.

The LEED rating system, devised by the United States Green Building Council, assesses the degree to which a building is environmentally friendly, uses energy-efficient equipment, renewable energies or other technologies that reduce the negative impacts of

buildings on the environment.

In Middle Urumqi Road in Shanghai's Jing'an district, there is the world's first LEED Zero Energy pharmacy. It stores certain drugs in refrigerators, keeping them at a constant temperature and humidity. The refrigerators are energy-saving and use environmentally friendly refrigerant.

"In terms of daily routine work, we adopt a series of on-line internal and external office systems to reduce the generation of paper waste," said Yang Ge, senior vice-president of Cowell Health, the parent company of Cowell — the LEED Zero Energy pharmacy.

"Not only in our stores, but also in our office and logistics systems, we have gradually achieved paperless and electronic documentation, as well as the use of recyclable turnover boxes. In addition, for unavoidable waste such as pharmaceutical packaging, we conduct detailed classification and collection in accordance with LEED requirements to better realize the resource utilization of garbage."

Many food and beverage companies are now scaling up their green building efforts. The Chinese coffee chain Luckin Coffee owns three LEED gold-level outlets,

in Xiamen, Fujian province, in Tianjin and in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. The outlets are greener in terms of design and construction.

Based on the degree to which buildings meet certain criteria in categories such as energy efficiency, water conservation and indoor environmental quality, there are four levels of LEED certification: certified (40-49 points), silver (50-59 points), gold (60-79 points) and platinum (80+ points).

Luckin was also the first Chinese coffee brand to acquire LEED platinum-level certification. Its 20,000th outlet, in Beijing's Zhongguancun, was built according to LEED platinum-level standards during the design and construction stages and acquired certification last year.

With intelligent energy monitoring and energy-saving equipment, the outlet's energy efficiency has been significantly improved, and energy conservation and emissions reductions have been promoted. With the help of a fresh air system and intelligent LED lighting, consumers can have a more comfortable shopping experience in the store.

McDonald's China owns the largest number of LEED-certified projects globally.

Over 3,600 outlets in China are LEED certified, accounting for more than half of its total in the country, covering 29 provincial-level regions in the Chinese mainland.

"With McDonald's China's large scale and rapid pace of expansion, we have developed a standardized and replicable LEED certification prototype, enabling 100% of our new restaurants to achieve LEED certification standard and continuously lead in green restaurant development," said Doni Ma, vice-president of McDonald's China National Construction, Design, Equipment and Facility.

The U.S. Green Building Council said that the Chinese mainland once again ranked first in the world on its annual list of top 10 countries and regions for LEED last year. It was the ninth year in a row that the Chinese mainland has topped the list.

The ranking highlights countries and regions outside the U.S. making significant strides in healthy, sustainable building design, construction and operations. Last year 1,860 LEED green building projects, representing more than 269 million square feet of space, were LEED-certified in the Chinese mainland.

— ZHENG YIRAN

Mindful citizens get with the low-carbon program

Low-carbon living has become a habit for Wei Ying, 36, of Wuhan, Hubei province, but she was surprised when her lifestyle choices such as riding rental bicycles and recycling her trash contributed to a reduction in a bank loan.

On April 28 she offset 90 yuan (\$12) from her monthly mortgage payment with 45,000 grams of carbon credits, making her the first resident in Wuhan to do so.

She earned the credits via Wutanjianghu, a mini program within the social media app WeChat, launched in June 2023 by Wuhan Carbon Inclusion Management Co. under the guidance of the Wuhan Ecology and Environment Bureau. It aims to encourage locals to adopt low-carbon lifestyles.

As China moves ahead with its climate targets of peaking carbon dioxide emissions before 2030 and achieving carbon neutrality before 2060, the mini program provides a microcosm for how local authorities are moving to encourage people to help reach these goals.

Wei started to use the mini program in 2023. "I already led a low-carbon and environmentally friendly lifestyle then, but



Residents take part in a game promoting low-carbon awareness in Wuhan, Hubei province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the mini program makes me feel that my actions have tangible value because it records and quantifies my low-carbon activities."

The mini program encourages people to do more low-carbon things such as switching off lights when leaving an empty room or using public transport, by tracking these activities within the phone, connecting with other apps and sharing data, and then giving points or carbon credits for these actions. The points can be cashed in for various prizes or products and

even be used to lower bills.

The mini program has 1.6 million users, said Liu Shu, chairman of Wuhan Carbon Inclusion Management Co. Emissions reductions recorded on the mini program have gone beyond 33,000 short tons, he said.

A similar mini program named Sanjin Green Living, launched in September 2022 in Shanxi province, has also been a success.

Since going live, the mini program has engaged more than 7.3 million users, and their low-carbon activities

have collectively led to a reduction of about 265,300 short tons in carbon dioxide emissions, said Shanxi Green Trading Center Co., the operator of the mini program. The center, which Shanxi province established 13 years ago, supervises carbon trading in the province.

Liu Zelong, director of the center, said it continues to face challenges in promoting the mini program.

"It aims to instill in citizens the concept of green travel and green consumption because many people didn't have this concept before."

Thanks to a fund of 4 million yuan provided by the Shanxi Provincial Department of Ecology and Environment, the center also introduced incentives to promote the program. The carbon credits earned through the mini program can be exchanged for prizes including prepaid supermarket gift cards and drinks, Liu said.

The platform has attracted businesses including bakeries, travel companies, coffee stores and grain producers that donate prizes, and last year the number of its users rose by 2.4 million, Liu said.

— ZHOU LIHUA, ZHU XINGXIN AND HOU LIQIANG

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BEIJING SPECIAL



GRAND CANAL CULTURE HIGHLIGHTED



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The 2025 Grand Canal Cultural Belt Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue opened at the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing in Tongzhou district on May 29. It showcased the achievements in the construction of the Grand Canal cultural belt in recent years, as well as the efforts of cities along the canal to enhance their cultural significance through innovative approaches.

This year's event debuted the "Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue" Grand Canal mascot, Hexi; the Grand Canal designer toy, Shuiyun'er; and the *China Grand Canal Cultural Relics Atlas*.

Hexi, designed by Chinese artist Han Meilin's team, is inspired by the water deity of the canal town, which symbolizes joy and the auspicious vision of safeguarding water sources and nurturing all living beings. Encircling its body is a flowing ribbon derived from Han's water and cloud patterns, creating a wispy and ethereal effect.

Breaking away from traditional stern frameworks, the image of Hexi is reshaped with a round and lively posture, featuring a head resembling a dewdrop, rosy cheeks and a hint of innocence in its expression.

Shuiyun'er, developed by Pop Mart International Group, showcases a group of cultural dissemination spirits with innovative Chinese design, representing Grand Canal culture. The spirit Shuiyun'er by the Grand Canal is originally a raindrop leading to five major waterways, namely the Yangtze River, Yellow River, Huaihe River, Qiantang River and Haihe River. By reshaping the water messenger with a delightful Chinese style, it allows the audience to feel the cultural pulse of the millennium-old canal.

The event also introduced the *China Grand Canal Cultural Relics Atlas* published by China News Service's China Newsweek magazine. It features 52 museums in 36 cities across eight provinces and municipalities along the canal.

Among the provinces and municipalities traversed by the canal in China, there are around 1,300 museums. Some of these canal-side museums offer distinctive views of the canal, while others are located at archaeological sites or house sought-after collections. Some museums even offer boat tours.

The Grand Canal Museum

of Beijing, a representative museum on the atlas, is showcasing the historical connections between Beijing and the Grand Canal through more than 1,000 artifacts and artworks. As one of the cultural landmarks of Beijing Municipal Administrative Center, the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing was opened in December 2023. It has hosted significant exhibitions such as *Unveiling Sanxingdui and Jinsha of Ancient Shu Civilizations* and *This is the Shang* series, becoming a popular destination for visitors in Beijing.

The cultural symbol exhibition between Beijing and Zhejiang at the event focused on the theme of canal scenery, presenting the regional landscapes and aesthetics of Beijing and Hangzhou at either end of the Grand Canal. The Hangzhou exhibition area had the charm of the Jiangnan region. Led by Chinese culinary master Liu Guoming, it showcased the historical and cultural heritage of Hangzhou cuisine.

The Hangzhou exhibition area featured a special presentation of cold dishes themed around the Grand Canal, attracting the interest of many guests. Ingredients such as shrimp, cucumber, ham, flour and roast duck were presented by the chefs into shapes resembling mountains, lotus flowers and boats.

On the other side, the Beijing exhibition area highlighted the elegance of the city, featuring live demonstrations by an inheritor of the Quanjudu hanging-oven roasted duck technique and a Quanjudu pastry master, along with a display of snack gift boxes and cultural and creative products.

The Beijing section of the Grand Canal has traversed more than 1,000 years, spanning seven districts and has played a significant role in the development of the capital.

Since 2017, the local government has made continuous efforts to renovate the natural landscape, historical sites and urban scenes along the Beijing section of the Grand Canal. The canal has been replenished by 17.7 billion cubic feet of water; more than 31 miles of waterfront greenways have been renovated or newly constructed; a number of wetland parks have been opened; and the Beijing Grand Canal Cultural Scenic Area has been designated as a 5A-rated cultural tourism destination.

The Grand Canal Museum

of Beijing, Beijing Performing Arts Centre, and Beijing Library have become new cultural landmarks in Beijing Municipal Administrative Center. In 2024, the number of visitors reached approximately 6.5 million. The Liangma River International Waterfront Area, featuring an 198-acre riverside park, has a fully connected 11.18-mile waterfront greenway. Night tours along the Liangma River have become popular, earning it a mention in the first batch of national-level nighttime cultural and tourism consumption areas.

Furthermore, efforts continue to promote the coordinated restoration of surface and underground areas and the simultaneous ecological recovery of rivers. The coordinated efforts of Beijing, Tianjin and Hebei have advanced comprehensive management of groundwater overextraction in North China, resulting in an average increase of 7.15 feet in the depth of groundwater along the Grand Canal compared to the end of 2020.

"The Chinese nation has two of its proudest artistic achievements, one is the Great Wall, the other is the Grand Canal," said Han, the artist and senior professor at Tsinghua University. He grew up in Shandong province through which the Grand Canal flows. He said he believes that the story of the Grand Canal in China needs to be told by more people.

Zhao Feng, dean of the School of Art and Archaeology at Zhejiang University, shared the relationship between the Grand Canal and silk culture.

Zhao said: "The canal connects all directions, especially linking the homeland of silkworms and the center of silk production." He also noted his hopes to combine silk artifacts from the past millennium, intangible cultural heritage of dyeing and weaving and industrial heritage to inherit and innovate silk culture.

Currently, the inscription of the Grand Canal as a UNESCO World Heritage Site has brought the protection of the site into a new decade where both Beijing and Hangzhou will continue to promote their canal cultures. Since its establishment in 2019, the Grand Canal Cultural Belt Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue has aided exchanges among provinces and cities along the canal.

—YUAN SHENGGAO

Dialogue event reveals strategies that can rejuvenate waterway

The 2025 Grand Canal Cultural Belt Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue brought together officials, scholars, corporate leaders and representatives from international organizations, offering insights into the protection, inheritance and use of the canal.

The event, now in its sixth year, took place from May 29-30 in Beijing. With the theme "Sails Racing, Canal Thriving", it featured two high-level dialogues, a research activity, a drama performance, an exhibition, and canal markets held in several districts around the capital.

During the opening ceremony at the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing, officials from the two cities demonstrated their approaches and achievements in building the Grand Canal cultural belt.

In Beijing, 17.7 billion cubic feet of water have been added to the canal. The city has renovated and constructed more than 31 miles of riverside greenways, opened wetland parks, and established the Beijing Grand Canal Cultural Scenic Area in Tongzhou, which is a national 5A-rated tourist spot.

As the southern starting point of the Grand Canal, Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, has been committed to developing the canal for urban residents and tourists. It has built an array of new canal culture landmarks including the Grand Canal Hangzhou Steelworks Park, the Xiling Wulin Art Museum, and the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal Museum, local officials said.

Shan Jixiang, director of the expert committee of the Chinese Society of Cultural Relics, and Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy, delivered keynote speeches during the dialogue themed on canal cities and the waterside economy, which was held on May 29 in Xicheng district.

Shan explained the synergy between cultural heritage preservation and the water-

side economy, demonstrating its vital role in regional development throughout history — a model that still enlightens Xicheng's development.

Through policy-market coordinated mechanisms, the district's canal cultural resources can be transformed into drivers for the integrated development of culture, commerce, sports and tourism, and inject vitality into the waterside economy, Dai said.

The other high-level dialogue focused on using technology to promote cultural heritage preservation and cities' sustainable development.

Yang Yujia, curator of the Beijing-Hangzhou Grand Canal Museum, said that the integration of museums and technology goes beyond visual effects. It requires integration with artifact preservation, exhibitions, visitor services and public education.

"As museums evolve, they must maintain culture as their foundation, while employing new technology to showcase culture. It's both an emerging trend and a challenge for museum development," Yang said.

Tech companies should adopt natural and user-friendly interactive designs when developing products to establish emotional connections between the public and culture, and increase their engagement, said Ji Haiwei, vice-president of the digital culture division of Rokid, a Chinese leading augmented reality glasses company.

This year's event also launched the Beijing-Hangzhou Dialogue Grand Canal mascot, Hexi; the Grand Canal designer toy, Shuiyun'er; and the *China Grand Canal Cultural Relics Atlas*.

Hexi, created by Chinese artist Han Meilin's team, draws inspiration from the canal's "mythical water-guarding beast", embodying the wish to safeguard the waterway and nurture all forms of life.

—YUAN SHENGGAO



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LIFE

The Erhai Lake against the backdrop of Cangshan Mountain in Dali, Yunnan province.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



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Many of the Westerners who opt to decide to live in China end up in one of the country's numerous bustling metropolises, but there are those for whom the attraction of a more simple lifestyle — and one that is a lot cheaper — proves irresistible.

One of them is Patrik Bachstatter, 33, from Sweden, who has found not just a home but a new calling in the ancient town of Dali, Yunnan province.

Bachstatter met his wife in the Philippines, and the couple moved to China in 2018, living first in Shenyang, Liaoning province, later in Sanya, Hainan province, and then Qingdao, Shandong province. However, it was Dali, with its clear air, mountains and strong sense of community that offered a more lasting connection.

"I read that Dali is known as the 'California of China,'" Bachstatter said. "It's not a big city, but it has good infrastructure and a lifestyle that's closer to nature. That really appealed to me."

His path to organic farming was sparked by personal health concerns. After gallbladder surgery and digestive issues, he began paying closer attention to what he ate, and how food was grown.

"I wanted to feel better, so I focused on clean, healthy food. That led to a broader lifestyle change."

Drawn to Dali's ecological farming community, he began cultivating organic vegetables in villages across Midu and Eryuan counties, using sustainable techniques rooted in soil health and biodiversity.

Bachstatter said he starts

every day early. By sunrise he is usually walking by Erhai Lake, breathing the fresh air and resetting his internal clock. His mornings include yoga, stretching and reading before he heads out to his farm.

While many people may imagine an idyllic and unhurried rural lifestyle, Bachstatter's life is far from simple. It involves constant learning, trial-and-error farming, and an ongoing quest for deeper spiritual and physical well-being.

"Local farmers here are incredibly knowledgeable. Even

if they haven't studied organic methods, their connection to the land runs deep. There's so much to learn from their traditions."

In the quiet village of Nanxinan in Huangshan, Anhui province, the smoky aroma of wood-fired pizza mingles with the fragrance of tea fields and the earthy scent of preserved mandarin fish.

Adrien Brill, 35, an American, has traded the bustle of teaching in Chengdu, Sichuan province, for the serenity of rural China — and found purpose, community and creativity

in making pizzas in his wife's hometown eight years ago.

"My wife could be closer to her family, which was important to both of us, and I would finally have the chance to build the kind of life I had long been yearning for — one that's more in tune with nature, community, and personal well-being."

In 2021, after various business ventures including running an English-language training center, he launched a TikTok channel called Wen's Kitchen on which he cooked daily meals and explored village cuisine. In 2023 the opportunity came to

open a pizza shop in Nanxinan.

"I didn't choose the restaurant business. The restaurant business chose me. It started with a video we shot at the launch of our pizza shop. It went viral overnight. The next day we had hundreds of people lining up at our door. We had three tiny tables, no point-of-sale system, handwritten menus ... It was total chaos — but also magic."

Among his signature pizzas are one topped with preserved mandarin fish and another with fermented tofu, both traditional Anhui delicacies.

"It's not just food. It's a cultural exchange. It's the story of my family: one part American, one part Chinese, and something new and beautiful in between."

In 2023, 711,000 residence permits were issued to foreign nationals living in China, the National Immigration Administration says.

Yu Hai, a sociology professor at Fudan University in Shanghai, said China's opening-up began with big cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, which naturally attracted the largest number of foreigners. Back then, foreigners visiting small towns across China were mostly travelers passing through.

"However, choosing to settle down and build a life in a small town may be the newest chapter in the story of foreigners in China."

"The country has become not only a livable destination but also one that is increasingly friendly to diversity."

— YURAN

Expats shun city lights and go rural



Adrien Brill (left) works in his pizza shop in Huangshan, Anhui province; Patrik Bachstatter visits a traditional loquat farm in Dali, Yunnan province.



Rewind the videotape to the televised Spring Festival Gala in 1999 in China and you will see the first *xiangsheng*, or crosstalk show, staged entirely by non-Chinese performers.

Dressed in traditional Chinese garb, they made jokes in fluent Mandarin — complete with Beijing accent — and delivered new year salutations to raucous laughter from the audience. Among the performers was David Moser, a U.S. scholar on China.

"You can't imagine how nervous we were, as it was a live broadcast," Moser said. "But we knew we could not forget the lines because we had rehearsed so much."

Moser said he was delighted and honored to take part in the country's most-watched television event.

The 53-year-old is now a scholar of Chinese languages and culture, and associate professor at the International Culture Institute of Capital Normal University.

For Moser, crosstalk is a

good tool to learn Chinese because it is a comedic art form that combines language, history and local dialects.

It is also a great source of Chinese humor, he said, emphasizing that humor is universal across cultures, and it is only the content and context that vary.

Moser's interest in the country was aroused by the Chinese writing system and its distinctive characters. As he learned to write Chinese and learned more about the country's history, he gradually became interested in Chinese culture.

He studied the language on his own in the 1980s while working on a master's degree in music at Indiana University Bloomington. His fascination with the *Tao Te Ching* and Confucianism spurred his curiosity about China's philosophy and culture.

"I thought it was so fasci-



"Even if just two people from each country get to know each other deeply, they can become a force for cooperation."

DAVID MOSER

In 1986 Moser traveled to Beijing for the first time to help with the translation of a book at Peking University. "That was when I went from having just an interest in China to actually being actively involved in the country."

Great changes have taken place since then. He is also impressed by how, within 20 years, the Chinese went from being largely ignorant of the West to being well-versed in its culture.

Enthusiasm for English can be gauged by the popularity of a TV program titled *Outlook English* in the early 2000s. Aimed at teenagers and young adults, the educational program covered all aspects of life and integrated English learning into interesting programs, attracting an audience of millions.

Moser was a host, judge and translator for the show for

years. "This was a chance to use my skills and actually pass on my knowledge of the language to a very large number of people."

However, Moser said he eventually realized that TV stardom was not to be his destiny, and he received an offer to teach at Capital Normal University in 2007.

He loves blending East and West into something new, he said, and it is because of his different roles that he thinks he can act as a good bridge between cultures, dealing with many kinds of people in many different ways and explaining in simple terms aspects of China and the United States beyond books or movies.

Personal, face-to-face exchanges are more critical now than ever, he said.

"Even if just two people from each country get to know each other deeply, they can become a force for cooperation. That's how programs and friendships begin."

— ZHOU JIN

The path from jokester to academic

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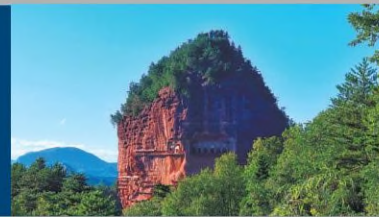
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FRATERNAL TIES

PROVINCES POOL
THEIR KNOW-HOW
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HIGH PLACES

RESTORERS POUR
ALL INTO GROTTOS
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Amid global trade headwinds, China has sent fresh signals that it will further expand high-standard opening-up and promote international cooperation to provide strong momentum for its own development and boost global economic growth.

The message resonated strongly at three recent key international fairs that China hosted over the course of about a week — the World Smart Industry Expo 2025 in Chongqing, the 25th China International Fair for Investment and Trade in Xiamen, Fujian province, and the 2025 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing.

President Xi Jinping sent three congratulatory messages in succession within six days to the events, which featured a wide range of domestic and international participants from various sectors.

In the letters, Xi reiterated the country's firm commitment to working with all parties to build an open world economy and advance the building of a community with a shared future for humanity.

While emphasizing that global development is facing challenges as well as opportunities amid profound changes in the world economic landscape, Xi assured the world that China will take solid measures to promote liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment, continue to share its development opportunities with the rest of the world, and inject more positive energy and greater certainty into global development.

Former Kyrgyz prime minister Djoomart Otorbaev said

Fresh signals point to global opportunities



Visitors interact with a robot at the 2025 China International Fair for Trade in Services at Shougang Park in Beijing, on Sept. 13. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

the fact that China is opening further to the outside world is important.

"China organized a lot of events at an international level where top specialists from around the world are attending and exchanging ideas," he said in a recent interview with China Global Television Network. "This is exactly what has to be done."

China has been steadfastly deepening reform on all fronts

to build a new system for an open economy. A series of measures on the reform of foreign trade has been introduced in areas including taxation, finance, and trade and investment facilitation.

Since 2017 the number of items on the negative list of restricted sectors for foreign investment has been reduced from 93 to 29, with all access restrictions for manufacturing removed.

Paul Bateman, chairman of J.P. Morgan Asset Management, has visited China more than 150 times over the past 30 years.

"With each visit, I'm more impressed by the vitality and growth of China's market," he said while addressing the Global Trade in Services Summit of the China International Fair for Trade in Services.

Noting that the company's presence in the country has

expanded in recent years thanks to China's decision to open up its service sector, particularly the removal of foreign equity caps in certain financial services, he said the growth of trade in services is creating significant opportunities.

China boasts the world's largest middle-income group, with per capita GDP of about 96,000 yuan (\$13,500) last year. It is the world's second-largest consumption market and second-largest import market, providing huge opportunities for the world.

Coupled with solid steps in expanding institutional opening-up, such as aligning with high-standard international economic and trade rules, China has also made consistent efforts to improve the business environment, with tangible results.

The 2025 China Business Report, published by the American Chamber of Commerce in Shanghai this month, indicated that over one-third of surveyed U.S. companies believe that China's policies and regulations regarding foreign companies have improved in the past few years. The figure for this year is higher than that for last year, it said.

Jeffrey Lehman, chairman of the chamber, said that one of the interesting results this year is that although the companies still regard the regulatory environment as challenging, they find that the challenges have been reduced since a year ago.

"This year is an improvement over 2024, and hopefully that trend will continue into 2026."

— CAO DESHENG

U.N. jobs put world at the feet of young Chinese



Zhang Wei (center) with local youth volunteers during a field mission in Muhanga, Rwanda, in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

When Zhang Wei was 24 she took a turn in her career path that seemed more than a little offbeat for someone about to complete the final year of her studies for a master's degree.

As with many of her peers, the local job market beckoned for the student of horticulture at Shanghai Jiao Tong University last year. Instead, after completing those studies she took a one-year sabbatical and boarded a plane bound for Rwanda, Central Africa.

There, as an agribusiness intern at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, she set herself on the path toward a once unthinkable career, one that an increasing number of Chinese students are opting for: working for the U.N.

"Agriculture wasn't exactly a conscious choice after the college entrance exam," Zhang said of her journey to becoming an FAO intern in Rwanda. "But as I studied and gained more exposure, I came to realize how vital agriculture is to livelihoods. That awareness led me to start thinking about the career possibilities."

"Serving at the FAO enables me to use my skills and knowledge in a multicultural, professional setting, allowing me to contribute to something bigger and more impactful."

This year the U.N. celebrates the 80th anniversary of its founding, and it is 54 years since China resumed its lawful seat in the body. These days for many young people in China the U.N. offers rich opportunities for building a career, something that was once regarded as a pipe dream.

The figures bear this out, the number of Chinese nationals working in the U.N. system more than doubling, to 1,664, in the 15 years to 2024.

Yet not long ago the pathway to a U.N. career for Chinese was anything but simple.

Li Wen, chief of mission in China for the International Organization for Migration, said that in the late 1990s linguistic roles were the primary entry point for most Chinese staff. "At that time the dominant channel was through language, translating and editing Chinese documents."

Li's connection with the U.N. goes back to her university days. In 1995, as a postgraduate student at the China Foreign Affairs University in Beijing, she took part in China's first Model United Nations conference, representing Afghanistan in a session on women's issues. Though her understanding of the U.N. was nascent, it ignited a desire to be involved.

SEE YOUTH, PAGE 2

ANCIENT CARVING LINKED TO MISSION OF FIRST EMPEROR

After months of debate about its nature, an inscribed rock carving near a lake in Madoi county, Qinghai province, has been identified by the National Cultural Heritage Administration as being from the Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.).

The 37-character inscription was found in 2020 on a rock along a lakeside slope, about 14,100 feet above sea level. It is of typical Qin-era *zhuanshu*, or seal script, writing style. The characters are spread across an area of 1.72 square feet, 7.48 inches above the ground.

Tong Tao, an archaeologist with the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said that when he arrived at the site in 2023 he instantly realized its extraordinary significance.

Except for some unclear characters, he recognized that the surviving words indicated that the carving was a historical recording absent from previously known documentation.

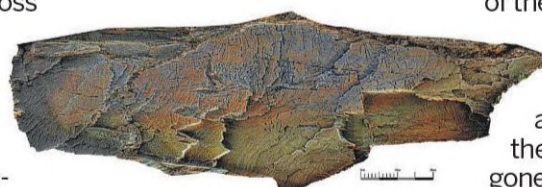
The carving documented that Qinshihuang, the first emperor of China, had sent a high official named Yi on a mission to lead alchemists picking medicinal herbs on Kunlun Mountain.

It is the only known surviving Qin-era rock carving that remains at its original site and could provide a key reference on the location of Kunlun, a monumental sacred mountain in ancient Chinese culture hailed as the "ancestor of all mountains".

For example, in *Erya*, one of the oldest Chinese dictionaries, dating back to the third century B.C., it is said that "the river comes from Kunlun", which corresponds to the location of

the rock carving, close to the source of the Yellow River.

Nevertheless, after Tong, the archaeologist, wrote an article about the earlier findings in the newspaper *Guangming Daily* in June, the inscription ignited debate in the media. While some scholars supported its identification as being from the Qin Dynasty, others doubted its credibility and saw it as a modern fabrication due to its well-preserved condition.



The Qin-era rock carving.

Deng Chao, director of the department of historic monuments in the National Cultural Heritage Administration, said that "laboratory analyses indicate that the inscribed rock consists of quartz sandstone, characterized by high abrasion resistance and strong weathering durability."

"Through high-definition examination, distinct tool markings on the inscribed characters were identified, indicating their creation using blunty-tipped engraving instruments,

which matches artisanship of the historical period."

Li Li, deputy director of the China Academy of Cultural Heritage, said mineralogical composition studies and metallic element analysis ruled out the possibility of fabrication involving contemporary alloys or modern carving implements.

"The mineral types and contents inside the carved grooves and on the surface of the carved stone are basically consistent. This indicates that both the interior of the grooves and the rock surrounding the inscriptions have undergone long-term weathering."

Comprehensive archaeological research has also been conducted across a vast tract of land surrounding the rock carving, said Wang Jinxian, director of the Qinghai Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

"Archaeological research showed that this lakeside region had been an area of frequent human activities dating back to the Paleolithic period," he said, responding to some public doubt about why Qinshihuang's mission left carvings on this "desolate land".

— WANG KAIHAO



Archaeological workers examine the site of a Qin Dynasty (221-206 B.C.) rock carving near a lake in Madoi county, Qinghai province.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

SOCIETY

Women from the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region take part in the training of Jin embroidery, a craft from Shanxi province, and showcase their works to tourists. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Uniting power of tea leaves and stitches

In a sunlit workshop a group of women bend over embroidered canvases, their needles flashing as their handiwork brings the rugged beauty of desert poplar trees to life.

The women are in the city of Wujiaqu, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, but the skills they are using come from Fanshi county, Shanxi province, more than 1,860 miles distant.

This cross-cultural exchange is part of a decade-long initiative blending intangible cultural heritage with targeted poverty alleviation, delivering economic power to rural women and reinvigorating cultural traditions dating back centuries.

This drive began when He Zhijian, a fourth-generation master of Jin embroidery from Fanshi, arrived in Wujiaqu under a pairing assistance program.

"Local Xinjiang embroidery was bold and rustic, using wool and thick yarns suited for large items like tapestries, but it lacked the refinement for delicate cultural products," he said.

What makes Fanshi work special is its intricate color gradations, delicate silk threads and highly refined needlework.

While Xinjiang embroidery features bold geometric patterns and vibrant flat color fields, Jin embroidery favors subtle shading, fine detail and pictorial realism, which has often been used for decorative panels, apparel ornamentation and finely crafted cultural objects.

"It is precisely what has made Jin embroidery a valuable complement to the Xinjiang tradition," He said.

Over the past decade He and his team have traveled to Wujiaqu numerous times, training 30 core embroiderers.

Faced with differences in techniques, the Jin embroidery team started teaching from

the most basic stitches. "We taught them which stitches to use for embroidering eyes, and which ones for hair, giving embroidery a theoretical foundation and systematic methodology," He said.

Ten women who excelled traveled to Shanxi for advanced hands-on training.

They themselves later became teachers in Xinjiang in what He describes as a "snowball effect."

Beyond technique, the Jin embroidery team also helped develop cultural and creative products with Xinjiang characteristics.

They combined Shanxi's paper-cutting techniques with Xinjiang's totemic motifs, creating unique designs, and developed innovative products rich in symbolic meaning.

"These products preserve the local cultural elements of Xinjiang while incorporating the refined artisanship of Jin embroidery, making them more aligned with modern aesthetic tastes and tourism demand," He said.

Today more than 200 embroiderers work in local cooperatives, each earning an average of 20,000 yuan (\$2,800) a year, he said.

"They now can make money at home while minding their children."

Another centuries-old trade is renewing ties between Xinjiang and central Hubei province.

Jian Nisi, deputy director of Hubei Changshengchuan Tea Research Institute, stood at a cultural exhibition in Hotan last month holding a dark brick of

tea that drew many curious local residents.

"For Uygur and Mongolian families, our brick tea is the foundation of their milk tea," Jian said. "It's more than a drink; on the grasslands it is the drink of life."

After Changshengchuan tea was first produced during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), it traveled through ancient tea routes to border regions, becoming a daily necessity for multi-ethnic communities.

To this day Changshengchuan remains a designated producer of specialty ethnic goods, supplying border areas under plans organized by the national ethnic affairs authorities.

As a key component of Hubei's pairing assistance program in Xinjiang, Changshengchuan has worked closely with Bortala Mongol autonomous prefecture in the north of Xinjiang since 2018.

"We hold training sessions at the prefecture's cultural center twice a year, teaching tea art techniques and sales skills," Jian said.

Changshengchuan has developed 170 distributors and partners in Bortala, most of them local women.

E-commerce training has helped local partners expand sales online.

"Many homemakers have become tea art specialists or salespeople through the program, with monthly incomes between 5,000 and 6,000 yuan — all without leaving their hometowns," Jian said.

Changshengchuan also uses its Hubei distribution network to bring local specialties, such as Hotan jujubes and roses, to wider markets.

"We are not just doing business; we are continuing an ethnic unity story centuries in the making. We will keep helping local communities prosper through tea," Jian said.

— YANG FEIYUE



Visitors try Changshengchuan's brick tea at a cultural event in Bortala Mongol autonomous prefecture, Xinjiang, in May last year.

Shanghai continues to make its theme park mark

Shanghai is poised to cash in on family entertainment as it undergoes a surge in construction of new theme parks and upgrades existing ones, tourism and industry experts say.

This summer in Shanghai, the theme park capital of China, the country's first Legoland opened, and other major projects are in the pipeline.

"Driven by the varied supply and strong consumption, as well as its good business environment, theme parks in Shanghai and the rest of China can unlock an enormous theme park economy," said Dai Bin, president of the China Tourism Academy.

Opened in July and covering 78.6 acres, Legoland Shanghai Resort is said to be the world's 11th and largest Legoland.

It features eight themed areas, offering more than 75 interactive rides, shows and attractions.

On May 19 Shanghai Disney Resort announced the groundbreaking of its ninth themed land, the Spider-Man zone. The new zone, adjacent to Zootopia, will include the park's first major Marvel-themed attraction, a thrilling



Tourists take photos while enjoying their time at Shanghai Disneyland. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Spider-Man roller-coaster ride. Shanghai Disneyland said it had more than 14 million visitors in 2023, ranking fifth among theme parks worldwide and securing its position as the most visited and popular theme park in China, according to the 2023 Global Attractions Attendance Report published by the Themed Entertainment Association and the consulting firm AECOM.

On Feb 12 Jin Jiang International Holdings Co., Ltd. announced it had signed a joint venture framework agreement with Warner Bros to open a Harry Potter studio tour in Shanghai. It will be the third such attraction globally, and the first in China.

Zhu Jianhui, senior director and head of retail research with JLL China, said Shanghai's appeal to foreign investors is unmatched.

"Shanghai stands as China's leading retail consumption hub and the most developed city for flagship stores and first-launch projects. For foreign investors, choosing Shanghai as their initial entry point into the Chinese mainland market aligns strategically with their business goals."

Theme parks are not limited to China's big cities and represent a nationwide economic phenomenon.

Eighty-six major theme parks across the country reported a total of 130 million

visitor trips in 2023, generating about 30.39 billion yuan (\$4.26 billion) in revenue, 97.86% more than in the previous year, the 2024 China Theme Park Competitiveness Evaluation Report said. Visitor numbers rose 71.84% compared with the previous year.

China's theme park economy has expanded steadily in recent years, with the market size forecast to be worth more than 110 billion yuan by 2028, 21st Century Business Herald reported, citing figures from China Insights Consultancy.

Fantawild recorded 85.69 million visits in 2023, 111% more than in 2022, propelling it from fifth to second place in the global rankings, the report by the Themed Entertainment Association and AECOM said.

Happy Valley Company operates eight amusement parks and 10 water parks in cities including Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and Chengdu, Sichuan province. The group, with a total of 25 themed attractions in 13 cities nationwide, has about 40 million visitors annually.

— WANG YING

Youth: Career chances beckon

From page 1

After graduating, she joined the Department of International Organizations and Conferences of the Foreign Ministry, experiencing life as a representative of the Chinese government at the U.N. In 2014 she made history as the first employee seconded by the Chinese government to the Office of the President of the U.N. General Assembly.

"I worked in New York until the end of 2016, and then had the opportunity to join the International Organization for Migration."

When she began working at its headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland, the following year, she was the only Chinese national working there, she said. Now, more and more Chinese professionals are being recruited to the U.N. in various fields.

This increasing presence is reflected in what is happening at Chinese universities. Zhu Jiejun, deputy director of the Center for the Study of the U.N. and International Organizations at Fudan University in Shanghai, has witnessed the surge firsthand.

He offers a popular course that brings professionals from international organizations into the classroom.

When the course was established in 2020, about 600 students applied for 200 spots. Last year more than 1,500 students sought admission, forcing him to cap attendance at 300.

Graduates from his course have already joined the ranks of the U.N., Zhu said.

"A former student of mine now works at the United Nations Population Fund. Most of her work there involves humanitarian relief efforts, which are quite dangerous because they often take place in conflict zones and war-torn areas. Without a spirit of sacrifice or a deep sense of compassion, it would be very difficult to carry out such work."

"For China it's a positive development that more young Chinese have the will and opportunity to work in international organizations such as the U.N., better reflecting China's commitment to peaceful development and collaboration."

Having recently completed her internship, Zhang is now back in China. But she still keeps thinking about the project proposal she initiated that has already received endorsement from the Chinese Embassy in Rwanda.

"The next step is to formally submit the relevant documents. Bit by bit, I look forward to the day when this proposal can bring tangible improvements to the livelihoods of smallholder farmers in Rwanda and strengthen the country's agricultural resilience," she said.

— YANG RAN

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BEIJING SPECIAL

City's inventive assets in spotlight

As Beijing hosted the 42nd IASP World Conference on Science Parks and Areas of Innovation from Sept 16 to 19, the nation's capital showcased its cutting-edge advancements in technology and innovation.

With the theme "Elevating excellence: innovation spaces driving high-quality development", the conference explored how innovation spaces contribute to social, economic and technological progress.

The IASP, or International Association of Science Parks and Areas of Innovation, is a network of innovation ecosystems that brings together managers of science parks, research parks, innovation districts, knowledge cities and other innovation spaces. Its mission is to drive growth, internationalization and effectiveness for its members.

In an era marked by rapid technological advancements and economic globalization, spaces such as science parks and innovation districts have emerged as vital catalysts for progress. These areas not only foster innovation and aid the application of scientific advances but also play a significant role in enhancing regional innovation capabilities, improving industrial structures and promoting employment.

Beijing is home to leading research institutions, tech giants and a thriving startup ecosystem, offering an ideal setting for the conference.

"For IASP delegates, Beijing offers a unique opportunity to explore, innovate and be part of something truly extraordinary," said the association.



A group of media workers take photographs of a giant robot hand at Robot World in the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area on June 17. ZHENG HUANSONG / XINHUA

"Whether networking with professionals or experiencing the city's dynamic mix of old and new, every moment is sure to inspire."

Beijing is working to establish itself as a global center for scientific and technological innovation. In recent years, the city has achieved remarkable milestones in this endeavor. In 2024, Beijing boasted 431 highly cited scientists. The city's research and development investment intensity has remained above 6% for six years in a row, placing it among the leading global innovation cities. Additionally, the Nature Index showed that Beijing has remained the world's top science city since 2016.

Beijing is leveraging an inno-

vation and application ecosystem consisting of Zhongguancun Science City, Huairou Science City, Future Science City and the Demonstration Area for Innovation-based Industrial Clusters to drive its scientific initiatives. Each area has distinct strengths: Zhongguancun focuses on global high-end innovation; Huairou features scientific infrastructure; Future Science City targets future industries such as synthetic biology for manufacturing; and the demonstration area assists the application of scientific achievements from the three science cities.

To better commercialize research outcomes, Beijing has developed an online and offline innovation service plat-

form. This includes the International Center for Science and Technology Innovation website, which consolidates resources from the four areas to enhance connectivity and resource sharing.

Beijing is also encouraging social organizations to support the coordinated development of the four areas. Collaborations include strategic partnerships for technology application and resource matching. The ZGC Intellectual Property Protection Center has assisted more than 400 companies from the four areas with fast-track patent applications.

Yin Li, secretary of the Communist Party of China Beijing Committee, emphasized the need to strengthen the coor-

ordinated development of these four areas to cultivate new quality productive forces. He noted that it is crucial to stabilize foundational industries such as finance, information and technology services while developing high-tech industries like artificial intelligence, integrated circuits, new energy vehicles, pharmaceuticals and robotics.

The Demonstration Area for Innovation-based Industrial Clusters comprises Beijing's Shunyi district and the Beijing Economic-Technological Development Area, also known as Beijing E-Town. Over the past three decades, Beijing E-Town has transformed from an industrial area spanning 1.48 square miles into a hub for high-tech industries covering more than 84.94 square miles, housing over 100,000 businesses.

Dong Qichao, deputy director of the Beijing Science and Technology Commission, said: "Beijing E-Town has highly concentrated industrial resources and diverse application scenarios that complement the strong innovation capabilities of key laboratories. We will further integrate technology and industry, turning enterprises' needs into scientific questions for researchers to address, ensuring that technology transitions swiftly from the lab to the industry to serve the country's strategic needs."

In 2024, 290 research outcomes from the three science cities realized real-world applications in the Demonstration Area for Innovation-based Industrial Clusters. In 2025, the number is expected to be no fewer than 600.

— HU YUYAN



Future Science City showcases its leading-edge technological solutions at the China Beijing International High-Tech Expo in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Homes built and more businesses on the way

In the first half of 2025, Beijing's Future Science City achieved notable advancements in industrial space development, the introduction of key projects and the construction of roads and residential facilities, enhancing its appeal as a livable and work-friendly environment.

Noteworthy accomplishments include the registration of more than 190 new enterprises, the completion of 26 key roads and the delivery of nearly 8,000 settlement homes.

In the first half of this year, Future Science City, located in Changping district, expanded its industrial spaces to host high-quality projects. The first phase of the Future Star Industrial Park is now operational. Its second phase has been completed and passed quality inspections. Chinese carmaker Nio has established a delivery center in the industrial park.

The Life Valley (International) Bioengineering Innovation Center completed its first phase, with the second phase finishing its exterior construction. This center aims to become a model for biopharmaceutical collective economic development, integrating research, pilot production and support services. The first phase of the Robotics Industrial Park completed its main structural work, setting the stage for the clustering of robotics companies.

According to the Beijing

Bureau of Economy and Information Technology, the city plans to build five new specialized industrial clusters for small and medium-sized enterprises this year, with two located in Future Science City: the synthetic biology manufacturing cluster and the applied optics intelligent manufacturing cluster.

While building infrastructure, Future Science City is also attracting businesses. In the first half, more than 190 new companies registered in the area, and over 40 enterprises such as Lan-Divine and Anko Group set up operations there.

The Synthetic Biology Manufacturing Technology Innovation Center commenced operations, welcoming its first five teams, with nine projects slated to move in. Collaborations with universities are also underway, with Tsinghua University's innovations being introduced to the Energy Valley in Future Science City.

Infrastructure development is also accelerating, making Future Science City more livable. In the first half of this year, 26 key roads were completed. Yingcai Nanyi Street opened, providing seamless transfers to Metro Line 17. Additionally, 26 new roads started construction, enhancing connectivity for industrial spaces and residential projects.

— YUAN SHENGGAO

Zhongguancun hosts advances in AI and develops industry's ecosystem

Zhongguancun Science City, located in the northwest of Beijing, has demonstrated remarkable achievements in artificial intelligence and innovation ecosystem upgrades during the first half of 2025, according to Beijing Evening News.

The area hosts 70% of the city's AI unicorn companies and has helped deliver 944 million yuan (\$132 million) for enterprises through incubators, while advancing the construction of 12 industrial parks. Unicorn companies refer to startups with valuations of \$1 billion or more.

Zhongguancun Science City spans the Haidian Park area, covering 67.18 square miles, and extends to the whole of Haidian district and parts of Changping district. It serves as a core area for building Beijing into a global center for scientific and technological innovation.

Haidian district is home to 1,900 AI companies, including 26 unicorns. In the first half, 6,902 new tech enterprises were established.

The growth of Zhongguancun Science City is supported



Zhongguancun No. 1 is a landmark sci-tech innovation industrial park at Zhongguancun Science City in Beijing. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

by prestigious universities and research institutions such as Peking University, Tsinghua University and the Chinese Academy of Sciences, which provide robust basic research resources. Flexible institutional frameworks in research organizations like the Beijing Academy of Artificial Intelligence and the Beijing Academy of Quantum Information Sciences continually inject vitality into the area.

Zhongguancun Science City has been the launchpad for tech companies like Baidu, Xiaomi and Lenovo, which have gained global recognition.

Emerging leaders such as ByteDance, Cambrian and Megvii have also risen from this hub. International giants have also established research and development centers in the area.

— YUAN SHENGGAO

Labs and equipment attract global elite

With a vision to become a world-class innovation hub by 2050, Beijing's Huairou Science City is home to state-of-the-art large-scale science facilities and a growing community of elite scientists, according to a report by China Discipline Inspection and Supervision News.

This year, Huairou Science City has made new progress, including the global sharing of 16 scientific facilities, having provided over 1.43 million hours of access. Additionally, four large-scale science facilities have passed national inspections and are now officially operational.

Huairou Science City hosts various science facilities, including the High Energy Photon Source project, which covers an area equivalent to

90 soccer fields. With trial operation expected to begin by the end of this year, the facility is capable of emitting 100 trillion times brighter than the sun and will provide high-quality light for scientists in aerospace, energy, biomedicine and other fields.

According to a representative of Huairou Science City, the area has entered a new phase focused on operation and is rapidly forming a cluster of key scientific infrastructure, with all 29 facilities from the 13th Five-Year Plan (2016-20) now in research mode and all eight new facilities from the 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) under construction.

As the urban infrastructure improves, the number of scientists in Huairou Science City continues to rise, currently

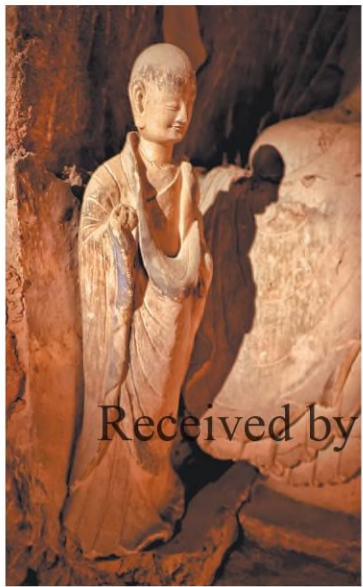
totaling 26,000. This includes 86 academicians from the Chinese Academy of Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Engineering, and 39 highly cited scientists.

The science city is committed to meeting the needs of its researchers by providing diverse housing options, enhancing infrastructure and developing a high-quality education and healthcare system alongside a robust cultural service mechanism.

A key project in the city is the City Lounge, which includes facilities for research, incubation, tech services, hotels, apartments, amenities and cultural activities, complemented by parks to create a multifunctional, people-centered public space.

— YUAN SHENGGAO

LIFE



Statue of a monk with a mysterious smile in cave 133 of the Maijishan Grottoes.



The giant statues on the east cliff of the Maijishan Grottoes in Tianshui, Gansu province.



One of the world-famous Buddhist statues in cave 44 at the grottoes. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

Mu Changyou recalls often looking up to see the soaring face of Maiji Mountain near his home when he was young. The name of the mountain, in Tianshui, Gansu province, Northwest China, means wheat stack, referring to its appearance, and it is home to many ancient Buddhist caves carved into the cliffside, collectively known as the Maijishan Grottoes.

Forty years ago Mu, then 19, of Maiji village, was offered the chance to work on the mountain, becoming a restorer of the cultural relics in the caves. From an apprentice cleaning caves and organizing tools to a master training students, he has spent decades extending the lives of his old friends.

Mu is one of the many professionals who protect the grottoes, a cave temple complex known as a gallery of Eastern statues because of the almost complete chronological sequence of its statues, built by pious ancient Chinese people from the Sixteen Kingdoms period (304-439) to the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

The grottoes, part of the UNESCO World Heritage site named Silk Roads: the Routes Network of Chang'an-Tianshan Corridor, have 221 caves, 161 of which still house Buddhist statues or murals. However, time has taken its toll on the site, and heritage protectors have explored various ways to protect it.

Over the past 80 years, from establishing files and consolidating dangerous rocks to the successful application for World Heritage status, generations of heritage protectors

have contributed great efforts to protecting it, said Yue Yongqiang, deputy director of the Art Institute of Maijishan Cave-Temple Complex, which oversees the site. Gansu province is commonly perceived to be an arid region, but Tianshui is located in the province's southeast and receives abundant rain, which causes water damage to the caves.

"Unlike other important cave temples in China that have stone statues, Maijishan Grottoes have clay statues with wooden frames or stone fetuses, just like those in Dunhuang, Gansu," said Hu Junjian, deputy director of the protection and research office of the institute. "In such a humid environment

the statues and murals here are more difficult to protect than those in Dunhuang." Dunhuang is home to the Mogao Caves, a UNESCO World Heritage site on the ancient Silk Road, with more than 700 Buddhist caves that feature exquisite murals and statues from the 4th to the 14th centuries. Water damage is a big challenge for the Maijishan caves. In 2018, after two weeks of continuous rainfall, cave 127 reached humidity of 100% in three months, leading to an outbreak of microorganisms. Protectors then found a large area on the northern side of the cave paved with a white flocculent mass. Researchers sampled the substance and took it to a

laboratory for identification. They conducted experiments to select proper methods of cleaning the flocs and applied a sterilizing agent, which was effective and environmentally friendly, in the cave to remove the mass. In 2019 their approach succeeded, removing the microorganisms and impeding their continued spread in the cave.

Xu Bokai, another deputy director of the institute's protection and research office, said efforts were initiated to study water seepage paths inside the mountain body so steps could be taken to block the cracks. Moreover, the site is rich in biodiversity because of its location in a forest zone, where animal and insect activities have a

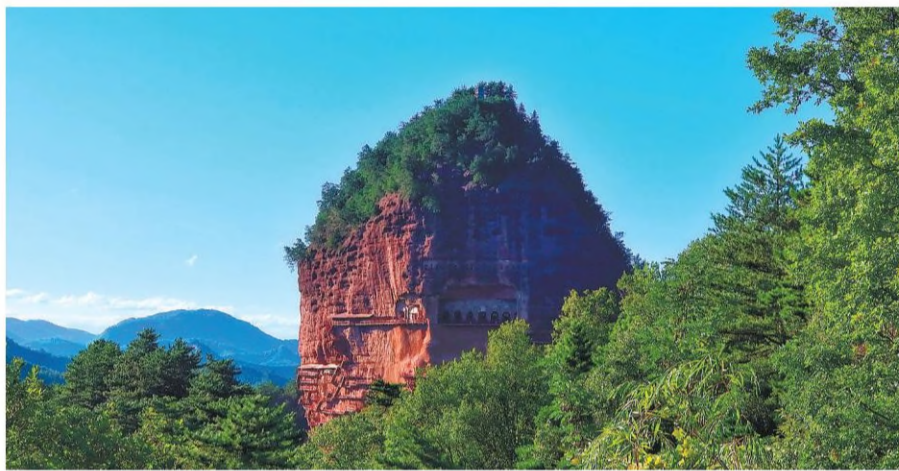
major influence on the cultural remains. For example, complex-toothed flying squirrels often defecate on the precious relics, causing damage to the stone statues and murals, and insects crawl on murals, directly touching the pigment layers and causing them to flake. "The squirrels have a habit of excreting in a fixed location, which means they wander around the forest to find food, but go back to a chosen place to defecate," Xu said. "After a while the place darkens and deteriorates."

So efforts are made to reduce animal and insect visits to the relics by using equipment to deter them and prevent such damage. "But such influences can never be eliminated because we cannot interfere with the animals' activities too much," Hu said. "We must keep the ecological balance."

Since 2020 conservationists have also worked with scholars at Peking University to discover methods to save the already blackened areas. After numerous experiments, a solution was developed using artificial saliva as the major component, which can decompose hazardous substances in excrement, Xu said. This is the first attempt nationwide to deal with damage of this kind, he said. "Since statues and murals are fragile, we have conducted experiments with the solution on the grottoes' trestle roads and cliffs to see if it's reliable and effective enough. Then we will understand if it's safe to use on the statues and murals."

— WANG RU

Fine protectors of mountain marvels



Seen from afar the Maijishan Grottoes resemble a stack of wheat piled high by farmers.

Collectors hold the winning cards

Li Jing talks of how, at the U.S. National Sports Collectors Convention in Illinois in July, a collector examined a card that her company made.

The surface of the card, one of thousands on display at the Donald E. Stephens Convention Center in Rosemont, features a golden drawing of the Hall of Supreme Harmony at the Palace Museum in Beijing, also known as the Forbidden City. The card's edges are inlaid with delicate filigree, and at the center is a tiny natural gemstone.

This thin card, less than one four-hundredth of an inch thick, embodies the marriage of centuries-old Chinese filigree inlay artisanship and modern industrial precision.

"The Hall of Supreme Harmony card is from our Heritage series," said Li, co-founder of Suplay, a Chinese designer toy and collectibles company founded in 2019.

The business produces collectible cards, figurines and pop-culture merchandise under its brand Kakawow.



Collectible cards bearing Palace Museum elements are popular worldwide. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The Rosemont convention, one of the world's largest card and memorabilia expos, was held over five days this year, and Suplay made its third appearance there in the past three years.

At Suplay's booth, wearing a Tang Dynasty (618-907) style jacket, Disney's Mickey Mouse stood out in playful contrast to Warner Bros' 100th anniversary commem-

orative cards sitting next to collectible cards featuring photography from the Chinese National Geography magazine.

Nearly all Suplay's products on display sold out on-site, bought primarily by U.S. collectors and distributors.

"These culturally infused collectibles are fast becoming favorites both at home and abroad," Li said.

In recent years, trendy and collectible Chinese toys have gained remarkable popularity worldwide, with numerous brands expanding their reach overseas, generating overwhelming enthusiasm both online and offline.

Pop Mart is a prominent example of this global success. By the end of last year Pop Mart had expanded to more than 30 countries and regions, operating more than 500 physical stores and over 2,300 robotic stores.

Another company, Top Toy, operates more than 280 stores worldwide and reported



Toys themed on Labubu, a popular doll of the Chinese toy company Pop Mart. SUN WEITONG / XINHUA

exports worth about 47 million yuan (\$6.6 million) last year.

Hong Yong, an associate research fellow in the e-commerce research department of China's Ministry of Commerce, said the overseas popularity of Chinese brands not only boosts their international visibility but also strengthens the domestic market return.

Suplay's entrepreneurial journey began with a creative reinterpretation of traditional culture.

"For our premium card brand Kakawow, we chose the Forbidden City as the first IP because it represents one deep cultural consensus among Chinese people," Li said.

The debut series, totaling 300 boxes, sold out in just two weeks, giving the team enormous confidence.

Kakawow launched its Heritage series priced at 6,990 yuan last year, which incorporated intangible cultural heritage techniques such as filigree inlay. "The market response exceeded all expectations," Li said, adding that 96% of the buyers are adults over 18.

Cao Wei, general manager of the card trading platform Card Hobby, established in 2014, has been a collector since 1997 and has witnessed China's collectible card culture grow over the years. Though cards with Chinese elements account for just 5% to 10% of transactions, Cao sees tremendous growth potential.

"The challenge for cultural cards going global is IP appeal," Cao said.

— YANG FEIYUE



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ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW

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HIGH ACHIEVERS

WOMEN'S PROFESSIONAL
WORLD TRANSFORMED

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PEEP INTO PAST

MUSEUM VISIT PROVIDES
VIEWS ONCE FORBIDDEN

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A flying car on display during the China International Fair for Investment and Trade in Xiamen, Fujian province, on Sept. 8.

WANG DONGMING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



China on track to maintain growth

The International Monetary Fund has predicted that China's economy will grow 4.8% this year, up 0.3 percentage points on what was forecast a year ago, saying it expects the world economy to slow further in the coming years.

Global growth was projected at 3.2% this year and 3.1% next year, the IMF said in its October World Economic Outlook, published on Oct. 14 at the start of the annual IMF/World Bank autumn meetings.

The IMF's projection for China, close to China's goal of about 5% growth for the year, reflected the shifting effects of trade policy and domestic efforts.

"A stronger-than-expected outturn in recent quarters — reflecting front-loading in international trade and relatively robust domestic consumption supported by fiscal expansion in 2025 — more than offset the headwinds from higher uncertainty and tariffs," the IMF said of China's growth prospects.

In April, when the U.S. shook global trade norms by announcing sweeping tariffs, the IMF trimmed its forecast for China's growth by 0.6 percentage points in response to escalating U.S.-China trade frictions.

By July, following a pause on higher rates in May, it revised the figure upward by 0.8 percentage points. Now, half a year after the tariff war began, the IMF projects that China's economy will maintain the growth rate it predicted in July, 4.8%, and that it will slow modestly next year.

The World Bank projected China's economy would grow 4.8% on Oct. 7; in April it had forecast growth of 4%.

China's gross domestic product grew 5.3% in the first half of this year, up 0.3 percentage points from the same period last year, according to official figures.

"China is weathering higher tariffs with a weaker real exchange rate, redirected exports to Asia and Europe, and fiscal support," Pierre-Olivier Gourinchas, the IMF's economic counselor and director of the research department, wrote in a blog on Oct. 14.

— LI JING

— ZHAO HUANXIN

Country becomes hub for two-way investment

As global supply chains undergo transformation and investment patterns shift, China has taken on a dual role in the world economy — as both a magnet for foreign companies and an increasingly influential outbound investor, experts and executives say.

This signals continuity in the country's opening-up, that China is no longer just a participant in global growth, and that it is becoming a co-architect of such growth, they said.

What draws foreign companies today is not the promise of low costs, but the chance to innovate, to test ideas in a vast and demanding market, and to use China as a springboard into global competition.

"China remains the top target market for companies expanding their global trade layout, with 44% of global companies choosing China as their first choice for expansion," said David Liao, co-chief executive for Asia and the Middle East at HSBC.

Citing survey data, he said that 40% of global firms are either already increasing their manufacturing presence in China over the next two years or are planning to do so. "These findings highlight that China remains a hot spot for international investment and



An industrial robot made by ABB on show during the China International Industry Fair in Shanghai on Sept. 25. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

occupies a central position in the global trade landscape."

That reality is reflected in the way executives describe the market, many calling it a touchstone for development.

Morten Wierod, chief executive of the Swedish-Swiss industrial group ABB, said China is the cornerstone of the company's business, with Xiamen, Fujian province, becoming its largest global manufacturing base and innovation center.

The same pattern plays out in life sciences and healthcare. Anita Wei, vice-president of external affairs of the life sciences and technology company Danaher China, said her

company's "double innovation engine" strategy is built on deep localization.

"We aim to achieve 80% of sales revenue from localized production and 80% of raw material sourcing from the Chinese market. This allows our research and development teams to respond directly to clinical needs in China and then promote those solutions globally."

Other foreign companies have also adopted similar strategies.

Zhao Bingdi, president of Panasonic China, described the shift by saying China is not only a manufacturing center for Panasonic, but also an

innovation hub, and that the Japanese electronics firm is transitioning from "in China, for China" to "in China, for global" with the aim of using its competitive edge honed in China for Southeast Asia and beyond.

These strategies have been underpinned by policy.

China has steadily opened doors wider, reducing national and free trade zone negative lists for foreign investment to 29 and 27 items, respectively. Restrictions on manufacturing investment have been removed, and pilot programs in cloud computing, biotechnology and wholly foreign-owned hospitals are underway. Procurement, IP protection, data flows and tax incentives are all being fine-tuned to create a more predictable business climate.

If inbound investment illustrates how China strengthens multinationals, outbound investment shows how Chinese firms are reshaping international markets. Last year outward direct investment was worth \$192 billion, bringing cumulative stock above \$3.14 trillion. For the 13th year in a row, China ranked among the world's top three investors, according to the 2024 statistical bulletin of outward foreign direct investment.

ANCIENT FIND REVEALS SECRETS OF LAMP FUELS

A 600-year-old porcelain lamp unearthed in Shanxi province in 2021 has turned the spotlight on the technical skills and cultural practices of that era, when people blended fuels to keep their oil lamps burning long, cleanly and brightly.

The tiny bowl-shaped lamp, retrieved from a tomb in the village of Nantou, dates back to the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Using high-sensitivity techniques, researchers discovered traces of fuel in the lamp — a surprising blend of linseed oil, mutton tallow and beeswax — that offered a rare peek into the everyday lives of people of the day. Most excavated lamps have yielded little or no residue at all, making

this find exceptionally rare.

Wang Keqing, a researcher in the Institute of Conservation at the National Museum of China in Beijing, said there could be three reasons why a blend of fuels was used. The combination could have produced a bright flame with a pleasant aroma and relatively little smoke; the user may have been trying to reduce lamp oil consumption; or the fuels could have been used separately during different periods.

The presence of beeswax points to the possible desire for fragrance and less smoke. It probably made the fuel less prone to rancidity. The vegetable oil helped the flame burn brighter.



A porcelain lamp of the Ming Dynasty retrieved from a tomb in Shanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

These fuels were probably used together to light the lamp, which was then placed in the tomb during the burial ceremony, Wang said. However, it could also be that different fuels were used to light the lamp at different

times and that the lamp was a personal possession of the deceased, which is why it was interred with them as part of a ritual.

The burial custom reflects ancient beliefs regarding life and death, and the anticipation of a good afterlife," she said.

The ritual of lighting lamps for the deceased continues in modern China as a form of ancestor worship, said Li Gang, vice-president of the Xinzhou Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology.

The tomb occupant was probably not a high-ranking official but an affluent commoner, Li said. The use of mixed fuels further demonstrates that ancient lamps and

their fuels were not standardized but were products of ingenuity and practical adaptation.

The lamp's fuels also shed light on a broader historical pattern. Early lamps primarily used animal fats. Use of beeswax started during the Han Dynasty (206 B.C.-A.D. 220), and the practice became popular among elites. As the belief grew that smoke from tallow harmed health, including eyesight, new burning methods developed. The cultivation of white-wax insects for candle production expanded between the 10th and 14th centuries, and blends of vegetable oils and wax were primarily used to burn lamps during the Ming Dynasty.

— CHEN MEILING AND ZHU XINGXIN

SOCIETY

Captain Gu Xinyue (left) makes flight preparations in the cockpit of an aircraft in Hefei, Anhui province, in March last year.

HAN SUYUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



In new world of work, the sky is the limit

For decades Chinese women have been pushing against boundaries and gender stereotypes in traditionally male-dominated industries. From civil aviation and technology to food delivery, they have carved out their own unique niche with resilience and skill-building.

Their progress has redefined the realm of possibilities in male-centric spaces, and they continue to challenge outdated norms and broaden opportunities for gender equality in all kinds of fields.

For instance, a growing number of women have pursued careers as pilots. Strict gender controls used to be imposed on pilot recruitment, but now domestic airlines continue to lift such restrictions.

Just over a decade ago, China Southern Airlines, whose headquarters is in Guangzhou, had only five female pilots; today it has more than 30.

Through their own efforts and guided by the spirit that women are no less capable than men, these pilots have reached new heights with professionalism and dedication.

While female pilots may not match their male counterparts in physical strength, industry insiders say that many have increased their daily training to boost both their physical fitness and decision-making capabilities.

This year, which marks the 30th anniversary of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China co-hosted the Global Leaders' Meeting on Women with UN Women on Oct 13 and Oct 14. The country has consistently honored its commitments to advancing women's development, such as promoting gender equality along with economic and social progress.

Over the past 30 years China has made remarkable strides in poverty alleviation, healthcare, education and other key areas concerning women's well-being.

Now, fathers who give priority to caring for children, managing household responsibilities and stepping back from traditional full-time work to support their families are no longer that remarkable, and show how gender role stereotypes have loosened their hold in China.

As societal attitudes evolve and professional barriers grad-



Astronaut Wang Yaping and her daughter at a museum in Beijing, last December.

ZHANG YUWEI / XINHUA

A female courier delivers food in Chongqing in March 2023.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



ually fade, a growing number of female executives have come to the fore, driving industry innovation with their distinctive leadership styles and professional expertise, and paving the way for future generations of women to pursue careers in many industries.

Wang Fang, chief financial officer of Embraer China, has worked for several multinational companies throughout her career and joined the China branch of the Brazilian aircraft maker Embraer SA as a credit specialist and financial analyst. Success is primarily measured by performance and capability, with the emphasis placed on an individual's contributions, not their gender, she said.

"The challenges that I have focused on are common and professional ones like navigating complex financial regulations, managing risks and ensuring robust financial health for the company."

The number of female internet entrepreneurs in China has risen over the years, too, and the country now has about 40 million female scientists and technicians, accounting for more than 45% of the total, the Zhongguancun Forum Annual Conference was told last year.

Wang Lijuan, head of operations, performance and digital at Airbus Beijing Engineering Center, has been driving the company's digital transforma-

tion since 2023. Fueled by her passion for technology, she is dedicated to building smarter operational platforms that empower engineers and unlock their creative potential.

"Women in engineering still face certain stereotypes. But I have always believed that skills and curiosity transcend gender. Every challenge is a chance to grow — to learn new technologies, explore new fields, and keep expanding my horizons."

Her thinking is also reflected in her workplace, and Airbus has built an open, inclusive environment in which everyone has a chance to succeed, she said.

More women are also filling the ranks of emerging occupations such as food delivery that were once dominated by men. Amid the hustle of their daily rides, they are redefining their sense of self-worth and reshaping their social roles.

From 2022 to 2024 the number of female riders in China rose markedly, even if the Chinese on-demand delivery company Meituan says that women account for less than 10% of its riders.

In addition, women are said to hold more than 30% of the management roles at Meituan's delivery stations, including roles such as station managers, deputy managers and team leaders.

— ZHU WENQIAN

Strenuous runs take women to the summit

Solitude, darkness, the capriciousness of the wilderness, and the physical toll of traversing steep terrain over long distances — any of these could understandably deter women from taking up trail running.

Yet, in defiance of such challenges, China is witnessing a remarkable surge of women adopting the world of dirt, rocks and hills, with its elite athletes now commanding international recognition.

A standout example came in late August when Yao Miao, 29, triumphed in the Ultra Trail du Mont Blanc OCC, a 37.9-mile race around Mont Blanc in France. The course runs from Orsieres to Champex to Chamonix. With this victory, together with her 2018 win in the 62.8-mile Courmayeur via Champex-Lac to Chamonix and another OCC title last year, Yao made history as the first and only Asian to claim three UTMB titles in different event categories.

Yao, widely regarded as China's queen of trail running, now holds fourth place in the International Trail Running Association rankings, with a performance

index of 827. Her compatriot Xiang Fuzhao, 34, is in sixth place with a score of 816.

These are not isolated victories but clear signals of the profound rise of Chinese women in trail running, marked by elevated competitive standards and expanding grassroots participation.

Lyu Ruihan, 30, of Beijing, has been an active trail runner for 10 years and was formerly a test engineer in the cybersecurity industry, leading a sedentary lifestyle.

After being diagnosed with a mild fatty liver, she was determined to improve her health and connect with nature through hiking in the mountains.

During one descent she started running to reach the bottom before darkness fell and discovered that trail running was more efficient.

Her dedication paid off in May 2018 when she reached the podium in a 62-mile ultramarathon in the Meili Snow Mountain National Park in Yunnan province.

Throughout that year and the next Lyu consistently placed among the top 10

female runners in every race she entered.

"I could clearly feel more female runners are joining the races, with many transitioning from other endurance sports like marathons and triathlons," she said.

For these female trail runners, gender-specific challenges have been a consistent part of their experience. Yao said that as a professional trail runner she relates to the unique struggles women face in the sport.

"The menstrual cycle is one of the biggest obstacles. Sometimes we train for months, only to have our performance severely impacted because the race coincides with our period, leading to disappointing results or even having to withdraw."

She also talks of practical issues such as the lack of private changing areas or toilets for women at aid stations during long-distance events, as well as safety concerns when running on remote trails at night.

However, positive changes are helping make the sport more women-friendly.

Worldwide female trail runners have been working hard to foster a more inclusive environment

for women.

A case in point is Trail Sisters, an organization founded in 2016 to advance gender equity and boost female participation in trail running and hiking.

It advocates for events to adopt standards including equal podium spots and awards for men and women, women-specific apparel and merchandise, availability of menstrual products at aid stations, ensuring visible placement of women at the start line instead of placing them behind male runners, and clearly stated pregnancy and postpartum policies.

According to its official website, these standards have been met by more than 600 events in North America this year.

In China, outdoor gear brands are increasingly focusing on the needs of female trail runners. For instance, Kailas, a Chinese outdoor apparel and equipment brand, began using shoemaking molds specifically designed for women in 2020.

— XING WEN

"I could clearly feel more female runners are joining the races, with many transitioning from other endurance sports like marathons and triathlons."

LYU RUIHAN



Lyu Ruihan (left) completed a 15.5-mile trail running race in Hong Kong last year while five months pregnant.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Availability of free HPV vaccination for girls welcomed

Wang Li, a mother of two young daughters in Jiangsu province, welcomed the news last month that the human papillomavirus vaccines will be made available to all eligible girls nationwide.

Wang, 36, has not been vaccinated against HPV, the primary cause of cervical cancer, mainly because of time constraints and uncertainty over which vaccine to choose.

"I always planned to get my daughters, aged 11 and 9, inoculated," she said. "I fully support the policy because it means the country will select and provide reliable and effective vaccines for my girls."

Wang is among the many parents and health experts who have praised the government's move to include HPV vaccination in the national immunization program and introduce HPV vaccination services for all eligible girls this year.

The policy was announced by the National Disease Control and Prevention Administration on Sept 11.

China's free immunization program covers 14 vaccines that prevent 15 diseases, and it has not been expanded since 2007.

Du Heng, principal officer in the Beijing office of the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation,

said that incorporating HPV vaccines into the national immunization program will significantly improve access and strengthen health protection for Chinese women.

In recent years the foundation has worked with partners in various fields to explore ways to increase HPV vaccine accessibility in China, she said.

"The inclusion of the HPV vaccine marks the first time the national immunization program has targeted adolescents, rather than only children under the age of 6. It also reflects the country's growing emphasis on safeguarding women's health."

— WANG XIAOYU

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BEIJING SPECIAL

Forum spotlights tech in heritage



Beijing once again took center stage in the global cultural arena in late September as it played host to the 2025 Beijing Culture Forum.

Launched in 2022, the forum, with a permanent theme of "Inheritance, Creativity, Mutual Learning", has evolved into a pivotal platform for Beijing's development in the new era, emphasizing international engagement.

This year's edition adopted "Integrated Development of Culture and Technology" as its annual theme, featuring an opening ceremony, six parallel forums, and more than 20 professional salons.

Nearly 800 guests from 58 countries and regions converged in China's capital for the two-day event. They included renowned experts, scholars, cultural figures, and industry leaders, all gathering to engage in in-depth discussions and exchange ideas.

At the opening ceremony, Yin Li, Party secretary of Beijing, highlighted that new cultural business forms, such as internet culture, entertainment, gaming and animation, generated nearly 1.6 trillion yuan (\$225 billion) in revenue in 2024, energizing the city's sectors.

Former French prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin emphasized that culture transcends bilateral relations and must be advanced within a multilateral framework.

In a letter to the forum,



Guests visit the cultural creativity exhibition area of the 2025 Beijing Culture Forum in September. ZHANG WEI / CHINA DAILY

French Culture Minister Rachida Dati noted that France and China both recognize the transformative role of disruptive technologies, particularly artificial intelligence. She emphasized that their innovation and growth potential will directly shape global culture and bring profound changes to the cultural sector worldwide.

Lazare Eloundou Assomo, director of the UNESCO World Heritage Centre, remarked on the essential role of digital technology in heritage protection, management, and education, highlighting China's leadership in digital innovation and heritage preservation.

Zhu Songchun, director of the Beijing Institute for General Artificial Intelligence, stated that AI and humanities research can complement each other, with AI research

providing deeper insights into human nature and cultural formation, while humanities offer cognitive frameworks and value systems for AI.

Gao Shiming, vice-president of the China Federation of Literary and Art Circles, said that in recent years, diverse forms of Chinese art and literature have adapted to and thrived on new media platforms.

He encouraged contemporary artists to draw poetic inspiration from the lives and future aspirations of Chinese people, creating art and culture that integrates the ancient and modern, East and West, culture and technology. Such works, he stressed, should be shared with the public, advance the times, and be presented to the world.

A highlight of the forum's opening day was the release

of several key achievements, including the report titled "From Initiative to Practice: 2024 Sino-Foreign Cultural Exchange Report".

According to it, 2024 marked a year of high-quality development in cultural exchanges between China and foreign countries. Chinese proposals for the new era, exemplified by a series of global initiatives, not only injected vitality into the pursuit of modernization with Chinese characteristics but offered solutions to address challenges in a turbulent and rapidly changing world.

The report noted that 2024 witnessed a multidimensional and comprehensive development pattern in Sino-foreign cultural exchanges. Robust cooperation in technology has driven the creation of an innovative ecosystem for

cultural exchanges; deeper collaboration in public health has advanced the building of a global community of health for all; strengthened partnerships in environmental governance have led global ecological civilization construction; and enhanced cooperation in media has promoted people-to-people exchanges and mutual understanding.

Looking ahead, the report indicated that Sino-foreign cultural exchanges are entering a new phase of prosperity. China stands ready to join hands with other countries — taking cultural exchanges as a bond and mutual learning among civilizations as a bridge — to collectively address global issues.

In addition to the report, the forum also announced the top 10 major events in the construction of a national cultural center in 2024 and 18 significant cultural achievements.

Three major project agreements were also signed on-site, covering areas such as AI-driven art creation, AI applications in museums, and Sino-German cooperation on global governance and civilizational mutual learning.

On the first day of the event, six parallel forums were held, focusing on topics including digital empowerment for cultural heritage, technology-driven cultural originality, and respecting the diversity of civilization.

Through keynote speeches, roundtable discussions, and case presentations, the parallel sessions delved into a wide range of topics related to the integration of culture and technology.

—HAO NAN



The Sino-French film series, a special curated event at this year's Beijing Culture Forum, launches a film concert on Sept 22. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Film festival celebrates deep Sino-French ties

As a special curated event at this year's Beijing Culture Forum, the Sino-French film series took place on Sept 22-24.

It was also designed to commemorate the 130th anniversary of world cinema, the 120th anniversary of Chinese cinema, and the 61st anniversary of China-France diplomatic ties.

Under the theme "Wind Moves, Shadows Dance", the event symbolized the fluid and interconnected nature of Chinese and French film cultures.

Through film concerts, image salons, academic dialogues, and film screenings, the series explored the century-long cinematic history of the two countries, examined innovation and expression of film art in the contemporary era, and aimed to elevate Sino-French film cultural exchanges to a new level.

The event featured a distinguished French delegation led by former French prime minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin. It included notable figures such as director Jean-Jacques Annaud and actress Juliette Binoche. The Chinese delegation was equally impressive, gathering prominent individuals from the film, cultural, and academic sectors. They included renowned director Wu Ershan, actor Liu Ye and the Peking Opera masters Tan Zhengyan and Tan Xiaozeng.

This grand event comprised three core segments:

a film concert that offered an audiovisual feast through classic film reproductions and live performances; five special activities featuring master dialogues, film screenings and academic seminars; and an image salon focused on the inheritance and innovation of film art.

This year, the Beijing Culture Forum introduced a new salon format, designed to regularly bring together experts, scholars and cultural celebrities from around the world. These gatherings will fuel exchanges, discussions, and collaborations on themes such as cultural heritage and development.

In April, the salon's inaugural event was held at Tiantan (Temple of Heaven) Park, where guests engaged in discussions on topics like "the global value of cultural heritage protection" and "how science and technology empower cultural heritage protection".

Sun Junmin, head of the city's publicity department, said that the Beijing Culture Forum Salon will serve as an innovative platform to promote ongoing cultural initiatives, coordinate high-quality projects, and enhance international cultural exchanges.

It will focus on themes like cultural heritage protection, cultural and technological innovation, and the integration of culture, commerce, tourism and sports, regularly organizing professional and diverse activities.

—HAO NAN

Salon examines digital innovations reshaping culture and creativity

As a key component of the 2025 Beijing Culture Forum, a salon specializing in artificial intelligence took place in the city's Haidian district earlier in September.

Themed "Cultural Intelligence: AI Reshaping Digital Content Production", the event featured in-depth discussions on topics within the sector, such as innovative models, transformation pathways, challenges and opportunities.

Experts in the AI field, alongside representatives from technology enterprises like the video-sharing platform Kuaishou Technology and leading content creators, gathered to share their insights.

Guo Yanmin, a professor at the Communication University of China, for example, explored the efficiency gains and job restructuring that AI is driving in the audiovisual industry. He emphasized the importance of maintaining authenticity in news communication, originality in artistic creation, and avoiding homogenization in commercial entertainment.

Additionally, Qin Jingyan, a professor at the University of Science and Technology Beijing, examined the role of AI technology in fostering high-level aesthetics and cultural expression, aligning with national strategies such as the dual-carbon reduction goals, sustainable development and building a beacon of cultural progress.

Cai Xiongshan, vice-president of Kuaishou, highlighted that AI-generated content is driving a new wave of technological transformation in the film and television industry, injecting vitality into its development.

Notably, the China-BRICS Artificial Intelligence Development and Cooperation Center established its first global achievement transformation center at Kuaishou's Brazilian branch in May, indicating broader applications of AI technology in countries involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, Cai said.

In recent years, the global AI



Visitors try their hand at a virtual reality experience in the Grand Canal Museum of Beijing. YAN XIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

technology revolution has continued to advance, with Haidian at the forefront of AI development. The district currently hosts 105 registered large models, accounting for two-thirds of Beijing's total and one-fifth of China's total.

Among these is Keling AI, a video-generating model developed by Kuaishou. Since its launch in June 2024, it has completed over 30 iterations, served more than 45 million global users, and generated over 200 million videos and 400 million images.

It has been integrated into fields such as film and television production, advertising creativity, e-commerce marketing, and cultural tourism, with the potential to empower more industries in the future.

Moreover, Haidian has nurtured leading general-purpose large models like Doubao, Ernie Bot, and ChatGLM, and has incubated significant world-class achievements.

Beijing has been promoting the application of new technologies, products and scenarios to achieve digital empowerment in the cultural field these past few years.

In January, several sci-tech and cultural departments in the city issued a three-year action plan for innovation and development of technology empowering culture, aiming to advance the construction of a national cultural center and an international

sci-tech innovation hub.

According to the plan, Beijing will focus on meeting the technological needs of the cultural sector by strengthening research on AI, internet 3.0, and high-end processing chips, enhancing the capabilities of cultural digital content generation.

Technologies like AI and virtual reality will be employed to upgrade cultural infrastructure and create benchmark projects in cultural tourism, film, and cultural heritage sectors.

Furthermore, the city will promote the implementation of pilot policies, establish key laboratories for the integration of culture and technology, build a sci-tech and cultural industry cluster, and explore the application of AI in the governance of cultural digital content.

In August, Beijing released this year's list of technology-empowered cultural projects, including AI large model-based museum guidance and interactive theater experience systems, AI digital museums of industrial heritage, and AI-assisted music program score analysis and intelligent shooting systems.

Guided by the action plan and supported by the project list, Beijing will continue to integrate science and technology with the cultural industry, and build an innovation system poised for the future.

—HAO NAN

LIFE



Five Oxen, a Tang Dynasty (618-907) painting, is a testament to cultural relic protectors' determination to bring lost treasures home. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



A jade disc known as *bi*, made about 2,200 years ago, is one of the largest heirlooms of its kind in Chinese history. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

Forbidden gates swing open



A Gold Cup of Eternal Territorial Integrity of the Qing Dynasty (1368-1644). PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Lianhe Fanghu, a bronze jar with lotus and crane decorations, on show in the exhibition *A Century of Stewardship: From the Forbidden City to the Palace Museum*. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



Along the River During the Qingming Festival was unrolled for the first time in a decade. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Dasheng Yiyin, a Tang Dynasty guqin (zither) on show. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Meridian Gate towers above the entrance to the Palace Museum in Beijing, China's imperial palace from 1420 to 1911 and also known as the Forbidden City. During the imperial years, numerous royals, high officials and nobles walked through this gate, which stands for solemnity, ritual and order. They stepped into a place closed to outsiders, a place in which the course of their own destinies — and often the fate of the country — was shaped.

In October 1925 the Palace Museum was established, unlocking the gates for the public and marking the beginning of a story about custodians devoted to safeguarding and extending an unbroken civilization.

A century later tourists ascend the Meridian Gate Galleries, a privilege that was unimaginable even for most high officials who passed the doorway in ancient times. Here the exhibition *A Century of Stewardship: From the Forbidden City to the Palace Museum* opened on Sept 30, and runs until the end of the year.

More than 200 carefully chosen exhibits, including paintings, calligraphic works, jade, bronze ware, gold ware, porcelain and architectural components, are on view.

A half-day tour of its three galleries is akin to undertaking millennia time travel.

"Cultural relics are the best records of civilization," said Xu Wanling, chief curator of the exhibition. "Through relics we want visitors to see those

historic moments and the people behind them."

One monumental treasure on view, and perhaps the most famous Chinese painting, *Along the River During the Qingming Festival*, was unrolled for the first time in a decade.

This silk scroll, created by Zhang Zeduan of the imperial painting academy of the Northern Song Dynasty (960-1127), and more than 16 feet long, depicts the flourishing landscape of the national capital of Dongjing (present-day Kaifeng, Henan province) through vivid portrayals of about 600 figures, 100 houses, 25 boats and countless details of urban life.

Seals of nearly 100 collectors, impressed over centuries, testify to the painting's

journey through history.

The scroll was lost during the war that ended the Northern Song, stolen from the palace, passed from one literati's hand to another and from some powerful minister's residence to the next, before eventually entering the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) royal collection in the late 18th century.

However, turmoil returned. The last emperor Puyi, who continued to live in the Forbidden City in the 1920s after the monarchy fell, managed to get the painting out of the palace again. He later took it, along with many other relics, to Changchun, Northeast China, where he presided over a puppet regime under Japanese occupation. Many assumed the painting was lost forever during

the chaotic end of World War II.

Against all odds it resurfaced in 1950. Cultural relic researchers found it in a wooden case abandoned by Puyi when his puppet state collapsed. The painting later returned to the Forbidden City, intact.

Xu Tong, a researcher in the painting and calligraphy department of the Palace Museum, and who was in charge of selecting about 30 key works for this exhibition, said: "Many relics did not always stay in the palace peacefully. The hardships they endured just tell the exceptional history of this museum."

Another highlight, the Tang Dynasty (618-907) painting *Five Oxen*, portrays a modern tale of perseverance. This scroll in the Qing royal collection, one

of the earliest surviving Chinese paintings drawn on paper, disappeared after the Eight-Nation Alliance invaded Beijing in 1900.

It surfaced again in the 1950s in a Hong Kong auction. Premier Zhou Enlai then directed efforts to negotiate and buy the painting and some other relics, making the mission a matter of national urgency.

Xu Bojiao, a banker from a family of cultural relic appraisers, was entrusted with the task.

In a letter written to Zheng Zhenduo, then the country's cultural heritage administration chief, he said: "One more relic we acquire, one more thing we've done for our nation." This letter is displayed in the exhibition.

"We're not qualified to judge history," Xu Wanling said. "But people from history have spoken for us."

"In the early 20th century, when the country endeavored to overcome years of weakness, some cultural relics were lost. Thanks to our predecessors' efforts the treasures came back. It's also a reflection of the times."

Today, digitized editions of many highlights appear on screens with glasses-free 3D effects. Modern visitors may take the wonders of such technology for granted, but for any visitors stepping into the Forbidden City for the first time 100 years ago, the visual impact of these long-hidden cultural relics would have been overwhelming.

— WANG KAIHAO

Bonds that tie an oasis to Oklahoma

Kyle Dillingham's visits to China always come with strings attached. The fact that his home state of Oklahoma has a sister relationship with Gansu province is one of the reasons to make the 14,000-mile return trip, and then there's that fiddle of his.

Dillingham visited the Gansu city of Dunhuang eight years ago and he has been back five times since then to the modern desert oasis, which once served as a critical juncture on the ancient trade network. Late last month he was there to perform at the Eighth Silk Road (Dunhuang) International Cultural Expo.

"Without the Silk Road we might not have the traditional American fiddle music we know today," he said.

"You wouldn't have traditional fiddle culture in Oklahoma, where I come from. The origins of the bowed string instrument were probably somewhere in Central Asia, and it made its way along that Silk Road into Europe and became a European tradition."

Dillingham said it is exciting to be involved in the modern Silk Road and it inspired him to write the song *Old Friend*.

Talking of the lyrics, he said: "There are the ups and the downs, the ebb and the flow, and the coming and the going. But ultimately ... we are old friends looking toward a bright future of great friendship and strength."

More than 1,200 people, including officials, artists, scholars and schoolchildren from China and around the world, took part in performances, forums and exhibitions, and visited classic and emerging destinations in Dunhuang.

Mong Mong Sho, an artist from Bangladesh who joined 20 artists from 12 countries to retrace the Silk Road across Gansu in August, said the two paintings he displayed at the expo convey his feelings of fusing the ancient and the modern, the local and the global.

"We had a conversation with history, culture and nature. At the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, facing those

murals and statues that have been sleeping for thousands of years, it felt as if we were having a timeless conversation with ancient souls. The dancing figures of the flying apsaras and the colors deeply touched me.

"The Buddhist stories etched here have roots in the Indian subcontinent, so I find powerful echoes of my own culture and history in every mural and sculpture."

Visitors to the Dunhuang Studies exhibition area not only learned about how this legacy is being preserved but also experienced how new technologies are used to protect and restore ancient relics.

They walked through physical replicas of the Mogao Caves adorned with murals and statues, or experienced immersive digital explorations using virtual reality, enabling them to envisage the caves closed to the public.

Imagery from the caves featured heavily in the neighboring hall, devoted to the continuation of traditional



Tourists at Dunhuang's night market during the eighth Silk Road (Dunhuang) Cultural Expo. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Musicians from China and abroad perform at the night market.

Dunhuang culture and the advent of creative innovations using its media and motifs. Artisans displayed hunks of minerals crushed to create the pigments used to paint the cave murals centuries ago, and wood-burned fans featuring icons such as Hexi horses and wheat-straw embroidered camels.

— ERIK NILSSON AND HU YUMENG



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CHINA WATCH

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The natural high of a dreamland in the clouds

Historic trade route over mountains has its origins in Yunnan province, where the landscape is as diverse as its inhabitants

BY DENG ZHANGYU

Yunnan province in Southwest China is home to one of the world's highest and most storied ancient trade routes. For centuries, mule caravans traversed the historic path, transporting tea from the lush regions of Xishuangbanna and Pu'er to the high-altitude snowlands above.

The route made tea an integral part of life for the Tibetans on the plateau. From there the journey extended southward to India and to some Southeast Asian countries, and northward to Russia. Owing to the frequent exchange of tea for horses along the route, it is also referred to as the Ancient Tea Horse Road.

Along the way there are mountain ranges, dense forests, swift rivers, vast grasslands, towering snowcapped peaks and deep valleys. The perilous environment and unpredictable climate along the route forced mule caravaners to risk their lives in pursuit of a livelihood. Today the area draws tourists from both China and abroad, eager to explore the stunning mountains and rivers, as well as the multicultural heritage that lines the historic path.

The first stop on a journey that I made recently was Xishuangbanna, a birthplace of the world's tea trees and the start of the Ancient Tea Horse Road, where much of the traded tea was produced.

Xishuangbanna, on the southernmost tip of Yunnan, is one of China's best-preserved tropical ecosystems. Rainforest hiking is popular for visitors to explore its rich biodiversity. I joined a hiking

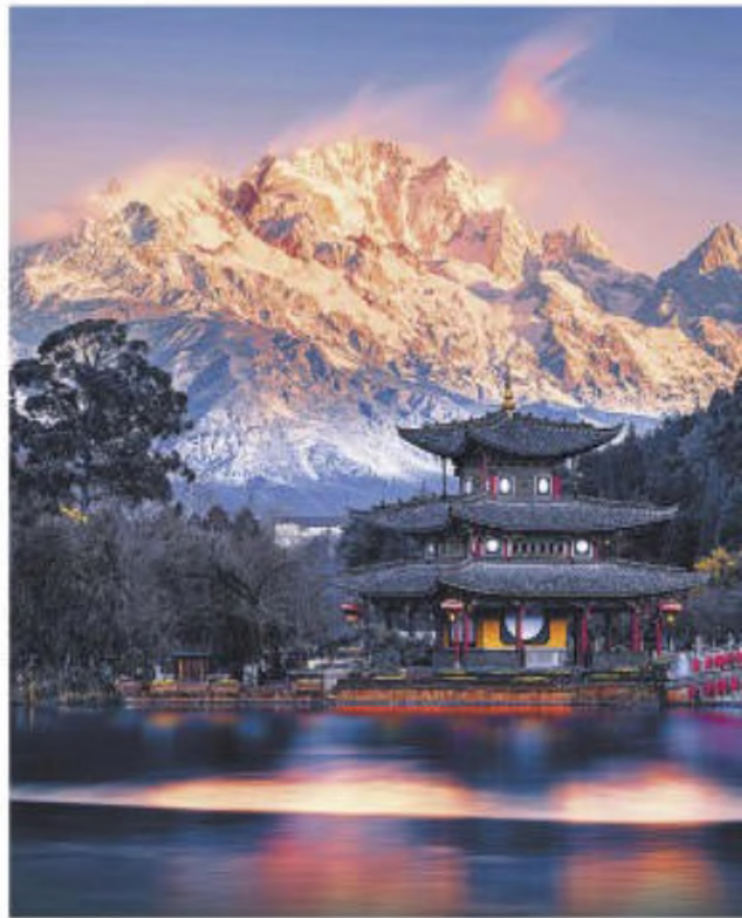
group and set off toward a jungle hidden behind Jinuo Mountain, just a half-hour drive from the prefecture's main city, Jinghong.

Everything in the rainforest was novel to me, from trees as high as skyscrapers that created a canopy blocking out most of the light to various insects that camouflaged themselves so well that few would notice them if someone did not point them out.

In this place was a black widow that had just finished spinning its web, a pair of locusts in the midst of mating, a lizard searching for food and a green bamboo snake dozing in a tree. After a three-hour hike I reached a camp where visitors could take a break with a cup of coffee or tea. As dusk fell, it was time to say goodbye to this remote rainforest, and the fragrance of the Pu'er tea I had just finished lingered on my tongue. My next destination was Pu'er, a city named after the tea variety it produces, just a two-hour train ride away.

Pu'er is a major tea-producing city on the Ancient Tea Horse Road. The tea is produced in large quantities here and transported north by mule caravans to the Tibetan areas on the snowy plateau. In the streets and alleys of Pu'er, tea shops are everywhere, and the shop owners beckon tourists to sample their wares, free of charge. The best-quality tea comes from the ancient tea plantations in the Old Tea Forests on Jingmai Mountain, a cultural landscape inscribed on the UNESCO World Heritage list in 2023.

I visited Nan Kang, a master tea-maker in Mangjing village on Jingmai Mountain, where nine



Top: The Ancient Tea Horse Road is a melting pot of ethnic diversity, as well as a showcase of natural wonders. **Above:** The annual Water Splashing Festival celebrated by the Dai ethnic group is a big draw for tourists in Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Right: Hani women are harvesting tea leaves in Pu'er in Yunnan. HE ZHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY



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ancient villages are inhabited by ethnic groups such as the Blang, Dai, Hani and Va, who have cultivated tea trees for generations.

Nan's home is in an open space halfway up the mountain. Looking out from his house, expanses of ancient tea forests bathe in the glow of the setting sun. Many of the ancient tea trees here are more than 100 years old, and the locals reckon that each tea tree has its own tea spirit.

I arrived just in time for tea-picking season in early April. Nan took me to witness the locals' unique skills, such as climbing trees to pick tea. Even villagers in their 60s and 70s nimbly scale the tall trunks to harvest the freshest leaves. It is a skill that has sustained their people for generations.

In just one day I helped pick tea, observed every step of the tea-making process and tasted a variety of fine Pu'er teas.

Strolling through the ancient village lined with stilt houses, I saw people dressed in traditional Blang clothes drying their freshly picked tea leaves at their doorsteps. Life here is tranquil and beautiful, much like Pu'er tea.

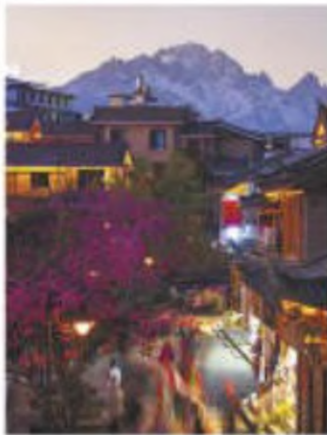
When I flew to my next destination, Lijiang, an important transit station on the Ancient Tea Horse Road, the highland scenery contrasted with Pu'er plantations in the south, a vivid picture of two distinct seasons.

Lijiang is renowned for its location at the foot of Jade Dragon Snow Mountain. I took a 35-minute tourist train trip from Lijiang ancient town to the mountain that afforded panoramic vistas of snowcapped peaks from various angles, and views of crystal waters and sheer canyons.

Taking the cable car to Glacier Park, I reached an altitude of 14,780 ft. From there I climbed up to 15,354 ft. The white apex was dazzlingly bright in the sunlight. Then the weather changed in mere minutes, shrouding the summit in clouds and mist, so it appeared and disappeared like a veiled goddess.

A brief stop in Lijiang ultimately led to the final destination: Shangri-La, a place often referred to as "paradise on Earth" and also an important hub on the Ancient Tea Horse Road. Tea was transported from there to Tibetan areas.

At an altitude of over 10,500 ft., Shangri-La boasts snow-



Top: Lijiang ancient town in Yunnan province is lit up at night. **Above:** Horses graze in the meadow at the Jade Dragon Snow Mountain scenic area in Lijiang. PHOTOS BY HE ZHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

capped mountains, pristine lakes and great valleys, and mere words can never do justice to its breathtaking beauty.

I took a one-hour train ride to Shangri-La, and as soon as I stepped out of the station I was captivated by the traditional Tibetan-style architecture. I spent the entire afternoon leisurely exploring Dukezong ancient town, which dates back more than 1,300 years. Here mule caravans once traded and interacted with locals. Various horse-trading shops, inns that accommodated people and their horses, and stores selling fodder and horse gear lined the narrow cobblestone streets. Today these old buildings bear witness to the once thriving and bustling scenes of the past.



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Fungal feasts are well worth the trip

BY DENG ZHANGYU

Where in the world are people most passionate about mushrooms? A visit to Yunnan province provides an answer. Strolling along the streets in any city here you will encounter shops selling stir-fried mushrooms that will delight not only your taste buds but your olfactory organs as well. Hotpot restaurants, filled with diners enjoying a mushroom feast, are ubiquitous.

Nie Rongqing, who grew up in Kunming, capital of Yunnan, has written a book about the province's mushrooms and says they are an indispensable part of any conversation about food for the people of this region.

When I met Nie at a restaurant in Kunming he announced that he had a gift for me. He gingerly took out two palm-sized matsutake mushrooms, taken from the mountains of Shangri-La the day before. He then summoned the waiter and instructed him to have the chef slice them.

In a few minutes the chef sliced the matsutake, still fragrant with the soil's earthiness, into vertical pieces, transforming them into a plate of matsutake sashimi, and it was served to us with soy sauce and wasabi.

"In Yunnan the favored way to treat guests is to let them savor the most delicious mushrooms," he said.

In June local people eagerly look forward to the arrival of the rainy season. With generous downpours a variety of mushrooms burst forth from the mountainous terrain, signaling the start of the mushroom culinary season.

From July to September a visit to any market in Yunnan offers a vibrant display of mushrooms in a spectrum of colors and unusual shapes. Harvested from the mountains, these natural treasures find their way into home kitchens and are celebrated as the most sought-after delicacies in eateries ranging from modest to upscale.

In early May I flew to Lijiang. My first meal was an eagerly awaited mushroom hotpot. The local way to enjoy this dish is by combining chicken broth with mushrooms. As the server poured a generous array of mushrooms into the bubbling chicken broth I could hardly wait to dig in. But then, in a twist, the server whisked away my chopsticks and placed an hourglass beside the pot, explaining that it was a timer.

The mushrooms needed a precise 15-minute boil to be safe to eat, lest they prove toxic. The removal of my chopsticks was a precaution to prevent eager diners like me from sneaking a taste too soon and risking a culinary misadventure.

The 15-minute wait was well worth it. The tender mushrooms, steeped in the rich, savory chicken broth, were an absolute delight.

In Yunnan the allure of these tasty mushrooms leads to many poisonings. A plate of stir-fried *jianshouqing*, a renowned variety, if not cooked properly, can have hallucinogenic effects. To eat or not to eat? People here have a saying: Even if it means meeting the "little people" — a trippy side effect that has one dancing and reaching for invisible objects — it is worth taking a bite.



Above: Mushrooms are the biggest culinary attraction in Yunnan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Below: Freshly harvested mushrooms are transformed into an array of delicacies. HE ZHAO / FOR CHINA DAILY



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CHINA WATCH

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Mounds claim their rightful place in history

Researchers piece together a fascinating tale to shed light on an exceptional saga

BY WANG KAIHAO
and WANG RU

In 1227, this dynasty in North-west China was finally defeated by the Mongol army after a campaign led by Genghis Khan. Xixia (or Western Xia, 1038-1227), a power spread across over 444,000 square miles at its zenith, eventually fell in the Gobi Desert.

Established by Tangut people and inhabited by various ethnic groups, Xixia was not documented in a specific history book by its successors while most Chinese dynasties were.

However, at the foot of the lingering Helan Mountains, a group of earthen mounds seal an exceptional saga, not only as a footnote on how a united Chinese nation evolved and boomed, but also about a neglected legend on the Silk Road.

The spotlight returns to this site on the outskirts of Yinchuan, capital of Ningxia Hui autonomous region. On July 11, Xixia Imperial Tombs achieved World Heritage Site status during the 47th Session of the World Heritage Committee of UNESCO in Paris.

Within the 15 square miles of the property zone, its key elements included nine imperial mausoleums, 271 subordinate tombs, 32 flood control work sites, and a 12.4-acre architectural complex site to the north.

The 11th to 13th centuries, the time of Xixia, witnessed a key era of political standoff and cultural communications in China. The Song Dynasty (960-1279), celebrated for its culture and art in Chinese history, ruled central and southern China. The Khitan and Jurchen peoples successively

established the Liao (916-1125) and Jin (1115-1234) dynasties to the north. The rise of Mongols on the grassland then further greatly changed the geopolitical environment.

"Xixia people demonstrated their perseverance and wisdom in the complicated circumstance," says Chen Tongbin, honorary director of the Institute of Architectural History, affiliated to the China Architecture Design and Research Group. "They were adept at learning and creativity. They relied on both agriculture and nomads."

In her eyes, Xixia Imperial Tombs remain a crucial witness to such cultural fusion and innovation resulting from interactions among diverse ethnic groups, modes of livelihoods and cultures. The tombs manifest such features through site selection, spatial layout, burial system, architecture, construction techniques, funerary customs, and so on, Chen says.

In the 1930s, when a German pilot flew over what is now known as Mausoleum No. 3 — the largest tomb among the complex — and took aerial pictures, he described



A green-glazed Kalavinka sculpture unearthed from Mausoleum No. 3. JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

it as "a huge anthill." Its true identity as a site of imperial tombs only re-emerged in the 1970s when Chinese archaeologists first launched excavations on the site. The "anthill" is actually a circular mausoleum pagoda.

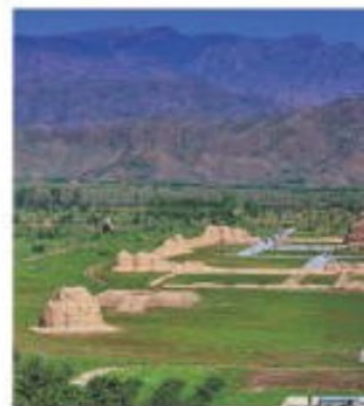
Half a century's continuous research has greatly cleared questions surrounding the site, according to Chai Pingping, an archaeologist with the Ningxia Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology who is in charge of recent research on Xixia Imperial Tombs.

Broken pieces of stele that were inscribed with Tangut scripts and Chinese characters, architectural components, gold artifacts, sandstone statues, Buddhist relics, and so on, gradually provide a panorama of Xixia imperial life.

As experts point out, the imperial tombs follow traditional Chinese geomancy, feng shui.

"Through archaeological studies, we can see the layout and design of Xixia Imperial Tombs absorbed many elements from Tang (618-907) and Song dynasties," Chai says. "It also has its own features."

Xixia people used pagodas to replace the shrines, which were



Above: Mausoleum No. 3, the largest among the Xixia Imperial Tombs. PROVIDED BY YINCHUAN XIXIA IMPERIAL TOMBS MANAGEMENT OFFICE TO CHINA DAILY

Bottom: A panorama of Mausoleums No. 1 (front) and No. 2 of the Xixia Imperial Tombs.

JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



Above: A statue pedestal in the shape of a *lishi* warrior unearthed from Mausoleum No. 3. **Right:** A stone horse statue unearthed from a subordinate tomb. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



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A gray pottery roof decoration unearthed from Mausoleum No. 6, JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



A green-glazed sea lion decoration unearthed from Mausoleum No. 3, JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



A pottery eave tile with animal pattern found in a subordinate tomb, JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY



dynasties coexisted was an important period for various ethnic groups of China to merge and form a shared community.

"Khitans, Tanguts and Jurchens ethnic groups communicated and integrated with the Han people for a long time," Du says. "They gradually absorbed the traditional material and spiritual culture of the Han and, vice versa, they also spread their own customs. It thus enriches the connotations of Chinese civilization."

In the early 20th century, a great amount of literature in Tangut scripts was discovered by foreign explorers at the Heishuicheng site in nearby Ejine Banner, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, which was later identified as an ancient Xixia city. The Heishuicheng literature, which is about various aspects of Xixia society, was regarded a milestone discovery in ancient literary artifacts.

Among Heishuicheng literature, researchers discovered *Tiansheng Gaiju Xinding Lyuling* or "The new laws in the years of Tiansheng (1149-1169) modified from the old one". It is the longest, most detailed and best preserved code of laws that is known of Xixia.

The code records Xixia exchanged with not only surrounding regimes but also Central and even West Asia through tribute, market fairs, and mutual trades along the Silk Road.

And findings on Xixia Imperial Tombs may resonate with the recordings.

On the outer wall of Mausoleum No. 3, arc-shaped corner towers may tell its possible inspiration from similar battlements in West Asia while most such structures in ancient China were square-shaped.

Sculptures of Kalavinka, a fantastical immortal with a bird's torso, also rested on the roof of mausoleum structures. Colloquially known as an "exquisite sound bird" and believed to originate from India, this deity image appeared in other key Buddhist sites in the rest of China following booming trade on the Silk Road.

Hu Dongmei contributed to this story.



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With some expertise

BY WANG RU and WANG KAIHAO

Yang Shanlong, a researcher at the Dunhuang Academy in Gansu province, is devoted to prolonging the life of the earthen heritages that are key testimonies to history. Over the years, he has shared Dunhuang's advanced techniques for protecting earthen sites with the Xixia Imperial Tombs in Yinchuan, Ningxia Hui autonomous region.

When Yang arrived at the site in 2007, he found time had left its mark. Base erosion leading to recesses in the wall surfaces then led to smaller bases that made the relics unstable and at risk of collapse in the event of an earthquake. According to Yang, erosion is caused by the repeated dissolution and crystallization of salt, leading to the loosening of soil and peeling from the main body. Moreover, cracks on the earthen buildings allow water to enter, and heavy rains sometimes wash away parts of the remains.

Yang says that based on Dunhuang's experience, they developed a series of methods catering to the Xixia tombs' specific issues. By analyzing the components of the earthen remains, they located earth with similar components but less salt, and added calcined ginger nuts with good waterproofing. Then they rammed the mixture into the base, using a technique that imitates ancient construction methods.

To prevent the water from leaking in, they also sealed the cracks. For the parts that might easily be washed away by heavy rain, they added an artificial layer covering the original parts that can handle wear and tear, containing the mixture of soil and calcined ginger nuts on the surface.

The layers they added for buildings in Mausoleum No. 6 in 2011, after 14 years, are still holding up well. "Once a layer is worn or washed away, we add a new one so that the original remains are always protected," says Yang.

CHINA WATCH

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**Stories unfold under
an azure canopy**

Inner Mongolia, once a land of nomads, now offers summer retreats and delicious cuisine

**BY FANG AIQING
and YUAN HUI**

"The yurt-like sky holds the vast green land within. Beneath its azure canopy, the infinite wilderness thrives. The wind bends the grass low, revealing sheep and cows."

For many Chinese, these lyrics from a song of the Northern Dynasty (386-581) bring to mind the Chilechuan, the plains of the Chile (Tiele) people, a northern nomadic tribe that once lived at the foot of the Yinshan Mountains in what is now Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

For anyone keen on catching a glimpse of majestic grasslands, Inner Mongolia beckons as an inevitable option. The autonomous region is like a crown capping the country at its very north, stretching about 1,500 miles from east to west.

This expansive terrain, most of it perched on a plateau more than 3,200 ft. above sea level, boasts varied landscapes — temperate prairie, alpine meadow and desert steppe — framed by dense forests to its east, fertile plains in the south and a sprawling sea of dunes in the west.

Summer's copious rainfall revives the grasslands, transforming them into lush green canyons. Wildflowers bloom, livestock graze, wetlands glisten, and the sun paints the sky with golden and ochre hues.



The flower-shaped shaomai is a signature dish of Hohhot, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Because of a lack of records, it is hard to tell where exactly the extensive land of Chilechuan was located. However, throughout history the Yinshan Mountains have held important geographical and strategic sway. Extending more than 746 miles east-west in central Inner Mongolia and northern Hebei province, they marked the boundary of subhumid and semiarid climates and delineated the divide between agricultural and nomadic civilizations.

Hence, war, trade and cultural integration all took place here. Portions of the Great Wall and border towns were built across dynasties. Artifacts that blend numerous cultural styles were discovered. Lines of poetry were passed down.

Over the years, Zhang Wenping, director of Hohhot's institute of cultural relics and archaeology in Inner Mongolia's regional capital, has been

studying the northern nomadic tribes that historically thrived in Hohhot, once called Shengle.

In 258 the Xianbei tribes settled along the banks of the Dahei River and built the city of Shengle as their winter base. The regime later established its capital there, gradually campaigned southward, and eventually founded the Northern Wei Dynasty (386-534), ruling over some core parts of the Central Plains region and promoting cultural integration.

The Chile tribes were also known as Gaoche, named for the large-wheeled carts they used to travel through tall grass, thick snow and marshlands. After the Chile were defeated by the Xianbei people in the early fifth century, they served as border guards for the Northern Wei Dynasty around the Yinshan Mountains area, north of its agricultural zones, Zhang says.

The lyrics at the start of this article were part of a pastoral song in the Xianbei language that has been lost to time. It tells of the undulating hilly grasslands on which Chile nomads herded, with slender, white fluffy herbage that grew taller than regular grass. As herders rode galloping horses, the sheep and cows in the distance seemed to vanish and reappear amid the swaying grass rustling in the wind.

Today a restored plain just 9 miles from downtown Hohhot re-creates that vision. Set against the backdrop of the towering Daqing Mountains, part of the Yinshan range, this area has been developed since



Sightseeing trams shuttle through the grassland in Huanghuagou (Yellow Flower Ravine), a popular summer getaway in Ulaanqab. QIN YU / FOR CHINA DAILY



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The Naadam festival is an annual summer celebration of the Mongolian ethnic group, encompassing diverse competitions and a display of traditional music and dance. ZHUI XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY



The sight of horses galloping across the expansive grasslands is an iconic image of Inner Mongolia. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The Chilechuan Grassland in Hohhot is a perfect spot for visitors to delve into authentic local culture. XU TING / FOR CHINA DAILY

2012 into a leisure retreat. Visitors stroll, cycle and camp here, enjoying a pastoral interlude close to urban life. The Chilechuan Grassland seeks to revive the memories that historically defined the land of Hohhot at the foot of the Yinshan Mountains: a former frontier of dynastic governance and the gradual integration of northern nomadic tribes into Chinese civilization.

About 90 minutes' drive from Hohhot, 250 miles or so from Beijing, lies a well-preserved alpine meadow, the Khuitenshil Grassland, in Ulaanqab, spanning the eastern slopes of the Daqing Mountains at an average elevation of 6,890 ft.

At its western end lies Huanghuagou (Yellow Flower Ravine), a 6-mile stretch with a depth of 980 ft., popular with summer tourists.

Sightseeing trams shuttle through the grassland as wind turbines spin in the distance. Animals graze, undisturbed by the intermittent grass waves in the wind or the fleeting shadows of passing clouds.

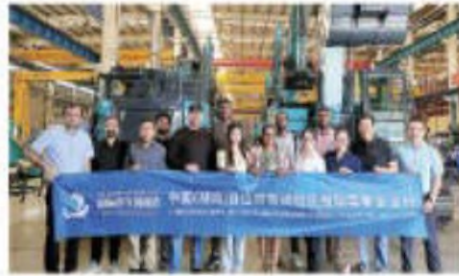
Close by, wildflowers burst into view — white, yellow, pink, blue and purple — some tall and proud, others tiny and delicate, dancing in the breeze.

Of course, no visit is complete without sampling the local flavors. While debate rages over where Inner Mongolia's best lamb is found and how it should be cooked, Hohhot proudly champions its own specialty: shaomai, also known as shumai. These delicate, flower-shaped buns, steamed or pan-fried with thin crystal wrappers and savory mutton filling, are often eaten with brick tea.

Wang Zhicang, secretary-general of Inner Mongolia's shaomai industry association, said in a recent interview with Hohhot Daily that the wrappers are made from Bayan-nuur wheat, the lamb comes from Xilin Gol, and the leeks from Tumd Left Banner. It is a regional symphony of flavors and an apt metaphor for Inner Mongolia's diverse and interwoven cultural landscape.



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The International Youth Entrepreneurship Port of the China (Hunan) Pilot Free Trade Zone Changsha Area organizes a business tour in May 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Young entrepreneurs thrive in Changsha

BY YUAN SHENGGAO

Changsha, capital of Central China's Hunan province, is often hailed as a metropolis that never sleeps due to its nighttime economy. But the city's development goes beyond consumer spending; it also thrives on its capacity to attract young entrepreneurs to stimulate innovation and technological advancement.

He Yao, founder of Changsha Feishi Technology, pursued remote driving technology in Changsha after earning his master's degree from Hunan University in 2020. He established his company at the Hunan Xiangjiang New Area College Students' Innovation and Entrepreneurship Park.

Growing up in a mining area in Chenzhou, He dreamed of replacing miners with intelligent machines. "Having seen the tractor perform tasks under remote control, it became clear that many industrial sectors still operate in challenging environments. If intelligent operations could replace manual labor, there could be significant market potential," he said.

In just three years, He led his team to complete and deliver nearly 1,000 remote control systems, bringing the vision of unmanned vehicle operation to life. Now, Feishi has become a key technology partner for industry giants such as Sany Heavy Equipment and Huawei. Additionally, its innovative solutions have won more than 10 prestigious awards at home and abroad.

"From technology development to market entry, the park always anticipates our needs in advance," He said.

As an integral part of the Xiangjiang New Area's sup-

port system, characterized by "one core park, one service center and multiple incubation bases," the innovation and entrepreneurship park spans 14,350 square yards. It provides a comprehensive incubation ecosystem, enabling student startup teams to progress from laboratories to the market.

Leveraging the park, the Xiangjiang New Area is accelerating a support system for creative incubation and industrialization. The Yuelu Mountain National University Science and Technology City has established 40 incubation bases, four proof-of-concept centers and eight pilot test bases to aid the swift market transition of research outcomes.

Changsha also extends a welcome to international talent. The International Youth Entrepreneurship Port of the China (Hunan) Pilot Free Trade Zone Changsha Area, which pioneered the launch of the "entrepreneur visa" for international youth, has been offering assistance with visas as well as startup support.

Ocjo Rachald, a 26-year-old entrepreneur from Benin in West Africa, began his business at the port after graduating from Central South University in 2024.

"I've found that Changsha is full of diverse opportunities," said Rachald.

Rachald was awarded the first "entrepreneur visa" by the FTZ Changsha area in 2024, and he established a company trading in agricultural machinery between Hunan and Benin.

"I want to create a brand for African agricultural products and be its spokesperson myself," Rachald said, expressing hopes to deepen economic and trade cooperation between Hunan and Africa.

CHINA WATCH

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A land of imagination

Ethnic groups celebrate their cultures in a gem that many have yet to discover

BY YANG YANG
and HE CHUN

Hundreds of millions of years ago this land was a vast sea. In its littoral areas, rivers carried vast amounts of quartz-rich sediment from the land, which steadily settled and built up over time. On the seabed huge amounts of carbonate material were deposited, mixed with mud and sand.

Over eons of tectonic shifts, what were once oceans have transformed into land, creating a world of peerless and spectacular natural beauty in the west of Hunan province. Two big rivers, the Yuanjiang and the Lishui, run across the land, bordered by the Wuling Mountains to the northwest and the Xuefeng Mountains to the southeast.

This area is now called Xiangxi, which, from north to south, mainly includes Zhangjiajie, Xiangxi Tujia and Miao autonomous prefecture and Huaihua.

In this land, rivers flow like the sweetest poetry, and rugged rock formations add to the beauty of a region rich in the cultures of many ethnic groups.

More than 2,000 years ago the poet Qu Yuan was exiled by the king of the Chu state to the Yuanjiang River basin. Journeying upstream, he arrived in Huaihua, passing through Xupu, where the Xushui River joined the Yuanjiang River.

When he entered Xupu, seeing towering mountains and the rushing waters of the Xushui River, he exclaimed: "Entering Xupu, I wander hesitantly; lost, I know not where to go."

In Huaihua, Qu wrote masterpieces such as *Lisao*, *Tianwen*, *Shenjiang* and *Shan-gui*. Here, too, he pioneered the tradition of Chinese romantic poetry, thus creating Huaihua's reputation as the "source of poetry".

For thousands of years Xiangxi has been an inclusive region where ethnic groups have thrived.

Now, people of various ethnic groups account for more than 64% of the population of about 8.2 million. Zhangjiajie is the cultural center of the Tujia ethnic group; Jishou, the capital of the autonomous prefecture, is the cultural center of the Miao ethnic group;



If you go

Getting there

You can fly to Zhangjiajie or take a high-speed train from most big cities in China. From the airport or train station to the city center a taxi costs about 30 yuan (\$4).

Transportation

Zhangjiajie city center is close to Tianmen Mountain, about a 10-minute taxi ride. It takes about 50 minutes to travel from the city center to Wulingyuan scenic area, with options including buses and ride-hailing services.

Accommodation

If you plan to visit Tianmen Mountain you can stay near the lower station of the Tianmen Mountain Cableway. You may also consider staying near the bus station for a cost-effective option.

Wulingyuan is another accommodation option. Xibu Street has many attractive inns near which you can experience the bustling night market and taste local delicacies.

Activities

- Natural attractions: Enjoy Zhangjiajie's stunning peaks and waters. Experience the world's longest mountain cableway at Tianmen Mountain, challenge yourself on the glass walkway, and climb the 999 steps to Tianmen Mountain.

- Performances: In Wulingyuan, the show *Eternal Love of Zhangjiajie* presents local culture through large-scale song and dance. The Charming Xiangxi performance offers a glimpse into the rich folk customs of western Hunan.

- Nightlife: Take a night tour of Xibu Street, where you can buy handmade crafts such as Miao embroidery.



A village nestled in the depth of mountains in western Hunan. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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From top: The 3,000 sandstone pillars in Zhangjiajie, Hunan province, are often shrouded in cloud, giving the illusion that they are floating in the air. LIU YING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Dong people celebrate festivals with lusheng (a reed-pipe wind instrument) shows in Tongdao Dong autonomous county in Huaihua, Hunan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
The Tuojiang River flows through the heart of Fenghuang ancient town in Hunan, flanked by traditional stilted houses and residences. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and Huaihua the cultural center of the Dong ethnic group.

In Yongshun county, the ruins of Laosicheng are what remain of the pinnacle of power of the Tujia ethnic group in the Xiangxi region. Laosicheng, the political, economic, cultural and military center of the Tusi chieftain system since the 13th century, is now a UNESCO World Cultural Heritage site, a place where visitors can experience Tujia ethnic culture.

Despite their differences, people from various ethnic groups live harmoniously together, celebrating their cultures on special occasions and in their daily lives, and respecting the cultures of their peers.

At regular fairs that fall on fixed days in different towns, women wear beautiful ethnic clothes and delicate decorations while bargaining for goods with vendors, speaking dialect that can strike the uninitiated ear as highly melodious.

Apart from being inclusive, diverse and poetic, Xiangxi is also a place of mystery.

Tao Yuanming, a poet and essayist in the Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420), wrote in an essay about a person in Wulingyuan who accidentally found a utopia — a land of peach blossoms outside the world.

Wulingyuan later often appeared as a symbol of utopia in works by poets such as Li Bai, Du Fu and Wang Wei in the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The land's mystique is reinforced by the traditional practices of ethnic groups in their rituals of worshipping deities and of funerals.

In 1988 the core scenic area of Zhangjiajie was named Wulingyuan, where people see peak forests shoot skyward from nowhere and on cloudy days, giant rocks covered by lush plants float in the air, an inspiration for the floating Hallelujah Mountains in James Cameron's 2009 blockbuster *Avatar*.



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Participants in the 2025 Discover China Program learn about guqin, or ancient Chinese zithers, at an exhibition. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Tour of discovery reveals real deal

BY XU NUO

Cultural exchange programs for young people from across the world to visit China are enabling them to experience the country's culture firsthand.

The Discover China Program, organized this year by Beijing Foreign Studies University for the second year running, was split into two parts, one attended by 13 university students from the United States, and the other by 37 students from European countries.

This year's program included lectures on China's economic and technological development, and diplomatic policies, as well as visits to historical and cultural landmarks and companies in Beijing, Xi'an, Shaanxi province, and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.

"I've always been interested in China," said one of the participants, Ashley Blake, a sophomore student in social sciences at Harvard University.

Blake said she has studied Chinese for two years and decided to anchor her academic focus on East Asia, especially China, and to "do some global cooperation" to tell Chinese stories that people can engage and connect with. The program offered her the opportunity to see and experience real Chinese culture and forge partnerships with Chinese people, she said.

Another tour participant, William Rose, of the University of Wyoming, said future generations will need to understand one another. "I think countries should work together in whatever ways they can, because each country has its own set of unique properties that is beneficial for everybody."

Joshua Calandrella, a PhD

student at Indiana University of Pennsylvania, made special note of the historic buildings he had seen. "I've been very much impressed with the art and the architecture, such as the Forbidden City. Learning the symbolism behind it and knowing how they're preserved and respected is really inspiring. It puts the past and the present together in a really unique way."

Apart from getting a taste of the long history of Chinese civilization, the students also experienced how technological innovation is transforming people's lives and leading to industrial advances. At a showroom in Beijing of the Chinese electric auto maker Nio, the students checked out various electric vehicle models and saw how artificial intelligence technologies have been integrated into voice assistants and autonomous driving systems.

William Crow, a Norwegian student at the University of Oslo, said he was impressed with China's fast-developing EV industry. "Just the idea that a car can have an operating system like a phone is very impressive. You can download an app to watch a movie in your car. We got to sit in the car, and they put on some movie with a roller coaster theme, and the car started to tilt to the left and right alongside the movie, which is just amazing."

Rose of Wyoming said: "The cities are for sure different, but in some way they have the same rhythm. When you look at the people of China and the people of the U.S., there are not a whole lot of differences. The core principles and the morals of each person, being outgoing, friendly, having integrity, as far as I can tell, look pretty much the same."

Women push boundaries to achieve new heights

For decades Chinese women have been pushing against boundaries and gender stereotypes in traditionally male-dominated industries. From civil aviation and technology to food delivery, they have carved out their own unique niche with resilience and skill-building.

Their progress has redefined the realm of possibilities in male-centric spaces, and they continue to challenge outdated norms and broaden opportunities for gender equality in all kinds of fields.

A growing number of women have pursued careers as pilots. Strict gender controls used to be imposed on pilot recruitment, but now domestic airlines continue to lift such restrictions.

Just over a decade ago, China Southern Airlines had only five female pilots; today it has more than 30. Through their own efforts and guided by the spirit that women are no less capable than men, these pilots have reached new heights with professionalism and dedication.

While female pilots may not match their male counterparts in physical strength, industry insiders say that many have increased their daily training to boost both their physical fitness and decision-making capabilities.

This year, which marks the 30th anniversary of the 1995 Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing, China co-hosted the Global Leaders' Meeting on Women with UN Women on Oct. 13 and 14. The country has consistently honored its commitments to advancing women's development, such as promoting gender equality along with economic and social progress.

Over the past 30 years China has made remarkable strides in poverty alleviation, healthcare, education and other key areas concerning women's well-being.

Now, fathers who give priority to caring for children, managing household responsibilities and stepping back from traditional full-time work to support their families are no longer that remarkable.

As societal attitudes evolve

and professional barriers gradually fade, a growing number of female executives have come to the fore, driving industry innovation with their distinctive leadership styles and professional expertise, and paving the way for future generations of women to pursue careers in many industries.

Wang Fang, chief financial officer of Embraer China, has worked for several multinational companies throughout her career and joined the China branch of the Brazilian aircraft maker Embraer SA as a credit specialist and financial analyst. Success is primarily measured by performance and capability, with the emphasis placed on an individual's contributions, not their gender, she said.

The number of female internet entrepreneurs in China has risen over the years, too, and the country now has about 40 million female scientists and technicians, accounting for more than 45% of the total, the Zhongguancun Forum Annual Conference was told last year.

Wang Lijuan, head of operations, performance and digital at Airbus Beijing Engineering Center, has been driving the company's digital transformation since 2023. Fueled by her passion for technology, she is dedicated to building smarter operational platforms that empower engineers and unlock their creative potential.

"I have always believed that skills and curiosity transcend gender. Every challenge is a chance to learn new technologies, explore new fields, and keep expanding my horizons."

More women are also filling the ranks of emerging occupations such as food delivery that were once dominated by men. Amid the hustle of their daily rides, they are redefining their sense of self-worth and reshaping their social roles.

From 2022 to 2024 the number of female riders in China rose markedly, even if the Chinese on-demand delivery company Meituan says that women account for less than 10% of its riders.

— ZHU WENQIAN

A captain (left) makes flight preparations in the cockpit of an aircraft in Hefei, Anhui province, in March 2024.

HAN SUYUAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Delegates attending the Global Leaders' Meeting on Women, which was held in Beijing on Oct. 13 and 14, take photos of a humanoid robot on Oct. 14 during their visit to the Robot World — a comprehensive robot exhibition center in the Beijing Economic Technological Development Area, also known as Beijing E-Town. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

China's proposals draw broad acclaim

Nation's commitment widely hailed as pivotal to accelerating gender equality, empowerment

President Xi Jinping's keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Global Leaders' Meeting on Women has drawn widespread acclaim from foreign participants and overseas experts, who welcomed his proposals as a pivotal step toward accelerating gender equality and women's empowerment worldwide.

They said the convening of the meeting holds milestone significance, demonstrating China's global leadership in promoting and protecting human rights and development, and advancing women's status.

"Women play an important role in creating, promoting and carrying forward human civilization. And the international community has a shared responsibility to advance the cause of women," Xi emphasized in his address.

He made four proposals, calling for collective efforts to foster an enabling environment for women's growth, propel high-quality development for women, strengthen governance frameworks to protect women's rights and enhance global cooperation on gender equality.

Recalling the Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing 30 years ago, Deputy Secretary-General of the United Nations Amina J. Mohammed underscored the pioneering role of the Beijing conference, noting that it lit "a fire of possibility" for women worldwide.

She said she is very glad to see China and other states "who have kept this flame alive".

Hosting a second historic conference in Beijing is a reminder of the shared responsibility to deliver on women's rights, she added.

Anita Amorim, head of the International Labour Organization's Emerging and Special Partnerships Unit, said that in the context of South-South cooperation, women's empowerment offers a strategic lever for resilience and shared growth, while noting that the Global Leaders' Meeting on Women has served as both a celebration of progress and a critical point of reflection on the persistent gaps in women's rights and empowerment worldwide.

Amorim said that over the years, the ILO has cooperated with China through South-South cooperation, bringing tangible benefits to countries in the Global South, especially in the Asia-Pacific region, in promoting employment, skills development and social protection, while promoting women's entrepreneurship and gender equality.

Nahla Haidar El Addal, head of the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women, highly praised Xi's advocacy of supporting women in shouldering more responsibilities, engaging deeply in global governance and sharing the

fruits of governance.

She pointed out that the key challenge in the current global governance system lies in the lack of coordinated, unified, clear and well-defined rules and a procedural framework, which makes it difficult for countries to form synergy in their actions. Therefore, she stressed that building international consensus and improving governance rules are of critical importance.

Russel Harland, deputy branch secretary and international relations officer of the Surrey County branch of UNISON, one of the largest trade unions in the United Kingdom, said he believes that China is giving vital impetus to the fight against gender inequality by embedding the shared responsibility to advance women's development, such as urging tangible and accessible policies to channel more quality health and educational resources to all women.

He noted that Xi's invigorating words are in line with China's Global Development Initiative, which calls for staying committed to development as a priority.

President Pro Tempore of the Liberian Senate Nyongblee Karnga-Lawrence said, "China's commitment of \$10 million to UN Women is highly significant for African nations, many of which are already partnering with the international organization to empower women."

"We look forward to this partnership and hope that small countries, in particular, will benefit from it," she added.

— JI HAISHENG, XING YI AND YANG WANLI

Ancient emotions echo across time and borders

In the verdant hills of Xishuangbanna, Yunnan province, where the Jino ethnic group has lived in relative isolation for centuries, Du Yun's latest project, *The Ocean Etched in the Forest*, finds its roots. This work, which blends the ancient folk traditions of the Jino people with contemporary sound, marks a profound intersection of history, culture and modern innovation.

The Ocean Etched in the Forest had its world premiere on Oct. 12 as part of the 28th Beijing Music Festival. The production will travel to the Lincoln Center for the Performing Arts in New York on Nov. 7, a significant step in Du's mission to take the Jino people's rich cultural heritage to global audiences.

Du is an alumna of the Shanghai Conservatory of Music, Oberlin College and Conservatory,

and Harvard University, and now lives in New York and is a professor of composition at the Peabody Institute of Johns Hopkins University.

For Du this project is about much more than music; it is an exploration of identity, heritage and the power of storytelling across generations. Du, a Pulitzer Prize-winning composer, seeks to use this work to bring ancient traditions into the present.

The Jino are keepers of an ancient oral tradition passed down through songs that recount the histories, emotions and myths of their people.

Du, alongside the director and designer Julian Crouch, her long-time collaborator, journeyed to Baduo village in Xishuangbanna and spent time with Jino people, finding out about their music, stories and way of life.

Through this collaboration Du and Crouch were inspired to create a space in which the Jino people's deep connection to the land, forest and their profound ecological awareness could find new life, echoing across time and borders.

One of the Jino folk songs that Du encountered was *The Shell Song*, which tells a tale of forbidden love. In *The Ocean Etched in the Forest*, Du reimagines this song, blending it with her own compositions and melodies while endeavoring to stay true to its original spirit.

Crouch brought his vision to life by crafting two large puppets from local materials to represent the tragic lovers of *The Shell Song*. This form of interactive storytelling blends the materials of the Jino people's daily lives, such as bamboo used

to make baskets and mats, with modern theatrical techniques, adding a visual and dynamic layer to the performance.

According to Jino legend, the creator goddess made a boy and a girl and placed them inside a large drum to survive a natural disaster. The two children floated on water for days before finding land. They married and gave birth to humanity. As a symbol of reverence, the Jino people hang the sacred drum in the air rather than placing it on the ground. The drum dance was traditionally performed to pay tribute to the ancestors.

This sacred drum, which plays a central role in the Jino people's cultural rituals and is an essential element of *The Ocean Etched in the Forest*, will be brought to both Beijing and New York.

— CHEN NAN



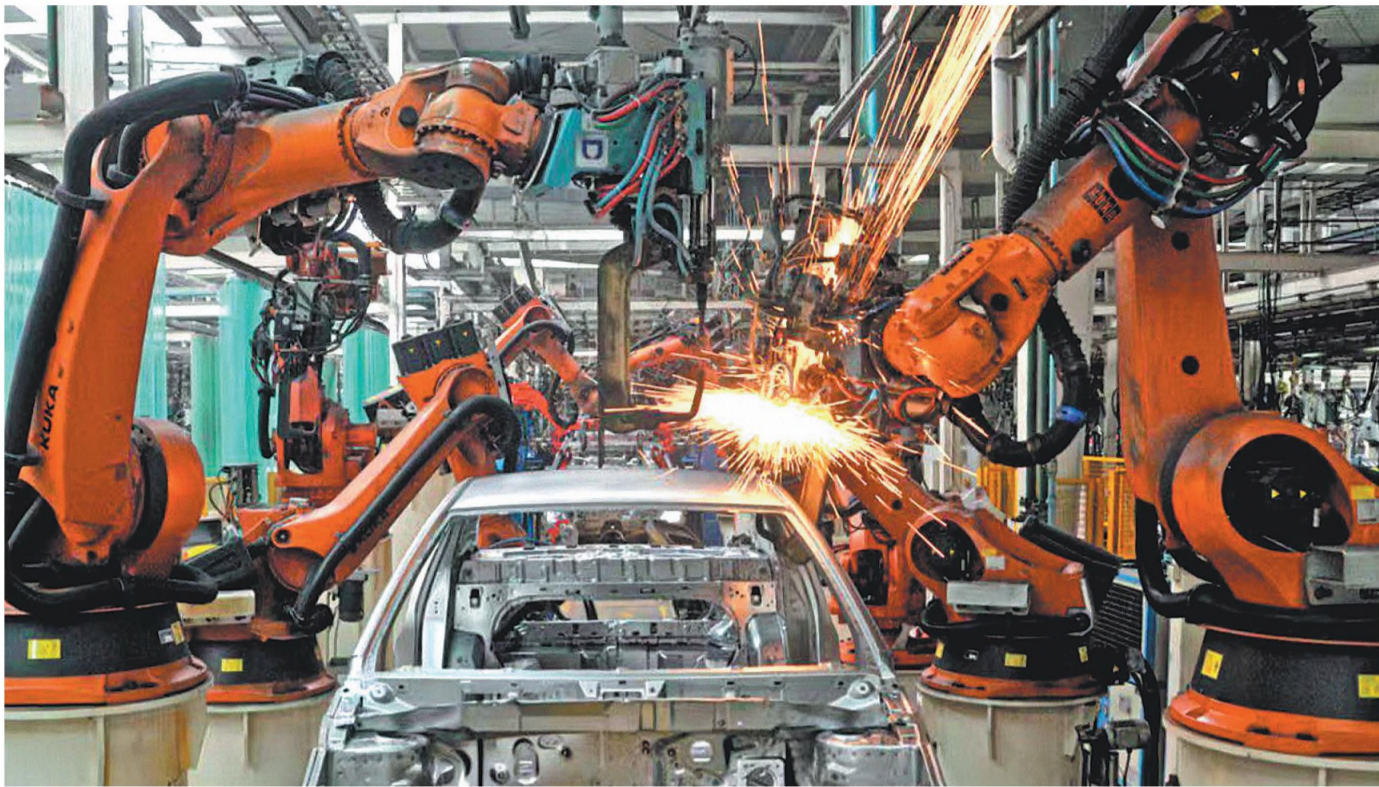
People of the Jino ethnic group from Yunnan province perform onstage.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



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A vehicle production line at a plant in Xiangtan, Hunan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Better trade ties offer stable growth conditions

Outcome of talks in Malaysia hailed as stabilising links between the world's two largest economies

By ZHONG NAN

For Xiong Xujia, the wait started alongside the China-US trade talks in Geneva, which later shifted to London, Stockholm and Madrid, resulting in a months-long spiral of uncertainty.

For Xiong, a foreign trade manager at Ningbo Tianxiang Electrical Appliances Co Ltd, a cookware manufacturer based in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, as well as her bosses and the company's clients in the United States, the May-September period turned into a season of uneasy waiting.

With each round of talks, they were glued to the television screens, refreshing news alerts on their mobile phones, searching for even the faintest sign that tensions might ease. That moment finally arrived when China released the outcomes of the Kuala Lumpur talks in late October, where both sides reached a consensus on tariff adjustments and export controls — a breakthrough that offered Chinese manufacturers, US retailers and consumers a badly needed reprieve.

"With the latest round of China-US economic and trade talks producing a series of substantive outcomes and areas of consensus, we are more convinced that openness and co-operation are the path to shared success," said Xiong.

She said the company will continue to meet clients' expectations with high-standard products and reliable services, broaden its engagement with the US market, and pursue higher-quality growth through deeper, mutually beneficial co-operation.

Despite a decline in bilateral trade, economic ties between the two countries remain substantial. The US is still China's third-largest trading partner, with bilateral trade reaching 3.69 trillion yuan (\$514.66 billion) from January to November and accounting for 8.9 per cent of China's total foreign trade, according to the General Administration of Customs.

Market watchers said the outcome of the China-US economic and trade talks in Malaysia demonstrated both sides' commitment to stabilising one of the world's most important economic relationships, setting the two countries' business ties on a firmer, more predictable footing.

This suggests not only a mutual willingness, but also a tangible ability, to steer the relationship back onto a more stable trajectory, said Liu Ying, a researcher at Renmin University of China's Chongyang Institute for Financial Studies.

Peng Bo, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, said that genuine, long-term normalisation will require both sides to follow through on their commitments and keep communication channels open and functioning. He added that it is both necessary and feasible for the two countries to build a workable framework for peaceful coexistence.



Visitors check out the booth of ARO pumps, a brand under Ingersoll Rand, during the IE Expo China 2025 in Shanghai, on April 21. SHI HUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

Liu Siqiang, vice-president of Winhere Auto-Part Manufacturing Co Ltd, a manufacturer of brake discs, brake drums and brake pads for automobiles in Yantai, Shandong province, said, "We believe that a healthy and stable China-US economic relationship serves as a common aspiration and crucial foundation for business development in the two countries." Through concerted efforts on both sides, Liu said, China and the US can not only unlock greater opportunities for their businesses, but also inject fresh impetus into global economic stability and prosperity.

US business leaders also said that the emerging signs of stabilisation — from policy adjustments to business sentiment — point to a cautiously improving outlook for China-US economic ties, with businesses on both sides standing to benefit from renewed momentum.

Jim Sutter, CEO of US Soybean Export Council, said that the organisation strives to provide Chinese customers with stable and predictable deliveries of US soy beans. "Beyond traditional food and feed uses, soy is now being applied in cutting-edge industrial sectors, including bio-based plastics, adhesives, lubricants, tyres, shoes, coatings, fire retardants and even sustainable construction materials," said Sutter. These innovative applications align closely with China's goals for green manufacturing and circular economy development, offering new dimensions for China-US soy collaboration rooted in technology and environmental stewardship, he added.

Sean Stein, president of the US-China Business Council, said that most US companies remain deeply committed to the Chinese market. He noted that several US firms are "increasing their reliance on China as a production base for the Chinese market and other global markets, because they know what they get — a stable investment climate."

One such enterprise is US industrial company 3M. It launched an expansion project for its tape production line at a manufacturing site in

Shanghai in August, marking a significant boost to its local capacity and innovation capabilities.

The project has increased production capacity by 50 per cent, enabling the company to better meet the surging demand for low-pollution, lightweight and high-strength materials in China's fast-growing consumer electronics and automotive electrification industries, said Henry Ding, president for China at 3M.

Ingersoll Rand Inc, another US-based industrial products and solutions provider, noted that over 95 per cent of its products sold in China are now locally manufactured, and that the company's research and innovation centre in Shanghai is driving innovation tailor-made for the Chinese market.

"Our growth plan during the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-30) period is not merely to expand our presence, but to evolve into an indispensable partner in China's high-quality development journey," said Arnold Li, the group's senior vice-president.

"We will continue to expand our local footprint by investing where our customers are growing, particularly in new industrial clusters," Li said.

FedEx Corp, the US-based express transportation service provider, introduced nonstop cargo flights connecting its Asia-Pacific hub at Guangzhou Baiyun International Airport in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, with Penang International Airport in Malaysia in mid-November. Operating five times a week, the new service is designed to enhance its intra-Asia network to meet growing trade demand between China and Southeast Asia, increasing connectivity, capacity and agility for Chinese businesses.

"The growing trade dynamics between China and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations is driving greater demand for efficient logistics services," said Poh-Yian Koh, president of FedEx China. To address this trend, FedEx will continue to enhance its intra-Asia network and service capabilities, strengthening connectivity between Chinese businesses and Southeast Asian markets, she said.

Gen Z drives demand for renting business

By YU RAN for China Daily

For Cheng Shuo, 27, an accountant, the most pleasurable thing in life is attending live music performances. Almost every month, Cheng, of Suzhou, Jiangsu province, travels to various cities for concerts, music festivals and fan events.

Before each show she often rents a video camera to record her trip. Online rental platforms offer easy credit-based services, with professional cameras costing between 200 yuan (\$28) and 400 yuan a day to rent.

"These things cost tens of thousands of yuan, but renting one for a couple of days costs no more than 800 yuan," Cheng said. "The process is simple: order online, verify your identity, and the camera arrives the next day."

She also rents clothing and accessories to match concert themes. "I sometimes rent an outfit in a particular shade, or jewellery that matches the light sticks and banners."

In recent years she has also started renting items for short trips with friends. For instance, she has rented a compact camera for a weekend getaway and a drone to capture images of landscapes.

"It only takes a few minutes to book what I need, then it's delivered to my door, ready to use. Later I just pack it up and send it back."

From renting high-end video equipment to trying household goods before buying, Chinese consumers, especially young people, are increasingly adopting a lifestyle based on renting rather than ownership.

The country's rentals market is expected to be worth 71.6 billion yuan this year and nearly 1 trillion yuan by 2030, the internet consultancy Analysys of Beijing says.

The items rented out range from electronics and outdoor gear to fashion and luxury items, with smartphones, laptops, cameras and drones among the most popular items. More than 30,000 businesses are offering rental services, the report said.

The rentals website rru.com said that during the National Day holiday from October 1 to October 8 the value of its orders for photography and drone equipment was nearly 350 per cent higher than in the corresponding period last year. Short-term rentals under 90 days now account for more than 70 per cent of bookings, it said, the vast majority of customers being young people.

"This increase reflects how short-term rental services have become the mainstream choice for young users seeking convenience and flexibility," said Chen Weijun, brand and channel manager for rru.com, which has expanded from renting office equipment to now covering more than 200 fields.

Chen said he and his team have observed three clear trends shaping young people's rental behaviour.

"They increasingly prioritise short-term utility over ownership, seek rentals that enhance social and experiential activities, and make decisions based on convenience and efficiency, valuing quick ordering, flexible extensions and easy returns."

Growth is strong in lifestyle categories. In-demand items include photographic equipment and drones, gaming consoles, trend-driven products, and tools for livestreaming.

Renting enables low-cost experimentation

without the burden of equipment depreciation, Chen said.

"These trends reflect broader shifts in young consumers' values, as they pursue experience-based consumption and 'lightweight' entrepreneurship," he said. "Photography rentals suit travel vlogging, gaming rentals enhance social interaction, and technology rentals satisfy the desire to experiment."

The website has also introduced innovative services to meet evolving demand. A "consignment rental" model, for example, unlocks income from previously idle equipment. Owners can consign their unused equipment to the platform to rent out, and share profits with the company.

"Generation Z and consumers under 30 are fundamentally changing the way rental services are used," Chen said. "They value utility and experience over ownership, creating diverse and fragmented demand that will drive industry expansion in the next two to three years."

A total of 38.2 per cent of users rent to test products before buying, while 33.7 per cent rent to enjoy more variety, the consultancy Analysys found. Major reasons for renting items include concerts, travel, entertainment, and work, with baby care, health, and beauty emerging as new growth areas.

Li Shuwei, 35, of Tianjin, said she has increasingly relied on rental services to make her daily life more convenient.

"Renting allows me to try out different household appliances and children's items without having to commit to a purchase," Li, who has a 9-year-old daughter, said.

After giving birth, she began renting not only cars and other items short-term, but also a wide range of products that suited the family's changing needs, she said.

According to data released by Zhima Rental, the rental platform operated under Ant Group's Zhima Credit, the total transaction volume on the platform grew by 71.6 per cent year-on-year in the first half of 2025.

Zhima Rental collaborates with over 15,000 merchants and brands, covering more than 200 product categories, from consumer electronics and home appliances to travel and entertainment.

More than 60 per cent of the platform's users are under the age of 30, reflecting the growing influence of younger consumers in driving China's rental economy. Zhima Rental reported digital electronics, photographic equipment, and outdoor gear have seen the fastest growth.

"The rise of the rental economy marks a profound shift in the consumption logic of the younger generation — from ownership-oriented to access-oriented. Young people no longer see material possession as the core of status or happiness; instead, they focus on rich experiences, flexible resource allocation, and a fluid way of living," said Shen Liang, an assistant professor at Shanghai Jiao Tong University's Antai College of Economics and Management.

"This shift also reflects a more socially responsible consumption orientation. With the rise of sustainable development awareness, more young consumers reduce waste and extend product life cycles through renting, aligning with the principles of the circular and sharing economy," said Shen.



A hanfu enthusiast selects garments at a rental shop in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on January 29, 2024. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

More US tourists choose China as destination amid travel rebound

By MINGMEI LI

As global travel rebounds, China is gradually recovering as one of the top destinations for US tourists.

"China is ready for your courage," said Ma Yunfei, director of the China National Tourist Office in New York, when addressing travel industry professionals at the 2025 United States Tour Operators Association Annual Conference & Marketplace in National Harbor, Maryland. The conference's theme, "Courage and Resilience: The Push for Renewed International Travel,"

China welcomed 132 million foreign visits in 2024, with nearly \$94.2 billion in tourism spending, recovering to nearly 97 per cent of pre-COVID-19 levels, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

To encourage international visitors, China has

expanded visa-free access to 240 hours, upgraded digital payment systems and strengthened partnerships among local travel agencies, urging them to "not just sell trips, but co-create experiences," Ma said.

Citizens of 55 countries, including the US, may transit through China using the 240-hour visa-free transit policy if they hold valid international travel documents and tickets with confirmed dates and seats to a third country or region. They may enter China through designated open ports across more than 20 provincial-level regions and cities — such as Beijing and Shanghai — and stay in designated areas for up to 10 days.

Chen Chunmei, minister-counsellor for cultural and tourism affairs at the Chinese embassy in the US, said: "Tourism between China and the US has gradually recovered from the impact of

the pandemic and geopolitical challenges. There is huge potential for tourism co-operation between our two great countries."

Chen said China continues to adjust flight and visa procedures to make it more convenient for overseas travellers to visit the country.

"US travellers are increasingly recognising that this is a unique opportunity — an experience of a lifetime, and China is on that list," said Terry Dale, president and CEO of the US-TOA. "So I think ... there is still strong optimism about China welcoming US travellers."

For many in the industry, the deeper significance of tourism goes beyond economics. The "strength" of travel is building people-to-people connections, Dale said. "We recognise China as a growing market. It's our job to make it happen."

In addition to traditional cultural landscapes,

contemporary attractions — ranging from cutting-edge technology events like the World Robot Contest to iconic experiences such as the Harbin Ice and Snow World — are also attracting foreign visitors.

Tour operators say they are already seeing a measurable recovery in interest in travelling to China.

Alison Atkinson, commercial director of Avanti Destinations, said, "We've been really reselling (China trips) for one year, so we're starting to see more bookings coming in." Beijing and Shanghai remain top choices, though travellers are increasingly drawn to local, authentic cultural experiences, Atkinson said.

Educational travel is also regaining momentum. An increasing number of young travellers have been travelling to China in recent years.

"What you are seeing is a continued resur-

gence of interest in Asia overall," said Brian Hoyt, vice-president of communications and industry relations at EF World Journeys. "China represents a massive opportunity for more North Americans."

Hoyt noted that his agency, which has run international education programmes for decades, focuses on giving participants the experience of "learning about the destination." Meanwhile, visitors are not only looking to travel around the country, but also for an in-depth experience that immerses them in the destination.

Some of these pro-tourism policies that have been developed in recent history are opening the door again for more and more Americans — for students all the way up to adults — who want to learn more about Chinese culture. You want to learn what it's like to live like a local in China," he said.



The Bingling Temple Grottoes in Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture, Gansu province, house a collection of Buddhist sculptures and murals. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Where two rivers turn gold in a realm of wonder

Shifting waters meet at the striking confluence, revealing ancient stories, quiet beauty, and fleeting moments of awe

By DENG ZHANGYU and MA JINGNA

The Yellow River, China's revered mother river, begins its journey on the snowcapped Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, flowing eastwards with emerald clarity until it reaches the Loess Plateau in Gansu province. Here, at the threshold of this distinctive landscape, it meets the Taohe River, a major tributary, and undergoes a striking shift, taking on the golden hue that gives the river its name.

Just 90 minutes by road from Lanzhou, capital of Gansu, lies Liujiaxia Reservoir in Yongjing in Linxia Hui autonomous prefecture, where the two rivers converge with dramatically different qualities.

On summer mornings, when mist drifts across the basin, the Yellow River appears surprisingly serene — its broad expanse of clear water contradicting the common image of a turbulent, muddy flow. By contrast, the sediment-heavy Taohe River carries the unmistakable yellow hue of the Loess Plateau.

The confluence creates a striking natural spectacle: a sharp dividing line between clear and turbid waters, a phenomenon locals compare to a *yuanyang huoguo*, a traditional Chinese hot pot vessel divided into two compartments, each with its own colour. The best spot to enjoy this spectacle lies at the Benchigou viewing platform, a 15-minute drive from the confluence. Perched above the gorge, visitors enjoy a sweeping panorama: the Liujiaxia Bridge arching across the mountains, the merging currents of the two rivers flowing beneath, and the fiery-red Danxia formations stretching towards the horizon.

Nearby, a yacht marina offers boat tours through the gorge's striking scenery. The hour-long journey takes visitors directly past the point where the two rivers meet, allowing close-up views of the water's transition from green to yellow.

Along the way, travellers can encounter the extraordinary Bingling Stone Forest, a landscape where towering rock formations create a surreal scene.

The stone forest is renowned for its diverse pillars, peaks and walls shaped by long-term weathering and erosion. Many naturally formed pillars and rocks take on imaginative silhouettes, such as animals, human figures and architectural structures, inspiring people to craft stories as they drift past.

As the yacht glides through this narrow stretch, the waterway tightens, leading deep into the gorge. After visitors disembark they discover a surprising cultural treasure: Bingling Temple Grottoes, carved into the cliffs and housing a rich collection of Buddhist art. The site includes 216 caves, hundreds of statues and numerous murals spanning multiple dynasties.

As visitors walk deeper into the cliffside complex, the true marvel reveals itself: the main statue of Bingling Temple, a 27-metre-tall Buddha carved into the mountain during the Tang Dynasty (618-907). The sheer scale of the statue, framed by weathered sandstone grottoes, is apt to stop travellers in their tracks. Sunlight filters into the canyon, illuminating the Buddha's serene countenance, which has gazed upon the Yellow River for over a millennium. High in the cliffs the caves overlook the Buddha statue from a vantage point 40 metres above the riverbed. Visitors reach them via a series of wooden staircases climbing alongside the statue.

Yet, the Yellow River's wonders extend far beyond Linxia's confluence and grottoes. As the river continues eastwards, it slices through the arid landscapes of Baiyin, a city about 200 kilometres away, where another geological masterpiece awaits — the Yellow River Stone Forest, a national geological park.

Here, the landscape shifts from Linxia's water-sculpted limestone to vast, wind-carved pillars rising from the desert. It is surrounded by rolling hills, desert stretches and the constant presence of the Yellow River's winding ribbon.

From Baiyin, an hour's drive takes travellers to the geopark, where scenic shuttles transport visitors deep into the canyon.



Clockwise from top: The Yellow River Stone Forest in Baiyin, Gansu, is renowned for its towering stone pillars and rugged rock formations. The Yellow River merges with the Taohe River. The waters of the Yellow River run through the heart of Lanzhou, Gansu.

If you go

Tips

April to October is the ideal window to experience Gansu province, though the high-altitude sun brings intense UV radiation. Pack a wide-brimmed hat and high-SPF sunscreen. Road trips are both convenient and rewarding. Car rentals are widely available in Lanzhou, placing most scenic areas within a two- to three-hour drive. High-speed rail connects Lanzhou to nearby cities.

On both sides, clusters of stone pillars soar skyward, ranging from dozens of metres to over 100 metres in height. The tallest reach 200 metres — equivalent to a 70-storey building — creating an exceptionally dramatic landscape.

Accommodation

Hotels in Lanzhou offer the most comprehensive facilities, with nightly rates ranging from 200 yuan (\$28) to 500 yuan. Linxia and Baiyin provide more budget-friendly options, though amenities tend to be modest. Travellers seeking immersive stays can also find village guesthouses near Yellow River attractions at less than 100 yuan a night.



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Village makes pretty profits from parading parakeets

By CHEN LIANG

For the past 54 years Wang Cheng has had extremely noisy neighbours, but he's not complaining. Every day from 5 am to 7 am and from 5 pm until sunset they fill the air with their chatter, chirps, squawks and trills, as if they couldn't care less about their human cohabitants.

The noisy neighbours in question are a species of a medium-sized parrot known as Derbyan parakeet (*Psittacula derbiana*). Perched on a towering banyan tree right in front of Wang's house, these birds have for generations made their home in Mangba, a village in Simao district of Pu'er city in Yunnan province.

Yet for all the great din that these Derbyan parakeets create, the International Union for the Conservation of Nature considers there are far too few of them — there are just 300 or so in Mangba — and has them on its list of threatened species.

This is due to the bird's limited habitat in small pockets of evergreen forests in north-eastern India and parts of Sichuan and Yunnan provinces, and Xizang autonomous region.

The villagers of Mangba, home to more than 250 people, wouldn't mind a few more of these birds either, given that they have turned into something of a money spinner.

The village has become the easiest place in China to observe the magpie-sized birds with green plumage, black fore and lower cheeks and pale yellow eyes, attracting bird-watchers, photographers and nature enthusiasts from far and wide.

"The parakeets have been here for a long time, living alongside us," Wang says. "The villagers' awareness of protecting the banyan trees and the birds has been passed down through generations."

By dint of conservation efforts and the area's mild climate, 36 towering banyan trees



Several Derbyan parakeets sit on branches of a banyan tree in Mangba village, Pu'er city, Yunnan province. CHEN LIANG / CHINA DAILY

are scattered throughout the village. These trees provide ideal shelters for the parakeets.

The village borders Nuozhadu Provincial Nature Reserve, which spans 18,997 hectares in Pu'er and of which more than one-third is covered by Simao pines, says Lu Wen, the reserve's director.

"The seeds of Simao pines are the primary food source for Derbyan parakeets."

The parakeets make their nests in the hollows of the old banyan trees. During the day they leave their home in Mangba to forage in the nature reserve, returning around sunset.

As noisy as the birds are, they otherwise seem to coexist peacefully with the villagers. "They don't feed on our crops, including corn," Lu says. "In addition to cones, they also feed on banyan fruits and the flowers of certain trees in the forest. If they're thirsty, they can fly to the Lancang River for a drink."

During the Derbyan parakeets' breeding season from March to May, chicks sometimes fall from their nests on the banyan trees, and Wang, who worked as a patrolman at the reserve for many years and has been a pioneer of the local

bird-watching business, always steps in to help. Over the years he has rescued 10 or so baby Derbyan parakeets, releasing them back into the wild once they matured.

The Nuozhadu reserve has also played a significant role in supporting the villagers' efforts in parakeet conservation. Since 2018, Lu says, the reserve administration has spent more than 500,000 yuan (\$70,300) in these efforts.

To enhance the habitat for Derbyan parakeets, reserve workers have planted more than 500 trees that produce fruits and flowers around Mangba that the birds favour, including banyan, cherry and Indian coral trees.

In November 2023, a 14-metre-tall artificial tree was built, equipped with nearly 20 nest boxes and a water trough to cater to the parakeets' breeding and drinking needs within the reserve. This installation has attracted flocks of Derbyan parakeets that have been observed drinking and playing there. In 2023 the nest boxes attracted three pairs of Derbyan parakeets to settle and breed.

Mangba remained largely unnoticed by Chinese bird-watchers until 2008, when two

students from Southwest Forestry University in Kunming, Yunnan, visited the area to survey birds. During their stay, they lodged with Wang, a reserve patrolman then. The students were captivated by the Derbyan parakeets and the rich diversity of bird species around the village, prompting them to base their degree dissertations on their observations in Mangba, Wang says.

In 2012 Wang established Mangba's first bird hide — a camouflaged shelter designed to observe birds up close without disturbing them — in a patch of forest near the village. Every day he visited the hide, leaving food and water to attract wild birds. Gradually, various bird species began to frequent the hide, drawing bird-watchers from across the country. Inspired by Wang's success, other families in the area set up bird hides, turning the activity into a thriving local business.

There are now 15 bird hides available to bird enthusiasts, with Wang managing five of them. The prime birding season in Mangba spans from January to June, he says, coinciding with the local dry season.

"During the dry season, birds are more inclined to visit our hides for water and bathing. At any of my hides, one can document about 30 different bird species."

Mangba has recorded more than 300 wild bird species, establishing itself as a destination for bird-watchers and photographers.

To accommodate the influx of bird-watchers and photographers, Wang began building a three-storey homestay in August last year, completing it in April. The building can host 23 guests, offering them the opportunity to observe Derbyan parakeets at eye level from the rooftop, just 20 metres away.

Wang charges 150 yuan (\$21) per person for a day's accommodation, which includes three meals and visits to his bird hides.

Bronzeware exhibition is of epic scale

By ZHANG KUN

Chinese bronzeware that captivated museum goers in New York for much of the year is now dazzling audiences in Shanghai. Following an exhibition at the Metropolitan Museum of Art in New York from February 28 to September 28, the exhibition *Recasting the Past: The Art of Chinese Bronzes, 1100-1900* opened at the Shanghai Museum on November 11, with about 178 pieces or sets of artefacts on display, including dozens that have never been displayed to the public.

The exhibition in New York, jointly hosted by The Met and the Shanghai Museum, had featured artworks of 15 collections from Asia, Europe and the United States.

The Shanghai exhibition features new scenography and select exhibits from the Shanghai Museum collection. It is on at Shanghai Museum East until March 16.

The exhibition is of the most epic scale of later Chinese bronzes to be held in recent years, both domestically and internationally, says Wei Hsin Ying, a research curator in the bronze department of the Shanghai Museum and the curator of the Shanghai exhibition.

Bronze used as ritual vessels was at its peak era during three dynasties: Xia (c. 21st century-16th century BC), Shang (c. 16th century-11th century BC) and Zhou (c. 11th century-256 BC), she says. It gradually faded from the limelight later, until the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when imitations of ancient ritual vessels began to appear.

Bronzeware continued to enjoy great popularity throughout the subsequent Yuan (1271-1368), Ming (1368-1644) and Qing (1644-1911) dynasties, undergoing a functional transformation as trends changed, Wei says.

Their placement gradually shifted from temples and palaces to the studies of the literati and civilian households.

Bronzeware artisanship became increasingly refined. Artisans drew on a wide range of influences to create more diverse and eclectic vessel styles, evolving from simple and solemn to exquisite and ornate, ushering in a new era of bronze art while reflecting society's cultural trends.

For a long time these latter-period bronze artefacts were often labelled as archaic and received relatively little attention from the academic world. In recent years, with the successive publication of archaeological discoveries, numerous dated artefacts have been found in collections around the world. Academics have conducted in-depth research, leading to a progressively mature understanding of archaic bronze vessels.

"No single museum can fully present the complete story of bronze in China, so we need an exhibition like this that brings together artefacts from all over the world, centring on the outstanding collections of the Shanghai Museum and The Met," says Lu Pengliang, curator of Chinese art at The Met.

At the opening of the exhibition in Shanghai, Max Hollein, director and chief of The Met, said: "By focusing on underrepresented, or maybe even in certain parts, neglected areas of outstanding artistic achievements and artistry, we are not only sharing something new, but are making sure that this art gets the proper acknowledgment it deserves."

The exhibition is in four thematic parts. The first begins with imperial bronzes from the reign of two emperors, Huizong of Song and Emperor Qianlong of Qing, who were influential reformers of the ritual system. It then moves on to objects used in memorial ceremonies for ancient sages in local counties and sacrificial rites at ancestral clan temples. A series of bronze bells is highlighted in this part. Four belonged to a set of ritual musical instruments, originally named Dasheng, that were cast at the order of Huizong in 1105, following the style of the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). The ancient Bell of Zhejian, made in the same period, is displayed alongside an archaic ritual bell called Gu Xi, made in 1761. The Bell of Zhejian comes from the Shanghai Museum, and Gu Xi from The Met's collection. Together they tell of the evolution of ritualistic bells in China's imperial history spanning millennia.

The second part explores how the popularity of retro led to the commercialisation of bronze production from the Southern Song (1127-1279) to Ming dynasties. Master artisans emerged in this period, creating vessel forms that combined ancient aesthetics with new functions, such as censers, vases and ewers.

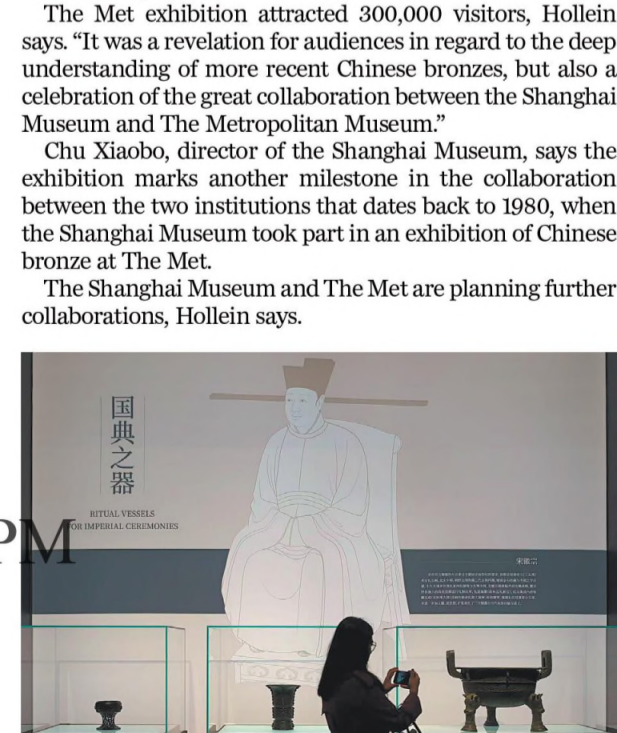
Part three features Yongle-Xuande gilt-bronze statuary and Xuande censers. These artefacts, recognised as outstanding representatives of Ming-Dynasty arts and crafts, have had a profound and far-reaching influence on later ages.

The final part explains how scholars and aesthetes transformed archaic bronzes from revered vessels of the state into elegant studio furnishings for the leisurely appreciation of antiquity.

The Met exhibition attracted 300,000 visitors, Hollein says. "It was a revelation for audiences in regard to the deep understanding of more recent Chinese bronzes, but also a celebration of the great collaboration between the Shanghai Museum and The Metropolitan Museum."

Chu Xiaobo, director of the Shanghai Museum, says the exhibition marks another milestone in the collaboration between the two institutions that dates back to 1980, when the Shanghai Museum took part in an exhibition of Chinese bronze at The Met.

The Shanghai Museum and The Met are planning further collaborations, Hollein says.



Emperor Huizong of the Song Dynasty is highlighted for reforming the ritual system and revival of ancient Chinese bronzes at the exhibition in Shanghai.