

Amazing puzzle

Modern variations of Luban lock blend tradition with innovation

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Mastercard eyes booming Chinese consumer market

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Envoy's term praised

China's Zhang Jun completes tenure at United Nations

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CHINA DAILY

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Nation vows to expand opening-up

Key speech at forum boosts Asian growth prospects, solidarity

By ZHANG YUNBI in Beijing, CHENG YU and OUYANG SHIJIA in Boao, Hainan

In order to open up further to the world, China will build on a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, based on rule of law and internationalized, top legislator Zhao Leji said, adding that the country will also shorten the negative list for foreign investment.

He made the pledge while delivering the keynote speech at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 in Boao, Hainan province, on Thursday.

The country will comprehensively remove restrictions on the access of foreign investment to the manufacturing sector, and further implement national treatment for foreign enterprises, said Zhao, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature.

China will also offer more convenience for foreigners coming to China for work, study and travel, he added.

The event on Thursday attracted around 1,500 participants, including political leaders, business executives and scholars from over 60 countries.

Zhao said China is willing to strengthen cooperation with other countries in high-tech innovation and will further promote open, green development.

The nation's green economy is expected to unleash an investment and consumption market worth 10 trillion yuan (\$1.38 trillion) a year, he added.

Noting that Hainan is building a free trade port with Chinese characteristics, Zhao welcomed people



Ban Ki-moon, chairman of the Boao Forum for Asia and former secretary-general of the United Nations, speaks on Thursday during the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in Boao, Hainan province. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

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to come to Hainan to invest and operate businesses.

Leon Wang, executive vice-president of global biopharmaceutical giant AstraZeneca, said Zhao's speech emphasized China's determination to promote higher-level opening-up, which will bring huge opportunities for multinationals like his company.

"As mentioned in the speech, Asia has become an important global force in the field of science and innovation, and China plays an important role in responding to severe health challenges that face the world," Wang said.

Marc Horn, president of science and technology company Merck China, said, "This country is very resilient and has shown that it can transform very rapidly, on a good trajectory for transformation."

"The new quality productive forces is a new area where I think there's a lot of growth opportunity

for us, so we want to continue doing investments in China," Horn added.

In his speech, Zhao noted that the expected target for China's economic growth this year is around 5 percent, and the country will continue to take the lead in growth among major global economies.

China will inject strong momentum into the world's economic recovery and provide more opportunities for the development of other countries, especially neighboring Asian countries, he said.

Zhang Donggang, Party secretary of Renmin University of China in

Beijing, said Zhao's speech shows that the Chinese government has put more emphasis on the quality of economic growth rather than simply pursuing greater speed.

"China's economic growth target, which is higher than that of many developed economies, sent a strong signal to the outside world that China's economy is resilient, has potential and development prospects, and can provide strong support for world economic recovery," he said.

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Journey to the West helps forge academic ties

As the founding president of a university that is barely two years old, I have to ask myself, how can we accelerate our growth? The answer is simple: We must go foraging for groundbreaking ideas.

Fresh ideas are the lifeblood of innovation. They can shorten our learning curve. They are nobody's monopoly. So we hunt for new ideas where we can. Our first stop: Europe.

It is said that time and tide wait for no man. Days before the recent Spring Festival holiday, I, like the Chinese monk Tang Sanzang, took my team on a journey to the West in search of wisdom.

We went straight to the heart of Europe, in a whirlwind tour of 10 cities across four countries, calling at picturesque campuses in Leuven (Belgium), Aachen (Germany), Zurich, Paris and other cities.

Everywhere we went, we experienced the brotherhood of scholars. We were greeted like old friends from afar. We visited Belgium's oldest universities, KU Leuven and Ghent University, as well as RWTH Aachen University in Germany, the University of Geneva in Switzerland and Sorbonne University in France.

Apart from visiting the campuses, we organized a roundtable in Brussels, exploring the topic of reshaping the ecosystem of a research university in a turbulent time.

And in Paris, we co-hosted a seminar on cross-disciplinary education.

The gates to a cascade of people-to-people exchanges between China and Europe are about to be opened, with a free flow of students and faculty between our two regions.

Happily, our founding philosophy of nurturing creative talent through cross-disciplinary education is aligned with the ethos of higher education in Europe.

The chemistry was good, with both sides keen to foster exchanges and partnerships. Many of our European friends were anxious to match our journey to the West with a similar journey to the East. The University of Geneva, for instance, showed its desire to deepen cooperation in the fields of environmental science and computer science.

I promised to roll out the red carpet. The gates to a cascade of people-to-people exchanges between China and Europe are about to be opened, with a free flow of students and faculty between our two regions.

Our students will benefit from immersing themselves in the rich academic traditions of Europe and vice versa. European higher education, big on cross-cultural learning and innovative program design, dovetails wonderfully with our belief in a strong foundation for higher education, a belief that harks back to the early days of China's opening-up.

When I asked them for help in sending our students abroad to broaden their global outlook, they ambushed me with a similar request of their own to help their students explore China, beginning with the vibrant Greater Bay Area, encompassing Guangdong province and the Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions.

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Sound bites



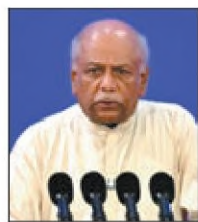
Kazakh President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev

It is evident that the global economy requires a new development paradigm, and in this context, Asia is leading the way toward a new era of sustainable development and it is expected to contribute 60 percent of global GDP growth this year. Asia's economic achievements are a testament to the region's resilience, innovation and determination, while challenges lie ahead.



Nauruan President David Adeang

No nation can thrive in isolation, neither should any nation be isolated from economic and financial engagement with the rest of the world. We appreciate and applaud President Xi Jinping's openness and the vision for promoting economic globalization and creating new prospects for growth and development, which is vital for small countries such as Nauru.



Sri Lankan Prime Minister Dinesh Gunawardena

Economic growth of China is economic growth of the world. Economic growth of the world will have to address the emergence of a new order, which comes with realities of what we can and what we have achieved in areas such as renewable energy, climate change and blue economy. Sri Lanka has taken a new turn of advanced development with the assistance of China, which we appreciate.



Dominica's Prime Minister Roosevelt Skerrit

We recognize the role of the Boao forum and China in providing development alternatives for other countries on the basis of mutual respect and mutually beneficial cooperation. The Global Development Initiative proposed by China has created necessary conditions to stimulate economic growth without harming the environment.



Samdech Techo Hun Sen, Cambodia's president of the Supreme Privy Council to the King

China's emphasis on technological and industrial innovation, notably through the development of new quality productive forces, as well as on environment and sustainability, shows that China favors quality rather than absolute growth. China has shouldered a heavy responsibility in supporting the growth of all the nations, from Asia to Africa and Latin America.



Daren Tang, director-general of the World Intellectual Property Organization

Asia has become the world's most powerful IP engine. We have 70 percent of all IP applications coming from Asia, up from 50 percent 20 years ago. These developments show that Asia has emerged as a major driver of ideas and innovation and that the global IP landscape has become much more diversified, with game-changing ideas emerging from all parts of the world.



Mathias Cormann, secretary-general of the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development

Globalization and increasing global trade have been a central pillar of Asia's economic success, delivering significant benefits to its people. Indeed, globalization and increased global trade have delivered increased incomes and living standards across Asia and all around the world, helping to lift hundreds of millions of people out of poverty.

DRIVERLESS VEHICLES TAKING FAST LANE TO SUCCESS

As consumers look to upgrade to smarter electric autos, fully self-driving cars are getting closer

By LI FUSHENG
lifusheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Salesman Wu Keli is considering trading his gasoline car for a smart electric vehicle at the urging of his wife, Zhang Qing, who was recently given a ride by her friend in an Aito M7, a model codelveloped by the Chinese technology giant Huawei and carmaker Seres.

"My wife said our 2017 vehicle is nothing but a product of a previous

In-depth

era. She is impressed by all the flashy features in the M7, from voice command to automatic parking," said Wu, 35, who is from Beijing.

Despite initial resistance, Wu has taken to the "electric gadgets" after several test drives of models from car manufacturers such as Nio, Xpeng, Zeekr and Aito.

"You can't resist the new-generation products. They can respond to your orders. In some scenarios, they can drive themselves. They are more than a car," he said.

Wu and his wife are not alone. A survey of 2,499 potential car buyers in late 2023 by the consulting company McKinsey showed that 77 percent of the respondents were interested in buying a vehicle with automatic parking.

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China, Western nations have long history of being unsure how to view each other
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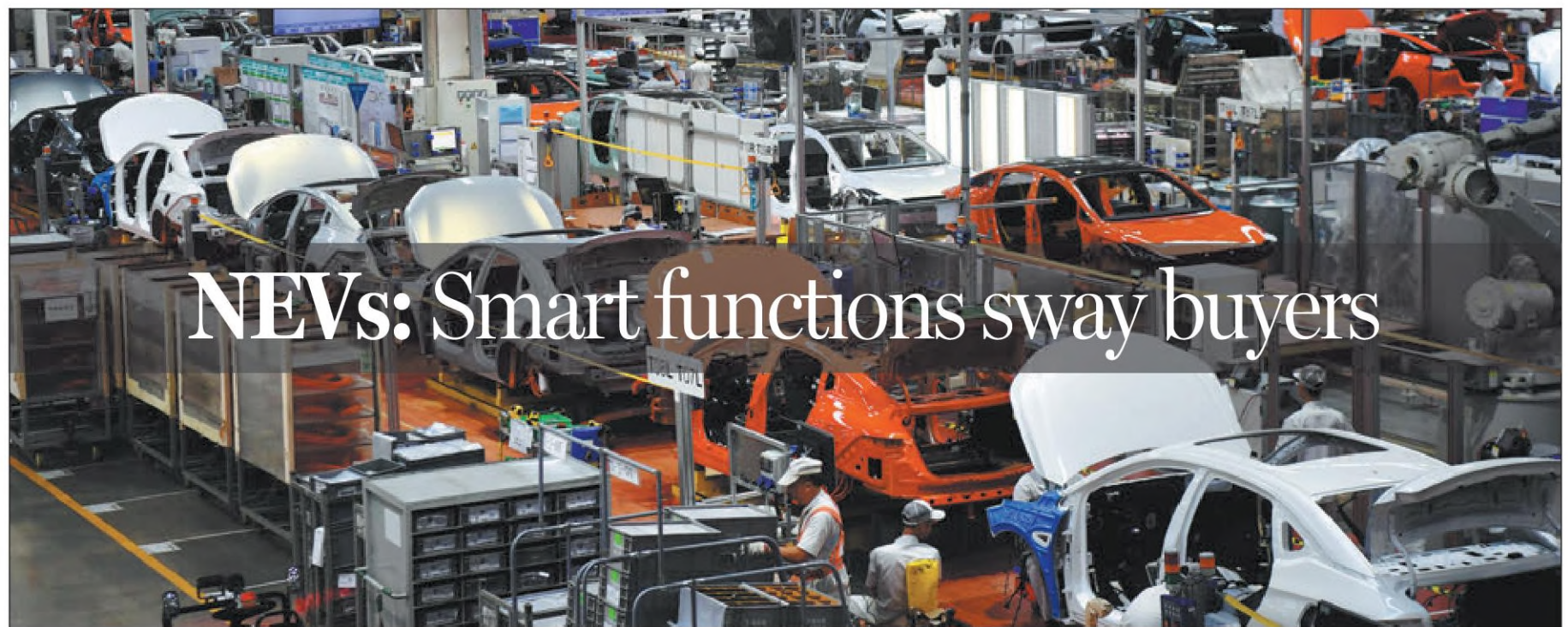
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PAGE TWO



NEVs: Smart functions sway buyers

Workers assemble GAC Aion new energy vehicles at a plant in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, in July. DENG HUA / XINHUA

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In the same survey, 76 percent said they would like a car that can drive autonomously on expressways, and 64 percent agreed that it is important for a vehicle to be able to navigate independently in urban traffic.

In 2023, a total of 14.65 million new energy vehicles, including electric ones and plug-in hybrids, were sold globally, of which 9.5 million were bought in China, according to the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers.

"It is possible to introduce some basic driving-assist functions into gasoline vehicles, but electric vehicles have their natural advantages in terms of precise control," Ouyang Minggao, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said at an industry forum in March.

Nearly 40 percent of new energy vehicles sold in China in the first half of 2023 had advanced driving-assist features, and they were standard in most priced from 160,000 yuan (\$22,231), China Passenger Car Association statistics show.

In contrast, only 18 percent of gasoline vehicles had such features, and the figure was 20 percent for those priced at 160,000 yuan.

The growth in advanced vehicle features has improved technology and cut costs, which in turn has spurred further development in the sector.

Industrial Securities auto analysts said in a report that the cost of hardware required for autonomous driving on expressways is 25,000 to 30,000 yuan. The priciest component is the lidar (light detecting and ranging) unit, which uses laser light to measure distances and map surroundings.

However, with the emphasis on visualization technologies, "the number of high-cost items may be cut, resulting in a drop in costs by up to 50 percent," the report said.

Levels of autonomy

New energy vehicles will account for 70 percent of new vehicle sales in 2030 in China, with annual deliveries reaching around 20 million units a year, Ouyang said.

Smart functions, with autonomous driving features at the core, are proving to be more important as automakers try to distinguish their products from others on the market.

As these functions become more commonplace, more car buyers expect them to be offered as standard features, which will push automakers to make them a major focus of their technological development strategies.

He Xiaopeng, CEO of Xpeng, said his company will spend 3.5 billion yuan this year alone on research and development of smart functions.

"Today, the job entails a lot of computing power, a huge amount of data, a lot of money and a lot of people," he said.

Investment across the sector will see the technology make huge strides in the coming years, he said.

A high-level smart-driving system requires 0.1 human interventions per 100 kilometers on the expressway, but it requires over 10 per 100 km on urban roads, the CEO said.

"The system will do as good a job in urban traffic as on expressways in 18 to 36 months," he predicted.

Xpeng offers vehicle functions capable of urban navigation in over

240 cities in China. Relying on visualization — instead of high-precision mapping — it takes a few days for the company to make such functions available in a city.

However, to date, all such functions available in the market have been legally defined as Level 2, or "combined driver assistance" autonomous driving.

At this level, a vehicle can control steering, acceleration and deceleration, according to the Society of Automotive Engineers. But Level 2 falls short of self-driving, as a driver sits in the car and can take control of the vehicle at any time.

The society divides autonomous driving into six levels from 0 to 5, with Level 5 classified as true fully autonomous driving.

Some automakers argue that their vehicles have functions that are more advanced than Level 2, and want a "plus" category between levels 2 and 3.

From a technological perspective, the jump from Level 2 to Level 3 is substantial, according to Synopsys, an electronic design automation company based in California.

Level 3 vehicles have "environmental detection" capabilities and can make decisions for themselves, such as accelerating past a slow-moving vehicle or braking to prevent crashing into obstacles. However, they need driver intervention when necessary.

Tipping point

Gu Huinan, president of Aion, the new energy vehicle arm of GAC Group, believes major change is just around the corner.

He estimates that Level 3 functions will be ready in terms of both hardware and software this year, and Level 4 vehicles, which do not need human intervention, will make a big impact in 2026.

A number of automakers are already testing Level 3 vehicles in



A self-driving taxi operated by Pony.ai travels in Guangzhou, Guangdong. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA

"Compared with driving-assist features found in private cars, autonomous driving will start from designated zones and gradually expand."

Thomas Fang, a partner at McKinsey's Shanghai office

China. In late 2023, Mercedes-Benz gained permission from Beijing municipal authorities to test such functions on designated highways in the capital.

To adapt its Level 3 system to local infrastructure and traffic conditions, the German carmaker involved its Chinese research team from the beginning of the project. Since 2021, it has been working to adapt the system to local infrastructure and traffic conditions, such as the country's unique road signs, and markings, construction zones and special lanes, such as those for buses.

IM Motors, an electric vehicle company jointly established by

Chinese carmaker SAIC Motor and e-commerce giant Alibaba, has also been given permission to test Level 3 vehicles on highways and expressways in Shanghai.

BMW, which is testing Level 3 vehicles in China, said it has started taking orders for such vehicles in the German market.

As more vehicles with varying levels of autonomy hit the roads, calls are also mounting for clearer legislation on their use. Issues already raised include the length of time a driver's hands can be off the steering wheel, and who should be held accountable for traffic accidents — the driver or the car manufacturer.

Drivers on expressways and major roads have said they have spotted autonomous vehicles with the drivers checking messages, making phone calls or even dozing off.

"There have been fatal accidents involving such vehicles. It is crucial to clearly tell their owners that the functions are to assist them, not replace them as drivers," said Zhang Yinnuo, an office clerk in Beijing.

Li Xiang, founder and CEO of Chinese NEV startup Li Auto, said the industry should not exaggerate the capabilities of such vehicles, and remove words like "autonomous" from advertisements.

Greenlight ahead

While automakers are gradually advancing from Level 2 functions, autonomous driving companies are placing a greater emphasis on driverless vehicles, classified as Level 4 or above, although some tailor Level 2 systems for car manufacturers as well. Despite their ambitions, they are less widely known among the public than the carmakers who sell such vehicles.

"Compared with driving-assist features found in private cars, autonomous driving will start from designated zones and gradually expand," said Thomas Fang, a partner at McKinsey's Shanghai office.

One example is self-driving startup Pony.ai, which is backed by Toyota, the world's largest vehicle maker by sales.

Pony.ai runs fleets of driverless taxis in designated zones in four of China's tier-one cities: Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou in Guangdong province. In Shenzhen, it offers 200 such rides a day.

Local government authorities are helping facilitate the technology's development. Pony.ai and Baidu were given permits in February to offer driverless-vehicle services at

Beijing Daxing International Airport.

The two companies are also able to provide autonomous vehicles on the 40-km expressway connecting Beijing Daxing International Airport and the city's urban areas, as well as in some designated areas within the airport.

The Beijing municipal government has also unveiled plans to expand the scope of demonstration zones for high-level autonomous driving this year and promote self-driving services in areas such as airports and railway stations.

Chen Zhuo, general manager of Baidu's self-driving business unit, said the company is concentrating on expanding its commercial robotaxi fleet.

Like Pony.ai, Baidu's Level 4 autonomous vehicles are currently operating in designated zones in several cities, including Beijing, Chongqing, Wuhan, Hubei province and Shenzhen.

The company plans to expand its fleet size and operational area, and build the world's largest fully driverless ride-hailing zone, he added.

In the third quarter of 2023, its robotaxi fleet, Apollo Go, provided 821,000 rides, up 73 percent year-on-year. Didi offered 2.87 billion rides in the same period.

Call me a cab

Despite a lack of clear business prospects so far, consulting firms are optimistic about the robotaxi sector in the long run.

China will be home to the largest fleet of robotaxis, according to BloombergNEF's Electric Vehicle Outlook, and there will be 12 million self-driving vehicles in the country by 2040, followed by the United States with around 7 million units.

Besides robotaxis, which are still in their infancy, Level 4 vehicles are already found at ports and mines, where safety requirements are less strict because there are a much smaller number of vehicles compared with urban roads.

Eacon, a Chinese startup specializing in transportation at mines, expects its fleet to reach 1,000 Level 4 trucks. Established in 2018, it has inked deals with five major open mines in the country.

Long-haul heavy transportation is another sector that Level 4 vehicles are expected to have a major impact on, as drivers' salaries are one of the largest expenditures for logistics companies, said industry experts.

Earlier this year, Pony.ai obtained the country's first cross-provincial demonstration permit for its self-driving heavy-duty trucks. The permit allows the company to conduct vehicle tests at speeds of up to 90 km on the Beijing-Tianjin-Tanggu expressway.

Before obtaining the permit, Pony.ai had tested vehicles in several other cities, with its accumulated tests reaching almost 4 million km.

However, there is still a long way to go, for both robotaxis and highly autonomous trucks, to become part of everyday life on China's roads.

Level 4 robotaxis are expected to become commercially available on a large scale by 2030, and fully autonomous trucking is expected to reach viability between 2028 and 2031, according to a McKinsey report.



Left: GAC Aion new energy sports cars are assembled at a workshop in Guangzhou. DENG HUA / XINHUA



A customer checks out an Aito M7 NEV at a Huawei flagship store in Shanghai on Dec 27. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Right: Visitors experience a futuristic travel concept Neuron electric vehicle during an auto exhibition in Guangzhou in November. LIU DAWEI / XINHUA

TOP NEWS

Beautiful symphony



Peng Liyuan, wife of President Xi Jinping, interacts with the visiting members of Burg Chinese Chorus from Essen, Germany, on Thursday at Beijing No 35 High School. WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Shanghai plans to boost high-quality development

Construction of modern industrial system also on agenda, says mayor

By SHI JING in Shanghai and LI MENGHAN in Beijing

New quality productive forces and further opening-up will serve as two major engines for Shanghai's high-quality economic growth, said officials of the Shanghai municipal government.

They made the comments during a news conference held by the State Council Information Office on Thursday.

"While continued efforts will be made to expand Shanghai's economy, the city will be dedicated toward the construction of a modern industrial system and the development of new quality productive forces. Meanwhile, comprehensive reform and opening-up will be deepened at a higher level to better achieve high-quality development both at the economic and social levels," Gong Zheng, mayor of Shanghai, said at the news conference.

While three pioneering industries — integrated circuit, biomedicine and artificial intelligence — saw their combined industrial value reaching 1.6 trillion yuan (\$221 billion) last year, they should aim for more breakthroughs to ease bottlenecks and further improve the resilience and safety of industrial chains and supply chains, said Gong.

Digital economy, green and low-carbon transition, metaverse and intelligent devices will be the four areas that Shanghai will strive for the upper hand in against market competition. The city also plans to be the early mover in the future-oriented healthcare, smart technologies, energy, space and materials segments, according to Gong.

"We will continue to step up mapping in disruptive and cutting-edge technologies while striving for breakthroughs in key technologies," he said. Technology mapping is used by companies for long-term planning in order to achieve specific objectives.

Traditional industries that make up a large part of Shanghai's economy, such as carmaking, steel and chemicals, should aim for digital and green transition by integrating with new technologies and novel business models. In this way, traditional industries can also grow into new quality productive forces, said Gong.

Research and development accounted for about 4.4 percent of Shanghai's 4.72-trillion yuan GDP last year, while the figure was 4.2 percent in 2022.

To further nurture innovation in technology, which is crucial to the development of new quality productive forces, Shanghai will attach greater importance to basic

research, giving full play to the 80-strong national-level high-end scientific research platforms and better supporting the 24,000 high-tech companies in the city. A basic research pioneering zone is in the pipeline, according to Gong.

In addition, more social capital will be invested in hard technology companies during their preliminary development stage, added Gong.

As an international financial hub, Shanghai was home to 548 foreign licensed financial institutions last year. The city's total financial market trading value hit a new record of 3,373.6 trillion yuan, the highest in the world.

Shanghai will deepen opening-up in the financial sector by completing its market system, enriching product supply, optimizing the institution's mechanism and bettering financial infrastructure, said Gong.

As home to 956 regional headquarters of multinational companies, Shanghai will further open up to attract more foreign investment, said Hua Yuan, Shanghai's vice-mayor, adding that foreign companies will be encouraged to invest in the sectors of green development, digital transformation and technology innovation in Shanghai.

While Shanghai remained the

first in the world for twenty-foot-equivalent unit container throughput for the 14th consecutive year with 49.16 million TEUs in 2023, efforts will be made to develop high-end shipping services such as shipping insurance and maritime arbitration, said Hua.

By aligning with the world's high-standard economic and trade rules, Shanghai will further improve its business environment and advance institutional opening-up, said Hua.

Pudong New Area, where comprehensive reform pilot programs have been conducted, will play a leading role in institutional opening-up, said Gu Jun, director of Shanghai Municipal Development and Reform Commission.

Market entry, especially in telecommunications and medical sectors, will be relaxed in an orderly manner. Six new regulations will be formulated in Pudong by the end of this year to advance reform in free trade accounts, commercial mediation and corporate compliance, he added.

To attract talents from home and abroad, which is integral to Shanghai's high-quality development, the city will roll out more policies to facilitate their household registration, housing, entry and exit into the country, said Gong.

In specific, Shanghai has come up with more convenient payment methods for expatriates, covering both mobile and card payments. It has also launched at the beginning of this year the portal International Services Shanghai to provide up-to-date information and policy guidance for expatriates working or traveling in the city, said Hua.

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Forum: Peaceful environment crucial for Asia's rapid growth

From page 1

"It will also help the country achieve high-quality development through structural adjustment and industrial upgrading, and further contribute to more sustainable and balanced economic development," Zhang added.

In his speech, Zhao, the top legislator, said the building of a community with a shared future for mankind has grown from a Chinese

initiative to a global action, and has evolved from a beautiful vision to an enriched practice.

He called on Asian countries to oppose power politics and hegemonic behavior, and to maintain a regional order that balances the aspirations of various parties and accommodates the interests of each party.

Asian nations should keep the region's long-term stability in their own hands, and work together to

facilitate Asia's development, advance its openness and promote Asian civilization, he said.

Sun Jisheng, a professor and vice-president of China Foreign Affairs University, said that China's development of its relations with neighboring countries, based on its philosophy of "amity, sincerity, mutual benefit and inclusiveness", has "played an important role in peace and stability in its neighborhood".

"One of the crucial conditions for Asia's rapid development in recent years is the peaceful environment it has maintained, which enables growth," Sun said. "In addition to its neighborhood, China has endeavored to shoulder the duties of a major country in the world and contribute to the peace and stability of the world."

Contact the writers at zhangyunbi@chinadaily.com.cn

Cooperation: Beijing, Brussels can help facilitate student exchanges

From page 1

Sorbonne University is interested in sending students to Guangdong province, where my university is based, for internships. And ESCP Business School suggested that we join hands in boosting student exchanges, creating a new university alliance and increasing mutual visits.

Most of the European universities

we visited have listed student mobility as a top priority, with China among the destinations.

Without hesitation, we all signed up to kick-start entrepreneurship and innovation within our academic communities, with knowledge transfer on tap and the promise of upcoming incubators and innovation hubs that reflect the deepening economic ties between China and Europe.

Growing networks and forums for the exchange of ideas and knowledge are now ours for the asking. They will compensate for the temporary COVID-induced shutdown of contacts. It is time to reconnect and resume dialogue on an array of urgent topics, from climate change and sustainability to artificial intelligence, its ethics, and its innovative impact and governance.

As the China-Europe High-Level

People-to-People Dialogue unfolds, Beijing and Brussels should take notice of the joint efforts made by academic institutions on both sides.

Brussels and Beijing can help turbocharge student exchanges. As conflict inflicts suffering in various parts of the world, our young generation is our best hope for returning to a world of harmony, through the whole gamut of cultural

Sci-fi masterpiece by Chinese author gains huge fan base overseas

By YANG YANG yangyang@chinadaily.com.cn

The mind-bending new Netflix series *3 Body Problem*, an attempt to adapt Liu Cixin's epic novel *The Three-Body Problem* for Western audiences, has earned a new wave of overseas cheers for the Chinese author's science fiction masterpiece.

The English translation of the book, which earned Liu the Hugo Award for Best Novel in 2015, became the No. 1 best-seller in Amazon's literary fiction section and rose to the 11th spot on the list of general best-sellers on Wednesday.

The Three-Body Problem is the first book in Liu's *San-Ti* trilogy, and is followed by *The Dark Forest* and *Death's End*.

Chen Feng, rights manager at China Education Publications Import & Export Co, the international agent for the trilogy, said this is the book's best performance ever on Amazon, and a record for Chinese literature.

The Japanese version of *The Three-Body Problem* topped the charts on Amazon Japan, while Liu's works dominated half of the Kindle e-book sales chart for Chinese literature, according to Chinese magazine *Science Fiction World*, which first ran the trilogy before it was published as books in 2008 and 2010.

After the first season of *3 Body Problem* started streaming on Netflix last week, it sparked intense discussions in countries including Japan, the United States, France and Germany, where the book has gained a huge fan base.

Hideo Kojima, a renowned Japanese game developer, recommended Liu's novel on social media after watching the Netflix series, along with the highly acclaimed Chinese TV drama based on the book. The domestic adaptation is rated 8.7 out of 10 by more than 457,000 viewers on Douban, a major review aggregator in China.

The Chinese TV drama was first released in China in January 2023. It also premiered on the NBC Universal streaming platform Peacock in the US on Feb 10, which was the first day of the Year of the Dragon.

Before that launch, the domestic series was already available on international streaming platforms, including Amazon, with its distribution extending worldwide.

On March 21, Netflix released all eight episodes of the first season on its streaming platforms, which reach

audiences in more than 190 countries and regions.

According to reports, the series was produced with a total investment of about \$160 million, with an average budget of \$20 million per episode, making it one of the most expensive single-episode investments in the history of Netflix.

The novel introduces an expansive narrative that intertwines physics, astrophysics and extraterrestrial life with human history and philosophy.

The story focuses on scientists discovering an alien civilization on Alpha Centauri, endangered by its unstable orbit around three suns, which is causing severe environmental chaos, known as the "three-body problem".

The narrative explores the implications of the first contact with an alien civilization, including the social, political and technological changes that follow.

"Notably, (the novel) does not rely on many of the traditional tropes you would expect from an alien sci-fi, to invoke fear and awe, but rather comes with an entire new arsenal of imagination to remind us that we are very fragile and insignificant within the universe," said a reader, who goes by the online name Gemlarin and has given Amazon's highest rating to the book.

The English version of the novel, translated by Ken Liu, was published in 2014, making Liu Cixin's work accessible to a broader audience base and allowing it to earn further international acclaim. It has garnered a group of celebrity fans including former US president Barack Obama.

The book, which became the first Asian novel to win the Hugo Award, has been praised for its innovative ideas and complex scientific concepts, as well as its unique blend of hard science fiction with Chinese historical and cultural elements.

As of June 2023, the trilogy, translated into 35 foreign languages, had sold about 4 million copies worldwide, setting a record for overseas sales of contemporary Chinese literature, according to *Science Fiction World*.

Apart from this trilogy, other major works by Liu Cixin have been translated into a number of languages, including novels such as *Ball Lightning* and *The Supernova Era*, and the short story collections *To Hold Up the Sky* and *The Wandering Earth*.

A lasting impression



A visitor admires French artist Edouard Manet's painting *The Railway* at a special exhibition commemorating the 150th anniversary of the birth of Impressionism at the Musee d'Orsay in Paris, France, on Tuesday. The exhibition features over 160 works by impressionist painters. LI YANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

ation could trigger a host of partnerships, joint research centers, and student and faculty exchanges.

Our promising start in institutional cooperation can contribute to creating an environment conducive to partnership and understanding between universities in China and Europe.

The author is founding president of Hong Kong University of Science and Technology (Guangzhou). The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Editor's Note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.



Ge Bingjie (from left), Qi Zechen, Huang Yanbo and Huang Cunzhong observe a cluster of *Salvia guidongensis* at Qiyunfeng National Forest Park in Guidong county, Hunan province, in 2022. DENG RENXIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

New species of *Salvia* discovered in Hunan

Named for county it was found in, herb is part of widely distributed subgroup

By CHEN LIANG
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In August 2022, a scientific exploration team trekked into the forests of Guidong county, Hunan province, an expedition that ultimately led to the discovery of a new species of *Salvia* (commonly known as sage) that was recently reported in a botanical journal.

The team, which consisted of engineers Huang Yanbo and Ge Bingjie from the Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden, as well as researcher Qi Zechen from Zhejiang Sci-Tech University, aimed to explore the wild habitat of *Salvia*, the largest genus within the mint family that boasts nearly 1,000 species distributed globally.

Guided by Huang Cunzhong, an official with the local natural resources administration, the team ventured into Qiyunfeng National Forest Park. It was there, on the forest's fringe near a stream in a valley, that they stumbled upon a distinctive *Salvia* population.

Over the next two years, the researchers dedicated themselves to thorough investigations and experimental studies of this population both in its natural setting and in a laboratory. The team's collaborative efforts with both domestic and international experts involved detailed morphological and molecular data analyses. Their findings revealed this per-



A pale purple flower of *Salvia guidongensis*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"China is a significant hub of *Salvia* diversity, boasting nearly 100 species."

Huang Yanbo, engineer from the Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden

ennial herb belongs to a particular subgroup known as *Glutinaria*. This subgroup consists of six known *Salvia* species that exhibit a fascinating disjunct distribution, spanning from Europe, Central

Asia and the Himalayas to East China, the Korean Peninsula, and Japan.

They compared the new species with the six known ones in the *Glutinaria* subgroup. What set the new one apart was its distinctive corolla shape, heart-shaped leaf bases, notably larger leaves and a unique characteristic not commonly observed in the East Asian species — it exhibits flowers in either pale purple or pale yellow. Furthermore, DNA evidence also suggested the ubiquitous status of the newfound population.

After integrating all evidence, the team confirmed it as a new member of the *Salvia* genus, naming it *Salvia guidongensis*.

It is named after the location of its first discovery, Guidong county, where it is currently exclusively distributed, making it an endemic species to this region.

The discovery was published in the international botanical journal *Frontiers in Plant Science* on March 5.

"China is a significant hub of *Salvia* diversity, boasting nearly 100 species," said Huang Yanbo, the lead author of the article. "The vast morphological diversity, from root to stamen, coupled with its varied habitats makes taxonomic studies of East Asian *Salvia* a formidable challenge."

The discovery and research on *Salvia guidongensis* serve to enrich the diversity of the genus and expand its germplasm resources within the country, Huang Yanbo said. Furthermore, its unique endemic presence in Central China effectively bridges a gap in the distribution of the *Glutinaria* subgroup. "It provides a new perspective



A pale yellow flower of *Salvia guidongensis*.

and evidence for understanding the biogeographical evolutionary history among the European-Central Asian-East Asian flora," he said.

This groundbreaking work was the result of a joint effort by 12 researchers from eight domestic and foreign institutions.

China boasts the richest diversity of East Asian *Salvia*, with 84 species in the country, accounting for over 80 percent of the species in the region.

In recent years, significant advancements have been made in the research of the genus, including new taxonomic classifications and the discovery of novel species. According to Huang Yanbo, these ongoing developments underscore the challenges in the phylogenetic and taxonomic studies of *Salvia* — especially in underexplored areas and ambiguous groups — and concerns about their conservation status.

The Shanghai Chenshan Botanical Garden has been at the forefront of conducting comprehensive surveys and research on the genus, leading to the identification of several new taxonomic groups.

Currently, the garden has amassed a collection of 150 *Salvia* species and varieties, including 75 from within China and 65 from abroad. This collection, which totals 1,752 germplasm resources, positions the garden as the premier repository of *Salvia* germplasm in China and the broader East Asia region. These invaluable materials and data derived from these resources have significantly bolstered efforts in conservation, breeding, scientific research and the practical application of the *Salvia* species.

Scientists identify 'alien' flowering plant

By CHEN LIANG

On Aug 13, 2019, Ya Jidong, a botanist from the Kunming Institute of Botany at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, and his colleagues walked into a patch of wet evergreen, broad-leaved forest in a karst valley in the Laoshan Provincial Nature Reserve in Malipo county, Yunnan province.

Working with the Germplasm Bank of Wild Species at the KIB, they were collecting germplasm materials from wild species, particularly seeds. By chance, they discovered a strange plant.

With a height of barely 4 centimeters above the ground, the tiny plant bore a striking resemblance to an "alien" due to its unique appearance.

"It looked more like a mushroom than a flowering plant, and it was something we had never seen before," Ya told China Daily.

They observed, measured and photographed the plant. As they walked a bit further, they found 10 more.

After returning to Kunming, capital of Yunnan, with the plant and conducting further studies, they found that the species is a member of the *Thismia* genus, which doesn't have green leaves and has eschewed photosynthesis in favor of a more unusual nutrient gathering process.

Thismia plants, commonly known as fairy lanterns, live entirely underground except for periods during the wet season, when their flowers rise above the soil.

"In the undergrowth of humid and dark forest, they only blossom for two or three weeks and then disappear," Ya said. "Even though we spent more than 100 days exploring the wild every year, we had never seen any *Thismia* species."

After further study through collaboration with other researchers from the Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden under the CAS, they realized that the plant was a new species of *Thismia*.

On Feb 28, the researchers from KIB and XTBG described the new species, named *Thismia malipoensis*, in an article published in the international botanical journal *Willdenowia*. The discovery marked the eighth recorded species of *Thismia* in China.

Ya is the first author of the research article titled "Phylogenetic and biogeographical analyses of *Thismia* (*Thismiaceae*) support *T. malipoensis* as the eighth species in China."

According to the researcher, the unusual, elusive plants are herbs that completely rely on specific fungi for their supply of organic



Three *Thismia malipoensis* flowers found in the Laoshan Provincial Nature Reserve in Malipo county, Yunnan province, in 2019.

nutrients and only emerge above ground during flowering and fruiting periods. The colorful plants have a completely degraded photosynthetic function, possessing only a few scale-like leaves. The shape of their flowers is also unusual.

Thismia plants are almost exclusively distributed in tropical and subtropical areas of Asia and the Americas, with the exception of the *T. americana* from the central United States, which is thought to be extinct, according to the article.

Since the genus was established in 1845, *Thismia* species discovery had progressed very slowly, with only 40 species found worldwide through 1999. After 2011, at least one new species per year has been found. To date, 106 species and one variety have been recognized.

Thismia taiwanensis was the first species to be discovered in China, and the only one found until 2002.

However, when most fairy lanterns are found, there are only a small number of them in any area, said Dr Yu Wenbin from XTBG, one of the article's corresponding authors. Because they are highly reliant on a specialized fungal host, their distribution ranges may be restricted by the availability of the fungi.

"*Thismia* plants are usually very small, inconspicuous and out of the ground in the flowering and fruiting seasons usually for a very short period of time," Yu said. "Most *Thismia* species have extremely small population sizes and may be more sensitive to environmental changes. Their conservation presents unique challenges."

Given the high dependence of *Thismia* plants on specific mycorrhizal fungi for seed germination and seedling establishment, the most effective conservation strategy for these species involves in situ protection, emphasizing the preservation of their natural habitats, Yu said.



Ya Jidong takes photos of *Thismia malipoensis* in the nature reserve in 2019. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Unique odd-scaled snake species reported

By CHEN LIANG

On Oct 14, 2022, Professor Mo Xiaoyang from Hunan Normal University in Changsha, Hunan province, and several members of his research team were conducting a biodiversity resource survey in Tongdao county, Hunan.

They noticed a snake that had been flattened by a passing car. Research team member Li Hui, a student of Mo's, is a passionate wildlife enthusiast and is especially fond of reptiles. He observed the dead snake carefully.

"It was an odd-scaled snake (the common name for snakes of the *Achalinus* genus), but looked a little different from those we had seen

before, with a creamy yellow ring around its neck," Li told Xiaoxiang Morning News.

The team brought the snake back to their laboratory. After a morphological analysis and molecular testing, they found that it differed from other known *Achalinus* snake species.

The discovery led them to explore the area for more specimens. After considerable effort, they eventually found and collected three live ones, one in Tongdao and two others in Nanshan National Park, also in Hunan.

Mo, Li, another student of Mo's named Zhu Leqiang and five other Chinese researchers recently published a paper in *ZooKeys*, an inter-

national peer-reviewed zoological journal, in which they described the new species of odd-scaled snake. They have named it *Achalinus nanshanensis*.

Achalinus is a genus of non-venomous snakes found in Japan, China and Vietnam. The publication marks the official debut of the new species, which is also known as the Nanshan odd-scaled snake.

With the discovery, there are now 28 odd-scaled snake species worldwide, and 21 of them are found in China.

They are called "odd-scaled" because their scales do not overlap one another like most snakes, but are instead spread out and lie individually, similar to pieces of a puzzle. They

are also known to be burrowers who crawl below the fallen leaves of the forest.

According to the newspaper in Changsha, the research team spent more than a year searching for and capturing the snakes after the first sighting of the dead one.

"Based on just a carcass, we cannot draw conclusions. We must find a live specimen," Mo recalled telling his teammates at the time.

Zhu said: "We spent over 200 days a year in the wild. The Nanshan odd-scaled snake is relatively small, about 40 centimeters long, with a body as thin as a pencil. It often hides in burrows and feeds on small invertebrates like earthworms, making it challenging to locate."

As the snakes are primarily nocturnal, the team set out fully equipped every evening, carrying snake tongs to capture the reptiles as well as

emergency medical supplies and flashlights. They meticulously searched forests in the area along streams and under fallen leaves, often returning home as late as 4 a.m.

Their routine persisted for months. From Tongdao to Nanshan National Park, the team searched along a road running over 100 kilometers, but to no avail.

Just as the team was on the verge of giving up, the new odd-scaled snake finally made an appearance.

It was on the last night of a survey, on Sept 1 last year, when their vehicle experienced a tire blowout on the road, forcing them to spend the night in the wilderness. They decided to take advantage of the situation and search for the snake once more.

"We couldn't give up looking for the snake and decided to make one final attempt," Li said.

They searched for more than 20 km along the road before suddenly spotting two live odd-scaled snakes that turned out to be the species they were looking for.

The team collected the snakes and later conducted further research in the laboratory, studying the reptiles' morphology and molecular identification. The conclusion was reached that the snake was indeed a new species.

According to Mo, a professor at the School of Life Sciences and the Wildlife Conservation Program at Hunan Normal University, the specimens of the Nanshan odd-scaled snake are currently housed in the university's vertebrate zoology laboratory. The team plans to continue conducting in-depth research on the species, including its geographical distribution and biological characteristics.

VISUAL



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

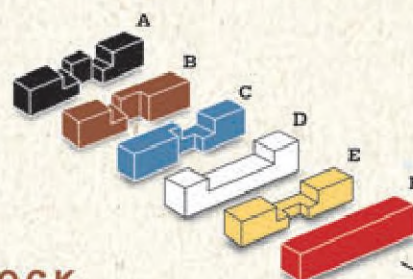
LU BAN, THE CREATOR



The Luban lock is attributed to the ingenuity of Lu Ban, a renowned structural engineer often referred to as the "father of carpentry" in China, who lived during the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC). He is credited with the invention of the saw, the carpenter's plane and the ink line.



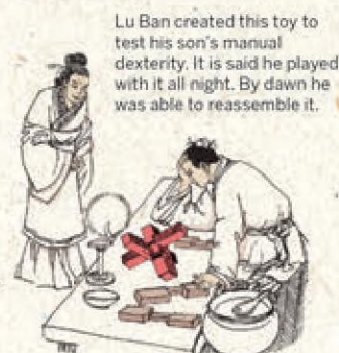
Tengzhou
A county-level city of Zaozhuang, Shandong province. It is known as the birthplace of Lu Ban.



SIX-ROD LOCK

This Luban lock is crafted using six traditional colors: red, blue, white, yellow, brown and black, drawing from the traditional color concept described in an ancient book. This reflects the inclusiveness and beauty of Chinese culture.

BEHIND THE LUBAN LOCK PLAYFUL MAZE



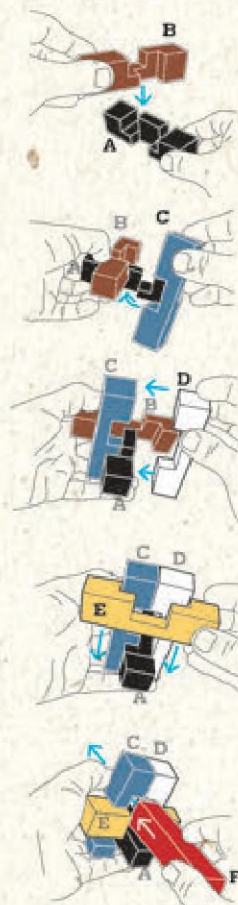
Lu Ban created this toy to test his son's manual dexterity. It is said he played with it all night. By dawn he was able to reassemble it.

This six-rod lock is carved with the Chinese character *fu*, which represents happiness and health.



ASSEMBLE IT

Luban locks come in different shapes and sizes, with different internal structures. They are usually easy to take apart, but challenging to reassemble.



The six pieces of the Luban lock are carved with the images of the four mythical creatures that are commonly found on stone carvings from the Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 220).

The original construction of the interlocking Chinese toy uses three sticks.



READY!

This toy has been developed into different variations, with the most popular one composed of six sticks, and some with 24 pieces or more.



The ladder-shaped base symbolizes stability and strength.

FATHER OF CARPENTRY

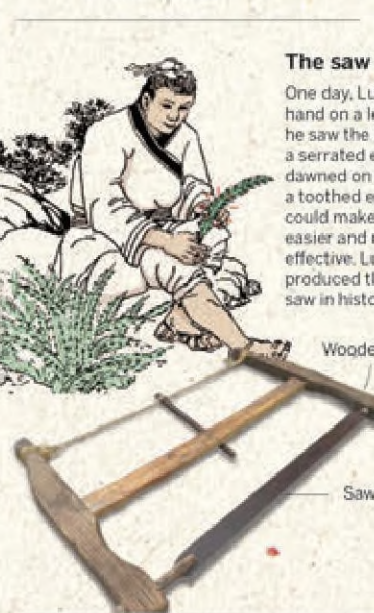


The plane
Among other tools, Lu Ban created the plane. It allows workers to make flat surfaces on even the hardest wood.

The lock bar is processed with angled cuts, creating a richer and more dynamic overall structure.



The ink line
Watching his mother-in-law and daughter-in-law make pink thread quilts inspired Lu Ban to create this tool to mark a straight line over wood to saw it in a precise way.



The saw
One day, Lu cut his hand on a leaf. When he saw the leaf had a serrated edge, it dawned on him that a toothed edge could make cutting easier and more effective. Lu then produced the first saw in history.

By XU XIAODAN and ZHAO RUIXUE in Tengzhou, Shandong and LI JING in Beijing

In a symbolic display of unity and strength, Zhang Jun, China's permanent representative to the United Nations, presented an elegant gift to members of the UN Security Council — a Luban lock, which is a hand-held puzzle composed of six intricately interlocking wooden pieces.

You can disassemble it easily by pulling out one of the six, and it falls apart, Zhang said. "The problem is this: How can you fix it?" he said.

Zhang displayed a Luban lock while speaking with reporters at the UN headquarters in New York City, the United States. China began its presidency of the Security Council in November.

"We may take this as a symbol of the serious challenges ahead of us," Zhang said. "It needs our solidarity, holding each other up together. And then we have more power, more strength, to tackle all the issues ahead of us."

The lock is named for Lu Ban, an architect known as China's "father of carpentry" who lived 2,500 years ago. He is credited with many utilitarian inventions, including the saw and other wood-working tools.

Finely crafted Luban lock puzzles have evolved into trendy toys, with hundreds of variations blending tradition with innovation. Jiang Xinlin, one of the astronauts on the Shenzhou XVII spaceflight, carried a Luban lock into orbit as a fidget toy, bringing it into a modern context.

Li Hao, an inheritor of Luban lock-making techniques in Tengzhou, a county-level city of Zaozhuang, Shandong province, described its significance: "With a six-piece Luban lock, one stick is made of ebony and the other five are made of pear wood. This embodies the Confucian philosophy of 'harmony in diversity'. Some Luban locks we have developed have collectible value because they are endowed with

meaning and made of precious wood."

Recognized as the birthplace of Lu Ban craftsmanship, Tengzhou is widely known for its locks. It is now one of the key areas of China in which the intangible cultural heritage of Luban lock-making is maintained. Old carpenters in the city once considered the creation of a perfect Luban lock to be the standard for apprenticeship.

In recent years, Tengzhou has been promoting traditional wood products under the brand "Lu Ban in My Home" as part of the city's efforts to advance the creative transformation and innovative development of traditional Chinese culture and promote Chinese culture globally. The initiative has contributed to the development of the local cultural industry.

Luban lock series products have been incorporated into the brand incubation project, with tailored support provided to enterprises to foster their growth. This strategic approach has led to the rapid industrialization of the Luban lock industry.

Li's workshop, which began in a town in Tengzhou, has evolved into a company with modern production lines, providing jobs for more than 100 residents and receiving orders from overseas. Sales reached 33 million yuan (\$4.6 million) last year, he said. The export value of goods from Tengzhou's cultural industry reached 676 million yuan last year, a year-on-year increase of 167.7 percent, the Tengzhou government said.

The heritage of Lu Ban, with its rich cultural significance, has not only become a symbol of tradition and innovation but also a source of inspiration for economic growth and cultural exchange.

For instance, the Luban Workshop, a vocational education program that offers skills training and job opportunities in foreign countries, has made the ancient Chinese engineering marvel more recognizable. So far, China has established 27 such workshops in 23 countries.

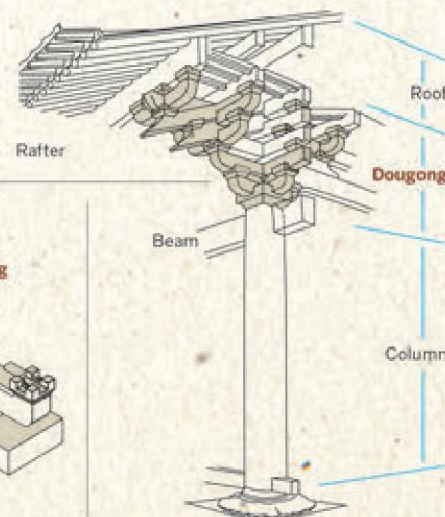
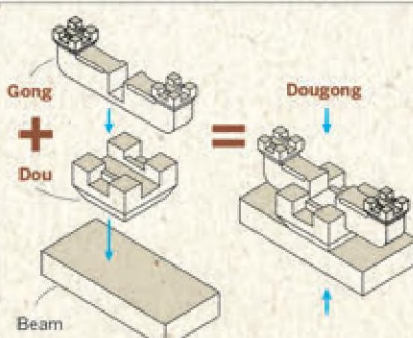
Contact the writers at shaorui@chinadaily.com.cn

ARCHITECTURAL INSPIRATION

The Luban lock system incorporates concave and convex parts that interlock seamlessly, drawing inspiration from the mortise and tenon joints used in ancient Chinese wooden architecture and furniture.



Dougong
Ancient Chinese bracket system. It made buildings earthquake-proof more than 2,500 years ago.



Sources: Tengzhou Luban Workshop Cultural Communication Co

GRAPHIC BY XU XIAODAN, ZHAO RUIXUE & JORGE CORTES / CHINA DAILY; TOOLS ILLUSTRATION PROVIDED BY WANG DECHAO & WANG KE

WORLD

Japan's move to export jets raises concern

Tokyo's revision of arms policy called out as a 'historic outrage', experts say

By **JIANG XUEQING** in Tokyo
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A revision to end the de facto ban on the overseas exports of deadly weapons manufactured in Japan signifies the country's abandonment of its consistent postwar peace policy, experts said, calling the move a "historic outrage" and "a major cause for concern".

The Japanese government greenlit revised guidelines for its stringent defense equipment transfer regulations on Tuesday, enabling the export of next-generation fighter jets developed in collaboration with the United Kingdom and Italy through the Global Combat Air Programme.

The revised guidelines outline that Japan is authorized to export these fighter jets, slated for deployment by 2035, to a third country. This marks a notable departure from Japan's historically tight constraints on arms exports.

"Fighter jets are the epitome of lethal weapons. Such exports blatantly contradict postwar Japan's pacifist principles based on the Constitution," said Takakage Fujita, secretary-general of the Association for Inheriting and Propagating the Murayama Statement, a Japanese civic group dedicated to upholding the 1995 statement that admits Japan's wartime mistakes.

"For years, Japan has adhered to the Three Principles on Transfer of Defense Equipment and Technology, maintaining a de facto ban on exporting weapons. However, this government decision is a historic outrage that undermines Japan's postwar principle of peace," Fujita said.

Exporting weapons and becoming a global arms dealer would destroy Japan's international credibility as a nation that has walked the path of peace, reflecting on its prewar and wartime mistakes, he added.

Fujita stressed that it is "absolutely impermissible" to unilaterally advance such a major shift in security policy without a national debate, and base it solely on agreements between Japan's ruling Liberal Democratic Party and its coalition partner Komeito.

The coalition government has repeatedly pushed through significant security policy changes, such as possessing the capability for retaliatory strikes, through unilateral decision-making via ruling party consultations and cabinet resolutions without engaging in national or parliamentary debates.

"We staunchly oppose this manner of forcibly imposing cabinet decisions without engaging in national debates or parliamentary discussions, which undermines the essence of pacifism," Fujita said.

The revisions stipulate that Japan can export the fighter jets,

which are targeted for deployment by 2035, to a third nation, though the warplanes cannot be transferred to a nation where combat is taking place.

According to the new regulations, the destination of the fighter jet exports will be limited to nations that have signed pacts with Japan on defense equipment and technology transfers, which currently stands at 15. However, the number could easily increase with new agreements, Fujita said.

"Monitoring whether the exported items are used for attacks violating international law or for aggression against other countries is difficult. Even if the exported items are used for such purposes, Japan cannot prevent it," he added.

Kazuyuki Hamada, an international political economy scholar and former Japanese parliamentary vice-minister for foreign affairs, expressed the same view.

"The Japanese government lacks the means to put a stop to the transfer of next-generation fighter jets and similar equipment to third countries," Hamada said.

"While the Japanese government points to the increasingly challenging security environment surrounding Japan as the reason for the revision, if that's the case, rather than expanding military capabilities, I believe priority should be given to strengthening diplomatic efforts and initiatives aimed at fostering mutual understanding through dialogue with relevant countries."

Japan has been drastically readjusting its security policy in recent years, increasing defense spending year-on-year, relaxing restrictions on arms exports, and seeking military breakthroughs.

Worrying neighbors

These moves trigger serious concerns among Japan's neighboring countries and the international community, said China's Foreign Ministry spokesman Lin Jian at a news conference on Tuesday.

"Japan must sincerely listen to the security concerns of neighboring countries. This is because Japan has a history of inflicting significant harm on its neighboring countries through militarism. To avoid repeating such tragedies, it is important to reflect on history and establish norms for future actions," Hamada said.

The Japanese government is supporting the defense industry and attempting to position it as a new growth industry, he said.

"Being led by the defense industry strategy pursued by the US government, the actions of the (Fumio) Kishida administration, pushing forward with cabinet decisions without considering domestic and international opposition or cautious voices, may sow seeds of future trouble," Hamada added.

China's UN envoy hailed as he leaves office

By **MINLU ZHANG**
at the United Nations
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China's current top ambassador to the United Nations said he will leave office at the end of March.

"I will soon conclude my tour of duty as permanent representative of the People's Republic of China to the United Nations," said Zhang Jun, who is about to return to China.

"For me, representing my country at the UN over the past five years has truly been a great honor and a most unforgettable experience," Zhang told reporters. His UN tenure started in 2019.

Zhang called his UN post "a great honor and heavy responsibility for me. It is also a very unforgettable and glorious experience. I always keep in mind the trust of the people of my motherland and make unremitting efforts to fulfill my mission."

"During my years at the UN, I have come to realize that the world is seeing a different China," said Zhang, adding that the country is "a force for peace, development and progress that can be relied upon."

"I am proud of China's strong development and the important role it plays in the international arena," he said.

Zhang said the world needs guidance in the right direction more than ever.

"It needs more insistence on fairness and justice. It needs motivation to move forward. It needs unity, trust and cooperation. It needs a stronger and more powerful United Nations," he said.

Zhang is also bidding farewell to senior UN officials such as UN Secretary-General António Guterres, and Dennis Francis, president of the 78th Session of the UN General Assembly, as well as representatives of other



Zhang Jun, permanent representative of China to the United Nations, bids farewell to President of the UN General Assembly Dennis Francis at UN Headquarters in New York on Tuesday.

MINLU ZHANG / CHINA DAILY

countries to the UN.

"I have always believed that China's development and growth are beneficial to the world," Guterres said, according to a statement from China's UN mission.

"China's commitment to promoting win-win cooperation among all countries in the world, while safeguarding its own interests and fully demonstrating its pragmatic and self-confident style as a great power, is unique among the major powers," he said.

Guterres said that he has witnessed the strengthening of China's role at the UN and its deepening of

cooperation with the UN. "The UN is ready to continue to deepen its cooperation with China in all fields," Guterres said.

"The UN needs more firm and reliable partners like China to maintain world peace and stability and promote sustainable development," said Francis.

"China has always taken practical actions to practice multilateralism, promote unity and cooperation in the international community, and become a strong pillar of the United Nations cause," he said, adding that he will continue to strengthen cooperation with China and jointly seek

benefits for all mankind.

Ambassadors from various countries, including Russia, the United States, the United Kingdom, France, Pakistan, Brazil, South Africa, Saudi Arabia, Egypt, Indonesia, Singapore, Italy and others also bid farewell to Zhang, according to the statement.

China is one of the five permanent members of the Security Council with veto rights. As China's national power increases, its role in the United Nations is also expanding. By 2019, China had become the second-largest financial contributor to the UN regular budget.

Cranes head to Baltimore to clear bridge wreckage

By **AI HEPING** in New York
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As massive barges carrying cranes headed to Baltimore to begin removing twisted metal from the collapsed Francis Scott Key Bridge, officials said the blocking of the nation's ninth-busiest port will not only hurt the local economy but could snarl supply chains.

Divers reached the bodies of two men in a pickup truck near the bridge's middle span on Wednesday, but officials said they would need to start clearing the wreckage before anyone could reach the bodies of four other missing workers.

It could be weeks or months before ships resume serving the port. The 948-foot containership that took the bridge down early Tuesday morning, the Dali, is still in the port. Ten vessels are stuck there, according to the Bureau of Transportation Statistics (BTS), including three bulk carriers.

Baltimore's port has become increasingly important to US retailers and manufacturers seeking to diversify their supply networks and bring goods closer to customers, Jonathan Gold, vice-president of supply chain and customs policy at the National Retail Federation, told

The Associated Press.

"Everybody is trying to figure out the impact on the supply chain" from the loss of the bridge, said Gold. He added that it is too early to tell how long shipments might be delayed.

The port's suspension is "one more disruption in an already-stressed system" for the global supply chain, said Abe Eshkenazi, CEO of the Association for Supply Chain Management. Cargo will now have to be rerouted to other ports, he said, which means figuring out where there is enough capacity to move things.

Market analysts are also looking at the impact the accident could have on auto imports. Baltimore's port handles the highest volume of shipments of cars and light trucks.

Ports around the country are preparing to absorb a surge in volume as companies reroute around the port and avoid the East Coast more generally.

While many of the 30,000 to 35,000 cars and trucks that used the bridge daily can be rerouted through the two nearby tunnels, that will cause traffic delays. Hazardous materials that aren't allowed in the tunnels will be diverted on a longer detour.

Rerouting cargo could push up trucking and rail prices if the volumes

are significant and could cause some congestion at those alternative ports, Judah Levine, head of research at logistics firm Freightos, told CNN.

The port also is an important artery for the movement of construction machinery and coal. It is also the largest US port by volume for handling farm and construction machinery, as well as agricultural products.

It handled 52.3 million tons of foreign cargo worth nearly \$81 billion in 2023, according to Maryland data, and creates more than 15,000 jobs.

The port ranked second in the country for exporting coal last year, according to the state of Maryland. But it isn't a huge global supplier of thermal coal, and the disruption can likely be made up by replacements from Australia or Indonesia if needed, said Alexis Ellender, lead analyst at global trade intelligence company Kpler.

Most of the coal from Baltimore makes its way to India for electricity generation, Ernie Thrasher, the CEO of the coal trading firm Xcoal Energy & Resources, told Bloomberg.

"The big question is the impact on India more than any global impact," Thrasher said.

Some of that coal will be rerouted, but complicated logistics will limit

how much other ports can take.

Mary Kane, president and CEO of the Maryland Chamber of Commerce, said the economic impact on Baltimore and the state of Maryland is "incomprehensible".

With port operations at a standstill, there is concern that many longshore workers could be unemployed. The immediate price tag: \$2 million in wages a day and 8,000 jobs, according to US Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg.

"That's one of the areas we're mostly concerned about," he said at a White House briefing Wednesday.

The port handled foreign cargo worth \$80 billion in 2023, according to Maryland Governor Wes Moore, meaning there will be millions of dollars in lost trade and taxes for every day that shipping vessels are blocked from accessing it.

Sean McNally, spokesperson for the American Trucking Association (ATA), told Fox Business, that trucks moving hazardous materials will now be subject to roughly 30 miles of detours around Baltimore because they are prohibited from using the city's tunnels.

"This will add significant cost in time, fuel and delays for trucks traveling through the region," he said.

US experiencing 'full-blown outbreak of Sinophobia'

By **HENG WEILI** in New York
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The United States is experiencing a "full-blown outbreak of Sinophobia," a China expert said in an article published on Wednesday.

Stephen S. Roach, a faculty member at Yale University and former chairman of Morgan Stanley Asia, wrote on the opinion website Project Syndicate that the anti-China sentiment has been building for years, dating to the early 2000s, when the US began targeting Huawei Technologies.

Roach said "China threats now seem to be popping up everywhere," as he cited export controls on advanced semiconductors, which he said are intended to stifle China's advances in artificial intelligence.

He said much has been made of supposed risks from Chinese electric vehicles and noted the recent proposed forced sale or ban of social media platform TikTok, which has 170 million US users.

While Roach said China has demonstrated some "Ameriphobia," he said it is not as pronounced as what is coming out of Washington.

"Not since the red-baiting of the early 1950s has America so vilified a foreign power," Roach wrote in reference to Wisconsin senator Joseph McCarthy and the House Un-American Activities Committee of that era.

"Today, another politician from Wisconsin, Representative Mike Gallagher, has led the charge as chair of the House Select Committee on the Chinese Communist Party, which ... has leveled a series of unsubstantiated charges against China," Roach wrote.

"While Gallagher will retire from Congress in April, his legacy will live on, not just as co-sponsor of a bill that could lead to an outright ban of TikTok, but also as the leader of a congressional effort that has cast a long shadow over those who support almost any form of engagement with China."

Forbes reported that Gallagher will take a job with Palantir, a software

company and defense contractor.

"The litany of US allegations is a manifestation of unproven fears wrapped in the impenetrable cloak of national security," Roach wrote, saying there is no "smoking gun" and it is "all about circumstantial evidence."

Roach said there are many "what-ifs" in Washington's approach.

"US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo, a leading Democrat, asks us to 'imagine' what could happen if Chinese EVs were weaponized on American highways," he wrote.

'Many what-ifs'

"And a former US counterintelligence officer has compared sensors in Chinese-made cranes to a Trojan horse. There are many what-ifs and mythical parallels, but no hard evidence on intent or verifiable action."

"What is it about China that has generated this virulent US reaction?" Roach asked.

"The claim of American exceptionalism" seemingly compels us to impose our views and values on oth-

ers. That was true in the Cold War, and it is true again today."

Roach said "excessive fear of China conveniently masks many of America's own self-inflicted problems".

"Bilateral trade deficits may well reflect the unfair trading practices of individual countries — China today, Japan 35 years ago — but broad multilateral trade deficits stem more from chronic US budget deficits that lead to a deficiency of domestic saving," he said.

"Similarly, the technology threat is not only an outgrowth of the alleged Chinese theft of US intellectual property; it also represents ... America's underinvestment in research and development and shortfalls in STEM-based higher education," Roach added.

"The only thing we have to fear is fear itself," Roach quoted a line from US president Franklin Roosevelt's 1933 inaugural address, concluding that "amid today's Sinophobic frenzy, that message is well worth remembering".

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GLOBAL LENS



Sharing splendor

Chinese Bronze Age archaeological treasures head for major US exhibition

An employee checks a crane with antlers bronze artifact at the Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan on March 4. PHOTOS BY HU JINGWEN AND XIAO YUJIU / XINHUA

More than 260 cultural relics from museums in Central China's Hubei province, including bronzeware, jade items, lacquerware, gold and silk fabrics, are being packed and transported to the United States, all set for an exhibition beginning April 19.

The items will be showcased at the *Phoenix Kingdoms: The Last Splendor of China's Bronze Age* exhibition until July at the Asian Art Museum in San Francisco.

It is set to be the largest presentation of Chinese archaeological treasures in recent years in the US, with many pieces being exhibited overseas for the first time.

The artifacts date back to the Zeng and Chu kingdoms during the Zhou Dynasty (1046-256 BC), a period known for its cultural diversity and the birth of great philosophers like Confucius.

Among the most prominent artifacts are a large bronze wine cooler, a jade pendant carved with dragon and phoenix motifs, and silk clothes embroidered with phoenix patterns.

"Phoenix elements are prominent in Chu culture, while in Western culture, the phoenix is seen as an auspicious bird. By using the phoenix as the theme of the exhibition, we hope to evoke an artistic and aesthetic resonance among Chinese and Western

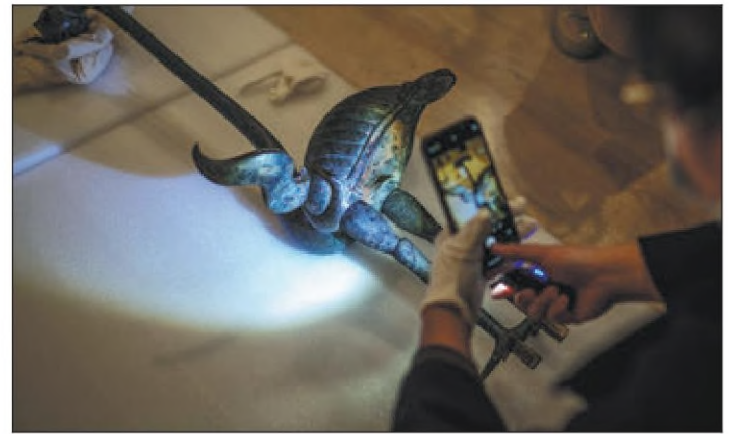
audiences," said Zhang Xiaoyun, curator of the Hubei Provincial Museum.

The artifacts have been collected from museums in five cities in Hubei and include 50 items under first-class state protection, half of which will be exhibited abroad for the first time.

"It provides new perspectives on the formation of Chinese civilization, particularly in the Yangtze River region," said Zhang Fan, curator of Chinese Art at AAM.

"We hope more museum exchanges can help enhance cultural understanding between the United States and China."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA



Left: Museum employees check and pack bronze artifacts in Suizhou, Hubei province, on Feb 27. Right from top: An artifact is recorded at the Hubei Provincial Museum in Wuhan on March 4. Employees check a crane with antlers bronze relic at the museum in Wuhan, Hubei province, on March 4. Employees pack bronzeware in Wuhan on March 4. Employees pack a chime bell bronze relic in Suizhou, Hubei, on Feb 27. Employees pack a bronze wine container in Wuhan on March 4. Employees pack artifacts at the Hubei Provincial Museum on March 4.

BUSINESS

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Nation lifts tariffs on wines from Australia

By WANG KEJU
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China has decided to lift anti-dumping duties and countervailing tariffs imposed on imported Australian wine for more than three years, in keeping with shifting market conditions in the Chinese wine market, the Ministry of Commerce said on Thursday.

The decision, which takes effect on Friday, will scrap duties as high as 218 percent on Australian wine exports to China, the ministry said.

Through joint efforts, China and Australia have reached a consensus on effectively resolving their trade disputes within the framework of the World Trade Organization, said He Yadong, a ministry spokesman, during a news conference.

China and Australia are important trading partners, and China is willing to engage in dialogue and negotiations with Australia to address mutual concerns and promote stable and sound development of bilateral economic and trade relations, He added.

“The reentry of Australian bottled wine into the Chinese market will benefit both Australian producers and Chinese consumers.”

Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia

The Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade said in a statement on Thursday it welcomed Beijing's decision, “which comes at a critical time for the Australian wine industry”.

“Since 2020, China's duties on Australian wine effectively made it unviable for Australian producers to export bottled wine to that market,” the statement said. “The reentry of Australian bottled wine into the Chinese market will benefit both Australian producers and Chinese consumers.”

The removal comes amid a thaw in Sino-Australian relations.

However, trade tensions between China and the US, simmering over years of tariffs and restrictions, have recently escalated with China filing a complaint with the WTO against the US for impeding electric vehicle manufacturers from procuring battery materials from China.

The US implemented the Inflation Reduction Act and its specific regulations, which require the use of specific regional products, including those from the US, as a precondition for subsidies, under the guise of addressing climate change and fostering a low-carbon environment, the spokesman said.

These actions violate relevant WTO rules, distort fair competition and severely disrupt global new energy vehicle industrial and supply chains. China's decision to file a complaint with the WTO is not only a legitimate measure to safeguard the interests of Chinese NEV enterprises and promote a fair competitive environment in the global NEV industry, but also a firm stance in upholding a rule-based multilateral trading system and staunchly defending the stability of global NEV industrial and supply chains, He said.

The act, a prominent policy of US President Joe Biden's administration, provides tax breaks for the purchase of electric vehicles manufactured in North America.

Beginning in 2024, vehicles having battery components or raw materials produced or assembled by “foreign entities of concern” will not be eligible for consumer EV tax credits, according to the Biden administration. The requirements apply to firms domiciled in China, including subsidiaries of US companies, as well as those elsewhere that are at least 25 percent held by State-backed entities from China.

Boao Forum



Participants discuss the outlook for the Chinese economy during the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 in Boao, Hainan province, on Thursday. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

Experts see signs of recovery in economy

Steps to boost demand, fix structural issues, foster new forces seen as key

By OUYANG SHIJIA
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China's economy is showing signs of steady recovery with effective measures to boost domestic demand and tackle structural issues, participants attending the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 said on Thursday.

Looking ahead, they said boosting consumption and fostering new quality productive forces will be among key priorities for the country to support high-quality development and sustainable growth.

Citing some key economic indicators in the first two months of the year, Ben Simpfendorfer, a partner at consultancy Oliver Wyman, said the “Chinese economy is stabilizing”, and he still sees some positive factors driving China's economic recovery this year.

“I think the exports are the primary positive factor,” he told China Daily in an exclusive interview on Thursday. “The global economic outlook looks more promising. And the US economy appears on

course to a soft landing.”

He also said a cause for concern in the current environment is the ongoing correction in real estate. It is quite important to stimulate stronger consumption this year. “So, I think to see a stronger recovery this year, we need to see consumer spending accelerate.”

Chinese policymakers, he said, have options to increase fiscal spending in fields like health, education and maternity care, providing more support to consumers, especially low-income families. “That might provide them with greater certainty in their household finances and greater confidence to start to spend more on other types of goods and services.”

Erik Berglof, chief economist of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, said he believes China needs to create clear conditions and rules on how the private sector can contribute to efforts to bolster the world's second-largest economy.

“It needs to focus on innovation and try to bring new ideas and new ways of organizing things,” he said. “I think China will remain an

important contributor to global growth for the foreseeable future, but it will require more efforts from the government side.”

Steven Barnett, senior resident representative of the International Monetary Fund in China, said China has become the world's largest economy in terms of GDP in purchasing power parity terms, and the country's economy contributes to around one-third of the global economic growth.

He told a forum during the ongoing four-day event in Boao, Hainan province, that China's robust economic growth will significantly benefit the rest of the world.

Over the next few years, fostering new quality productive forces and keeping spending high will be key to boosting China's long-term growth — and consolidated efforts to boost consumption will also help improve people's livelihoods, he said.

Although the property sector may continue to be a drag on China's economic growth, the structural adjustment in the sector will foster a healthy and better future for the sector's development, which will benefit the country's long-term development, said Zhu Min, vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges.

As China assures bright future, multinational firms eye win-win

By CHENG YU in Boao, Hainan
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China's efforts in promoting high-standard opening-up and innovative development will create unlimited market opportunities and broad development prospects for multinational corporations, said corporate executives on the sidelines of a high-level meeting during the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024.

Their comments followed a meeting between China's top legislator Zhao Leji and some representatives of the forum, including top executives of Chinese and foreign enterprises, in Boao in South China's Hainan province on Wednesday.

Top officials from the Ministry of Commerce, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, also attended the meeting.

At the meeting, Zhao said China is taking a series of new measures to expand its high-standard opening-up and sincerely welcomes partners from all over the world.

China has the advantages of a

vast market scale, robust industrial system, talent and an ecosystem that fosters innovation, as well as obvious institutional advantages. In addition, the fundamentals of China's long-term economic improvement have not changed, Zhao said.

Zhao noted that the nation advocates inclusive economic globalization, opposes various forms of unilateralism and protectionism, and is willing to closely link its own development with that of other countries.

The country will continue to promote mutually beneficial cooperation between China and foreign countries from the legal system level, safeguard the lawful rights and interests of enterprises and promote high-standard opening-up, he said.

Ban Ki-moon, chairman of the Boao Forum for Asia and former UN secretary-general, said at the meeting that China is now in a transition to growth model that put more focus on quality and sustainability. It takes vision and courage to pursue such goals, he said.

During the ongoing conference,

MNC executives voiced their support for economic globalization and free trade, and expressed confidence in China's economic development prospects. They said they are willing to actively expand the market to achieve win-win outcomes.

Leon Wang, executive vice-president of AstraZeneca, a global pharmaceutical major, said China has reiterated its determination to continuously promote international economic exchanges and interactions. “This is good news for multinational companies in China, including AstraZeneca, and will reinforce their confidence in the Chinese market.”

Wang noted that cooperation is both a cornerstone for development and key to sustained innovation. “Asia has emerged as a major global force in science and innovation, and China is playing an important role in addressing the serious health challenges facing the world. We will continue to strengthen its collaboration with innovative Chinese companies and healthcare organizations to address these challenges together.”

Low-altitude aviation setting its sights high

By MA SI
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China's latest plan to integrate general aviation equipment comprehensively into people's jobs and daily lives by 2030 will give a strong boost to the development of the low-altitude economy, including electric vertical takeoff and landing aircraft (eVTOL), experts said on Thursday.

The comments came after the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and three other ministerial-level departments unveiled an ambitious plan on Wednesday to form a trillion-yuan-level market in general aviation equipment.

The plan aims to capitalize on advancements in unmanned, electric and intelligent technologies to propel the commercial application of new-generation general aviation equipment in urban air transportation, logistics distribution and emergency rescue operations.

With a significant boost in innovation capabilities, China seeks to lead in the development of green and intelligent general aviation aircraft, positioning itself at the forefront of global innovation.

Wu Peixin, an independent aviation industry analyst in Beijing, said this is the latest signal from the Chinese government that the country attaches great importance to the development of the low-altitude economy.

According to the plan, key initiatives include the establishment of joint laboratories, technology innovation centers and tech innovation service platforms in the general aviation sector. Additionally, efforts will be directed toward laying the groundwork for a robust regulatory and safety verification system, while demonstrating the tangible benefits of aviation emergency rescue and logistics distribution on a large scale.

By 2030, China aims to establish a new model for the development of the general aviation industry characterized by high-end, intelligent and green features. This model will support and ensure the safe and efficient operation of various networks, including passenger transportation, drone delivery and low-altitude production operations, thus fueling low-altitude economic growth and forming a

“... as applications for low-altitude flights expand, low-altitude flight services are poised to move beyond specialized and high-end uses, reaching a broader market.”

Guo Yi, investment feasibility study researcher at the China Development Institute

trillion-yuan-level market scale.

Furthermore, China will support the development of smart air mobility equipment, such as eVTOL, to meet the evolving needs of consumers, the plan said.

In recent years, China's policymakers have increasingly focused on the concept of the “low-altitude economy”, though an official definition has yet to be agreed upon. Generally understood by economists as a range of business activities occurring within airspace up to 1,000 meters above ground, it encompasses both manned and unmanned civilian aircraft operations. These activities include passenger transportation, air tourism, cargo delivery as well as the manufacturing, maintenance and integrated services associated with related equipment.

In February, Chinese eVTOL aircraft developer AutoFlight conducted the world's first intercity demonstration flight in South China's Guangdong province. The service could offer a faster option for passengers shuttling between Shenzhen and Zhuhai in Guangdong in the future as it will take only 20 minutes compared to a regular three-hour car ride at present, the company said.

Guo Yi, an investment feasibility study researcher at the Shenzhen-based think tank China Development Institute, said: “In the future, as applications for low-altitude flights expand, low-altitude flight services are poised to move beyond specialized and high-end uses, reaching a broader market.”



Aircraft seen at a newly opened utility airport in Taizhou, Zhejiang province. ZHU HAIWEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Briefly

PBOC adds liquidity via reverse repos

China's central bank conducted 250 billion yuan (\$35.24 billion) of seven-day reverse repos at an interest rate of 1.8 percent on Thursday. The move aims to keep liquidity in the banking system stable at the end of the quarter, the People's Bank of China said in a statement. A reverse repo is a process in which the central bank purchases securities from commercial banks through bidding, with an agreement to sell them back in the future.

ICBC net profit up 0.8% last year

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, the country's biggest commercial lender, reported a net profit increase of 0.8 percent last year, despite a 3.7 percent drop in business revenue. The bank's net profit attributable to shareholders stood at 365.12 billion yuan (\$51.43

billion) in 2023 and its business revenue reached 843.07 billion yuan, according to its financial report filed to the Shanghai Stock Exchange. ICBC's nonperforming loan ratio stood at 1.36 percent at the end of 2023, down 0.02 percentage point from the end of 2022.

BYD net profit soars 81% in 2023

China's leading new energy vehicle manufacturer BYD Co Ltd recorded a net profit of 30.04 billion yuan (\$4.23 billion) in 2023, up 80.72 percent year-on-year, the company said. According to its annual report, BYD generated revenue of 602.32 billion yuan in 2023, an increase of 42.04 percent year-on-year. The company's research and development expenses amounted to 39.58 billion yuan in 2023, up 112.15 percent year-on-year.

XINHUA — CHINA DAILY

BUSINESS



Various payment options including Mastercard, UnionPay and Visa are available at a store in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Mastercard eyes booming Chinese consumer market

Payment network processor banks on innovation to improve service in nation

By LIU ZHIHUA
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The transformation of the Chinese economy which utilizes more innovation-driven and consumption-oriented drivers will further consolidate its solid fundamentals, bringing more business opportunities for foreign investors, said a senior executive of Mastercard.

Ling Hai, president for Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East and Africa at Mastercard, made the remarks in an exclusive interview with China Daily during the recently held China Development Forum, a two-day event that wrapped up on Monday.

"I think the transformation of the Chinese economy to more consumption-driven and more innovation-driven, in the end, is about a long-term sustainable and more balanced growth model," Ling said. "Mastercard can play a role in participating in Chinese domestic economic activities."

Ling said the payment network processor can support consumer spending to drive consumption, especially high-quality consumption, to move from goods to services and experiences.

"We've been in China for almost 40 years and our business model originally was dependent on cross-border (activities). There's still a lot of work to do in the area, but now we have a domestic license so we can support the domestic activities of Chinese consumers," Ling said.

"I think the transformation of the Chinese economy to more consumption-driven and more innovation-driven, in the end, is about a long-term sustainable and more balanced growth model."



Ling Hai, president for Asia-Pacific, Europe, Middle East and Africa at Mastercard

He also said that although it is difficult to predict what kind of new technologies will emerge, innovation is always key to boosting productivity.

"Innovation is also at the heart of the card business the company operates, as it drives financial inclusion, supports small businesses and promotes consumption," Ling added.

Over the years, Mastercard has built quite a visible cross-border portfolio in China, with millions of bank cards and acceptance points across the country.

Mastercard NUCC Information Technology (Beijing) Co Ltd, a joint venture between Mastercard and NetsUnion Clearing Corp, received formal approval from the People's Bank of China — the nation's central bank — late last year for domestic bank card clearing activity in China and recently launched the business.

The development allows Mastercard cardholders in China to enjoy payment services provided by the company both at home and abroad.

The State Council, China's Cabinet, published a guideline on improving payment services and enhancing payment convenience in early March to better meet the diversified payment needs of the elderly and foreign visitors.

The executive also emphasized the importance of improving multiple payment channels to enhance payment convenience for inbound travelers.

"The ecosystem in China has evolved into more digital wallet and QR-based, but that's not how the rest of the world works. For any inbound traveler, behaviors are very difficult to change, and that's a huge area still worth investment and development. We are getting a lot of support from the Chinese government and will work with the other private players as well as banks in China to foster an ecosystem that's really friendly to inbound travelers," Ling said.

The financial services provider enabled inbound acceptance via Alipay and Tencent wallets earlier this year, allowing international cardholders to pay like local people at QR code payment points when traveling around China.

Prudential sees opportunities in growing middle-income group

By WANG KEJU
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China's efforts to focus more on domestic consumption for sustainable and balanced economic growth, along with a fast-growing middle-income group and the shifting dynamics of its demographics, will bring massive opportunities for global insurance companies, the top executive of global insurer Prudential said.

China's economy is undergoing a transitional phase, with a stronger emphasis on high-quality and consumption-led growth driven by its ongoing urbanization and modernization, said Prudential CEO Anil Wadhvani.

Though the transitional period presents challenges, including managing debt levels and addressing an aging population, the fundamentals of economic growth haven't changed, and the country will continue to contribute quite significantly to global growth, Wadhvani, who is the global insurer's first global head to be based in Hong Kong in its 175-year history, told China Daily in an exclusive interview.

"There is not a single country

that, at least I know of, hasn't seen macroeconomic challenges, but it is more important how to manage them," Wadhvani said. "Based on some of the policymaking that is promoting greater consumption, I think the prospects only look bright for the Chinese economy in the medium to long term."

In particular, China has targeted its economic expansion at 5 percent for this year, which is an impressive goal as the country is already a super-sized economy, he added.

As the nation's middle-income earner group continues to grow and their incomes rise, there will be increased demand for insurance products and services. This presents an opportunity for Prudential and other companies alike to tap into the expanding consumer base and offer a wide range of insurance solutions, Wadhvani said.

China is also experiencing an aging population, resulting in a growing need for retirement and pension solutions. Prudential can leverage its expertise in retirement planning and provide long-term savings and investment options to address the pension gap in China, he said.

A report jointly released in March by the Insurance Association of China and the Swiss Re Institute has shed light on the inadequate insurance coverage for the middle-aged and elderly population in China.

According to the report, as of the end of 2022, the number of valid insurance policies held by individuals aged 45 and above accounted for about 30 percent of the total across all age groups, which falls short of the corresponding population proportion of 43 percent, indicating a significant insurance gap for China's middle-aged and elderly demographic.

In response to the relatively low market penetration, Prudential has been working closely with its local partner on the Chinese mainland, CITIC Financial Holdings Co Ltd, each investing about 1.2 billion yuan (\$166 million) in cash into CITIC-Prudential Life Insurance Co Ltd, their 50-50 joint venture, in late December.

The capital increase reflects the belief of both partners in the attractive long-term prospects of the life insurance business on the Chinese mainland, Wadhvani said.

Buoyed by strong demand, Evonik to expand presence in chemicals sector

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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China is a major driving force of global economic growth and German specialty chemicals maker Evonik is looking to expand its footprint here, its top executive said.

"The Chinese industry is somewhat ... like the red locomotive of the global economy in the global industry, which has also helped us in Europe to mitigate the impact of the crisis of the last (few) years," said Christian Kullmann, CEO of Evonik, during an interview with China Daily.

Of the 15.3 billion euros (\$16.5 billion) in revenue that Evonik generated last year, about one-fifth came from Asia, and the China market contributed more than 40 percent of the Asia revenue.

"The Asian market, represented by China, has always been a driving force for the global economy and an important growth market for Evonik. Evonik regards China as one of the driving forces of the global economy," Kullmann said.

He also commended the transformation of the Chinese chemicals industry from one of quantity to quality over the past decade, saying "that is what we, especially chemicals companies, are going to benefit from first".

Evonik's confidence in China's

future is based on the scale of the nation's market, its status in the global economy as well as the resilience of the country's economy, he said.

"China's economy has proved that it is able to act in a more resilient way and grow in a more resilient way than other regions have done in the past. So, that is what gives me confidence in this kind of economic progress."

Citing industry data which show that China's global chemical market share will exceed 50 percent by 2030 and contribute to 75 percent of chemical production growth, Kullmann said the country is also the world's largest producer and consumer of specialty chemicals.

"In a nutshell, to remain in China means that Evonik will obtain chances for attractive growth in the future," he said.

China has become the pivot of the global chemicals industry, wrote Zhao Jun, an expert from the China Petroleum and Chemical Industry Federation, in an article published on the website of China Chemical Industry News.

Zhao said China's chemical industry has grown by 8 percent annually in the past decade. In 2021, the nation's chemical sector reached a market scale of 1.7 trillion euros, accounting for 43 percent of the global total, the

European Chemical Industry Council said.

Meanwhile, China tops the world in chemical investment and research and development expenditure, with 100 billion euros and 15 billion euros, respectively, and the two numbers are projected to grow further in the next five years, Zhao said.

"Evonik wants to grow with the Chinese market. Therefore, we are increasing our local footprint to better serve the market by continuously expanding our local innovation and production capabilities," Kullmann said.

Evonik China Co Ltd and Shandong Vland Biotech Co Ltd agreed last year to build a joint venture to expand their presence in gut health solutions products for farm animals globally.

Kullmann said: "It is not an ordinary business. Here, we are focusing on biotechnology. And, for Evonik, I guess it goes without saying that biotechnology is one of the future pillars of the chemicals industry all over the world."

"In the future, we will have much more chances, for sure, better opportunities for collaboration, maybe with partners in Asia, and particularly in China, in fostering those ideas, in gaining next steps, in particular for products or processes in fighting climate change."

ifaw 国际爱护动物基金会

东北虎 Amur tiger

Between heaven and earth, together with other sentient beings, I live.

—Zhuangzi, philosopher, late fourth century BC

天地与我并生，而万物与我为一

—《庄子·齐物论》

AD

BUSINESSFOCUS

CHINA UP-CLOSE

Green thumb culture seen blooming again

Potted houseplants, flowers turning more Chinese homes into veritable gardens as households yearn for aesthetic spaces

By ZHU WENQIAN

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Chinese consumers have been increasingly buying flowers and plants to buoy emotions and beautify living spaces as they pursue more diversified and niche varieties, fueling rosy business growth for retailers.

So far this year, more than 100 million people have purchased flowers, plants and related gardening goods on Alibaba's e-commerce platform Taobao, with nearly 60 percent of such customers being female.

The number of buyers has climbed for three straight years, according to a joint report by the School of Agricultural Economics and Rural Development at Renmin University of China, Taobao and Tmall Group.

The traditional notion that flower and plant fans are mainly those with plenty of free time has changed in recent years. Busy urban consumers have found enhanced spiritual sustenance in tending to flowers and houseplants in their leisure time, the report said.

China stands as the largest producer of flowers globally, and an important trader and consumer of the popular commodities. The country has more than 5,000 large-scale flower enterprises, and some 5.3 million people are involved in the sector, according to the China Flower Association.

Shi Xin, a 34-year-old owner of online store Plant X, which mainly sells tropical plants, saw sales revenue at his store hit nearly 20 million yuan (\$2.77 million) last year, driven by increasing demand for beautiful tropical plants by those wishing for a more exotic decor in their homes and workplaces.

Chinese plants such as blue jacaranda and *Acorus calamus*, which are suitable for home embellishment with their distinct appearances, have seen sales surge online lately. Tropical plants such as green velvet alocasia and turtle-backed bamboo have increasingly become a part of the lifestyle of urban residents, the report found.

Shi said he mainly purchases seeds from different regions and nurtures the plants at a greenhouse in Conghua, Guangdong province. Guangdong stands at the largest production base of small potted plants nationwide.

He launched an online store on Taobao in 2019 and quickly began hosting livestreaming sessions. Livestreaming has significantly helped boost sales, as a large number of consumers enjoyed watching livestreaming sessions during the COVID-19 pandemic and interacting with anchors to gain more knowledge about domestic horticulture.

"Cultivating tropical plants is like buying pop toys for many young consumers, and they highly recognize the value of such plants. Sharing photos of plants with others is also a way of social network-



Growers cut fresh flowers at a plantation base in Zhangye, Gansu province, in March. WANG JIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

ing. The repurchase rate of our plants is about 55 percent," Shi said.

"We are bullish on the growth potential of tropical plants in China. Some experienced green thumbs even buy 100 or more potted plants each year, with many gifting their purchases. In addition, many people are still unfamiliar with the hobby, so it is believed there will be more sales growth opportunities," Shi added.

Buying flowers and plants online has become a growing hobby for an increasing number of Chinese consumers, and e-commerce business has significantly contributed to the growth of the flower economy in China.

A majority of flower and plant buyers online are people aged between 30 and 49. Among the total, over 40 million are high-income individuals, providing opportunities for the flower and horticulture industries to develop toward higher quality and more premium products, the report said.

In particular, consumers from Shanghai, Beijing and Guangzhou, Guangdong province, are most enthusiastic about purchasing flowers. Over 120,000 pots of flowers are delivered from all over

the country to the homes of flower enthusiasts in Shanghai every day, the report said.

Shi has been constantly innovating and hybridizing varieties after purchasing the seeds, and he develops hundreds and thousands of different varieties annually. As long as a couple of varieties become bestsellers online, it contributes to booming sales growth, he said.

For high-end tropical plants, each pot can carry price tags above 1,000 yuan. For mid-end varieties, prices usually range from 300 to 500 yuan per pot. Eyeing the growing demand, Shi plans to hire more employees at his company and introduce more varieties this year.

Despite mainly targeting domestic consumers, he also exported some 100,000 pots of tropical plants to Southeast Asia last year.

In 2019, before the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, sales of flowers reached 255.3 billion yuan in China, a record high. Sales declined due to the pandemic, but gradually picked up later and reached 225.5 billion yuan in 2022, up 4.36 percent year-on-year. The export value of flowers was \$863 million in 2022, growing 25.55 percent on a yearly basis, data from

the flower association showed.

In 2022, retail sales of flowers through e-commerce platforms in China accounted for 54.6 percent of total retail sales value, and e-commerce sales are expected to have exceeded 130 billion yuan in 2023, the association said.

The popularity of cultivating tropical plants in China has attracted more people to entrepreneurial endeavors in the sector. Wu Jiafan, in his 30s, used to work in the artificial intelligence sector in Shanghai, and he would like to shift to a new career path.

As luck would have it, he found that the market for online sales of tropical plants is less competitive compared to many other sectors, so he opened online store Jojo Plant on Taobao in 2019.

He said posting alluring plant and flower photos online is important to attract consumers, and the company has developed a group of packing technologies to make sure that when buyers receive their plants, they are in pristine condition.

"This is a beautiful and green sector that is full of positive energy. A few years ago, tropical plants were more expensive and scarce, so it is believed to be a sector filled with business growth opportunities," Wu said.



A grower picks eustoma flowers at a greenhouse in the Hani-Yi autonomous prefecture of Honghe, Yunnan province, in March. XUE YINGYING / FOR CHINA DAILY

"Tropical plants fit with young consumers' aesthetic demand for something novel and tasteful, and every pot is different. Many plants are synonymous with trends, and some celebrities like to purchase tropical plants, which helps fuel a trend of consumption among

younger folks online," Wu added.

By 2035, China aims to achieve annual sales revenue of over 700 billion yuan in flowers, according to a guideline of the National Forestry and Grassland Administration and the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs.

Cheery cherry blossom vistas fuel holiday escapes

By ZHU WENQIAN

With vibrant spring days around and temperatures rising across China, the country is blooming with flowers, from cherry and peach blossoms to apricot and yellow cole petals, and Chinese travelers have shown a growing preference for taking flower-viewing trips both domestically and abroad.

For the upcoming Tomb Sweeping Day holiday from April 4 to 6, going for a walk and appreciating fields of flowers are popular undertakings, and booking tickets on high-speed railways, engaging in self-driving trips and cycling have become hot options for travelers. In particular, booking volumes for HSR journeys surged nearly sixfold year-on-year, according to Alibaba's travel platform Fliggy.

Viewing cherry blossoms tops the list of a variety of horticultural visual delights during the holiday this year. Wuhan University in Hubei

province; Jiming Temple in Nanjing, Jiangsu province; and Taihu Lake in Wuxi, Jiangsu, stand out as sought-after attractions for cherry blossom appreciation tours, Fliggy found.

Meanwhile, a large number of visitors are opting for group and long-haul tours for flower viewing, and small groups and tailored travel products have also seen rising popularity. Flowers blooming across sprawling fields that are especially photogenic have attracted more attention, said Qunar, a Beijing-based online travel agency.

Based on different flower blooming seasons in various regions, some popular domestic destinations for such sojourns also include Wuyuan, Jiangxi province, which is famous for its cole flowers and bucolic panoramas.

"Most Chinese travelers choosing flower-viewing trips were born in the 1990s, and many of them take self-driving trips for two to three days with their parents or children.

For young people who were born after 2000, they tend to prefer long-haul trips," said Xiao Peng, a researcher with the big data research institute of Qunar.

In addition to appreciating flowers, now is also an ideal season to pick tea leaves. For instance, a two-day tour of the West Lake Longjing Tea Production Area includes the experience of picking tea leaves, as well as an in-depth research tour of the China National Tea Museum.

At the same time, demand for outbound flower-viewing trips has been high this year, as prices of traveling abroad in spring are relatively low — a traditional off-season travel period in China.

Since March, Japanese cities such as Osaka, Tokyo, Nagoya and Fukuoka began to witness cherry blossoms. In addition, Washington, DC and Jeju Island of South Korea have embraced the cheery cherry spectacle. From March to May, appreciating tulips in the Netherlands has

been popular among Chinese travelers as well, said Trip.com Group, China's largest online travel agency.

Booking numbers of travel products to Japan in March and April, reserved in March, surged by 360 percent compared with bookings made in February, Trip.com said.

For bookings of car rentals in the Netherlands in March and April, booking volume jumped by 80 percent year-on-year, with the average rental duration standing at 6.6 days, and the average price of individual orders standing at 1,571 yuan (\$217), Trip.com found.

Tianjin Airlines said since March 10, it has witnessed a growing number of passengers bound for Japan, with the passenger load factor of China-Japan routes up 18 percent compared with month-earlier figures.

The carrier operates flights connecting Tianjin with Tokyo, Osaka and Nagoya. During the cherry blossom season in Japan, the average



Visitors enjoy a spring view at a park in Nanchong, Sichuan province, in March. WANG ZEMIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

passenger load factor of those routes is expected to reach 86 percent, the airline projected.

In addition, a growing number of Chinese travelers prefer to take a few days off from work and take a longer holiday around Tomb Sweeping Day to travel abroad.

So far, the number of overseas hotel bookings during the holiday has nearly tripled over last year. Some popular overseas destinations include Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Australia, Indonesia, and the United Arab Emirates, Fliggy found.

COMMENT

Editorials

Case against Inflation Reduction Act aims to uphold global trade system

China has initiated dispute settlement proceedings against the United States at the World Trade Organization, contesting "discriminatory subsidies" under the US Inflation Reduction Act that resulted in the exclusion of goods from China and other members of the WTO.

The wide-ranging law provides billions of dollars in tax credits to help US consumers buy electric vehicles and US companies produce renewable energy, as US President Joe Biden aims to "decarbonize" the US power sector.

As the Chinese mission to the WTO said, "under the disguise of responding to climate change, reducing carbon emissions and protecting the environment, (these subsidies) are in fact contingent upon the purchase and use of goods from the US, or those imported from certain particular regions".

That leaves China no choice but to launch the proceedings "to safeguard the legitimate interests of the Chinese electric vehicle industry and to maintain a fair and level playing field of competition for the global market".

In response, US Trade Representative Katherine Tai, in a statement, accused China of using what she described as "unfair, nonmarket policies" to the advantage of Chinese manufacturers. Yet it is known to all that the competitiveness of Chinese EVs originates from the Chinese manufacturers' core technology advantages and scale effect that come from their long-term inputs in the field.

Last year, China exported 4.91 million complete vehicles and became the world's largest automobile exporter for the first time. China has exported almost no cars to the US, and the main purpose of the US in enacting this bill has been to prevent Chinese cars from entering the US market, a textbook protectionist practice that violates the WTO rules and principles of fair competition.

In the 1980s, the US government took many restrictive and protectionist measures to protect domestic auto companies in the face of the competition from Japanese-made automobiles. The oil crisis made the situation more unfavorable to US automakers, spurring the US to accuse Toyota of dumping cars into the US market and to pass legislation to limit the number of imported Japanese cars. In the 1990s, the US tried to pressure Japan to increase imports of US auto parts, and after being rejected, it imposed protective tariffs on Japanese cars.

What the US is trying to do now is a repetition of that history. By saying that the IRA was helping to contribute to a "clean energy future that we are collectively seeking with our allies and partners", the US trade chief has made it crystal clear the US government feels no qualms about using its subsidies, which are the "unfair, nonmarket policies" she complained of, to offset the advantages Chinese EV makers have gained through innovation and fair competition.

The enacting of the IRA has seriously disturbed the global industry and supply chains by unleveling the playing field not only for the EV sector but also the advanced chip industry, and other sectors. Contrary to Tai's claims, the US' allies are not exempted from these discriminatory practices either if they have advantages, for instance, in the chip industry.

That's why China is not the only party to express dissatisfaction with the IRA. The European Union, Japan, the Republic of Korea and other major economies, including India, have also expressed opposition to the IRA.

Although it will take a long time for the WTO to arrive at a conclusion on the appeal thanks to the US' blocking of the functioning of its Appellate Body, China's move, instead of taking tit-for-tat countermeasures, demonstrates its respect for the authority of the world trade body and its upholding of the governing system for reliable trade.

Security alliance threatens stability

The United States and Japan are planning the biggest upgrade to their security alliance since they signed a mutual defense treaty in 1952. According to reports, US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will announce plans to restructure the US military command in Japan to strengthen operational planning and military drills between the two nations.

That Biden is to host a summit with Kishida and Philippines President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. next month has fueled concerns that the upgrading of the US military alliances with the two countries will only aggravate the tensions in Asia.

What is more worrying is the fact that Japan is trying to urge Washington to strengthen the command structure in Japan. It wants the leader of US forces stationed in Japan to have more authority, which will make it easier for US forces and Japanese Self-Defense Forces to take joint military action. The military alliance between the US and Japan has been upgraded several times. Every step that has been taken to strengthen the alliance has helped Japan advance along the road to becoming a full-fledged military power.

In 2015, Japan's National Diet enacted a series of laws that allowed Japan's Self-Defense Forces to defend allies in combat. This changed the nature of Japan's military forces, enabling them to take part in military actions outside Japan for the first time since World War II. The upcoming plan to upgrade the US-Japan military alliance is even more dangerous. It will very likely grant Japan's military force the right to launch attacks instead of only taking defensive actions.

Japan has over the past couple of years significantly increased its security capabilities, doubling its spending on defense since 2022, including the proposed purchase of US Tomahawk cruise missiles. The Japanese military has also decided to set up a "Joint Operations Command" next year to improve coordination between the branches of its Self-Defense Forces. Japan described China as an "unprecedented strategic challenge" in its recent defense document. Both Washington and Tokyo do not mince words when hyping up the threat from China. That explains why this upgrading of the Japan-US alliance will make the situation in East Asia even more fraught.

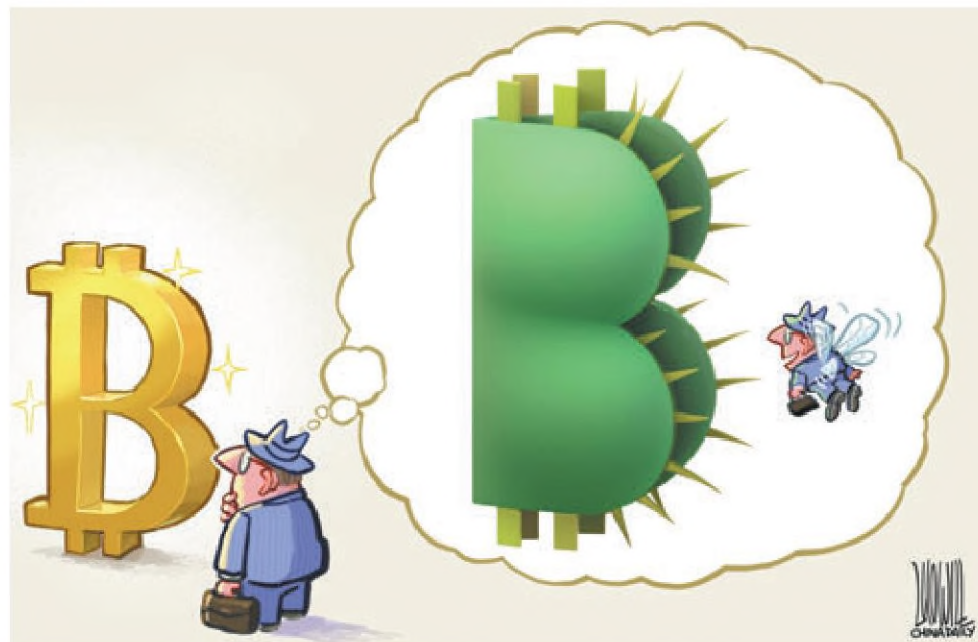
Beijing has stressed time and again that China's rise is peaceful. What China is doing in the South China Sea, contrary to the claims of "aggression", is to defend its own sovereignty and territorial integrity. It is the Philippines with the collusion of the US that has been challenging the status quo with its brazen provocations. China maintains that the maritime disputes should be settled through talks, and can be shelved for joint development if they cannot be settled for the time being.

As far as the Taiwan question is concerned, it is China's internal affair. Whatever way the island is reunited with the motherland, it is none of any other country's business. Not Japan's, and not the US'. Their meddling is ill-intentioned and self-serving.

It is unjustifiable and dangerous for Japan and the Philippines to hitch their wagons to the US' war chariots. By acting as pawns of the US in its geopolitical game, the two countries will only intensify the volatility in the region, which is in neither's interest. The continued upgrading of the military alliance between Japan and the US will increase regional tension, do a disservice to regional peace by increasing the likelihood of Japan making a misstep and create barriers to regional economic cooperation.

China has no intention of waging a war against any country. China's military spending is not for aggressive purposes but to ensure its defense capabilities keep up with the times and that it has the wherewithal to safeguard its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Luo Jie



Opinion Line

China's high-quality growth pillar for Asia's sustainable development

As the global economic recovery remains weak, and the international situation is complicated and intertwined, the world economy has experienced, what the World Bank calls, "five of its slowest years of growth in 30 years".

However, a message sent from the ongoing Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2024 in Hainan holds that despite facing various challenges, Asia still remains the mainstay of world economic growth and an important pillar of economic globalization.

According to a report published by the forum, Asia is expected to grow faster this year than in 2023, at about 4.5 percent, and in purchasing power parity terms, Asian economies are expected to account for 49 percent of the global economy in 2024, making it still a key driver of global growth.

More important, in the face of rising trade protectionism and economic fragmentation, Asian economies have made continuous and greater efforts to advance regional integration, and promote an equal and orderly

multipolar world and economic globalization that benefits all, by promoting infrastructure links and trade or other institutional arrangements with each other, injecting new momentum into the common development of regional countries.

The attraction of the Asian economy lies in its greater resilience, and its sustained high economic growth has made Asia the center of gravity of global development. Asia is also a key region for green and low-carbon development because of technology and is becoming a main destination for global clean energy investment.

As the world's second-largest and Asia's largest economy, China's economic growth is projected to maintain a relatively high level in 2024, significantly supporting the economic growth of East Asia and even Asia, and making it a major contributor to global economic growth. China's super-scale market will also bring huge dividends to the rest of the world. Currently, China is working hard to advance Chinese-style modernization, accelerating the formation of new quality productive forces, and

actively advocating an equal and orderly world multipolarity and economic globalization that benefits all. This fully reflects China's responsibility as a major world economy.

In recent months, China has introduced a series of policy measures to attract foreign investment and is committed to promoting high-quality development driven by new quality productive forces, which will lubricate its efforts to transition from "made in China" to "created by China". At the same time, it will unswervingly open up to the outside world at a high level and strive to create a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment, which will enhance investors' confidence in the strong resilience and development prospects of the Chinese economy.

As the Chinese economy is a pillar of global economic development, the transformed and upgraded Chinese economy can play a more important role in the world economy.

— PEOPLE'S DAILY

Kids should get a better break for overall well-being

The Ministry of Education and three other ministries have jointly issued a notice about launching a national campaign on myopia prevention and control to safeguard children's eyesight.

A paragraph in the notice says that primary and secondary school students should engage in appropriate outdoor activities during class breaks. Additionally, 30 minutes of physical activity during the daily midmorning break will be organized to give students more time to engage in outdoor activities and long-distance viewing, enabling their eyes to rest fully from visual fatigue.

Midmorning breaks can address more than just vision problems. Physical activity during breaks help children to not only exercise but also reduce stress, making subsequent classroom learning more focused and effective. At the same time, midmorning physical activities provide children a plat-

form to engage in social activities, strengthening their social adaptation abilities.

Sometime toward the end of 2023 there was a huge clamor after some schools did away with even 10-minute breaks for primary and secondary school students. The Ministry of Education responded by saying that it would further regulate activities in schools. Before the latest notice was introduced, several related policies had been guaranteeing midmorning physical activity for primary and secondary school students, which have now been implemented in many cities, showing good results.

To effectively utilize the 30-minute midmorning break, teachers play an essential role because they can enrich the activities to the maximum extent by combining the interests and hobbies of children of different age groups and adding various sports activities that will benefit children the most. At the same time, it should be clear

that the midmorning break is not solely the responsibility of physical education teachers. Because of the large-scale activities involved, the large number of participants, and the complex processes, it requires a multilevel hierarchical management mechanism mobilizing school superintendents, physical education teachers, class teachers and other staff members to ensure the breaks are used effectively.

To make the most of the 30-minute midmorning break, it is also crucial to stimulate the enthusiasm of children. Some schools equate the midmorning break with calisthenics, which not only fails to achieve the goal but also leads to a lack of enthusiasm among students. Innovating the form and content of the midmorning break and mobilizing students' enthusiasm and initiative to participate in midmorning activities are urgent priorities.

— GUANGMING DAILY

What They Say

Emotional value spurs consumption demand

As the most dynamic consumer group, the consumption habits of young people are reshaping the consumer market. The consumption of the younger generation is not like that of the elder generation. Young consumers will not lead a frugal lifestyle just to save money.

A recent survey indicates that 49.3 percent of young people attribute their consumption motives to reaping the emotional value of their purchased commodities and services. How to provide consumers emotional value is a focus of businesses trying to appeal

to youthful consumers.

The entertainment market, which features intellectual property such as games, animations, films, television shows and novels, is primarily oriented toward young people. It is predicted that the country's retail sales of derivative toys alone will reach 110.1 billion yuan (\$15.23 billion) in 2026.

The transaction volumes of snacks, perfumes, flowers, light luxury goods, pets, electronic products, blind boxes and self-growth courses and other bought-for-the-self consumer goods have all increased significantly in recent years despite the overall consumption being relatively weak.

As long as consumer goods can provide them with enough emotional value, young people don't mind even a long wait in a

line. This represents one of the driving forces promoting consumption upgrading and expanding domestic demand.

Young people are more willing to choose cost-effective online consumption, so as to ensure every penny spent is worth the money. The consumption concept of "paying for emotional value" and buying online is changing the current and future consumer market, product supply and business competition landscape.

If enterprises can seize the opportunities, effectively adjust their sales formats, and provide more products with high emotional value for consumers, they are more likely to grab the young people's attention in the fierce competition of the consumer market.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT

Fu Suixin

Chinese cranes not 'Trojan horses'

The Chinese leader emphasized on Wednesday that China's economy is healthy and sustainable, and that China will consistently improve its business environment to provide broader development space for enterprises from various countries, including the United States.

At the Nov 2023 summit in San Francisco, US President Joe Biden assured the Chinese side that the United States does not seek to suppress China's development or disengage from it, and instead it is willing to sustain bilateral economic and trade relations. But the US administration has failed to honor this pledge, repeatedly using national security as a pretext to discriminate against, rather hound out, Chinese companies.

On Feb 21, Biden signed an executive order claiming Chinese-manufactured cranes used in US ports posed a threat to national security. The US administration plans to invest \$20 billion over the next five years to upgrade US ports, including replacing Chinese cranes with those produced by a US subsidiary of Japan's Mitsui.

Currently, 80 percent of the cranes used in US ports are made by Chinese companies, which are known to produce affordable and high-quality products. Allegations that the Chinese-made cranes have been fitted with remote control devices and thus pose a "national security risk" are baseless, especially because there is no evidence to prove such allegations. In fact, the US Coast Guard Cyber Command inspected 92

Chinese-made port cranes but has not shown any evidence of the cranes being fitted with illegal or suspicious devices.

In reality, the executive order aims to "reshore" manufacturing to the US. But by trying to revive US manufacturing by suppressing Chinese companies, the US president is going back on his promise.

Besides, in February, Biden ordered the US Department of Commerce to investigate Chinese-made cars, alleging that their software could collect sensitive information on US citizens or remotely control vehicles.

Such national security trope has nothing to do with reality. Few cars used in the US are made in China, and their software is primarily developed by Western companies such as Bosch and Harman. Gaining access to data from car cameras and sensors, let alone remotely controlling vehicles, would be extremely challenging. US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo's remarks on MSNBC, suggesting that Beijing could remotely turn off 3 million Chinese-made cars in the US is incredible and irresponsible and groundless.

National security pretext used by the US is aimed at preventing Chinese electric vehicles from entering the US market and protecting US automakers against potential failure in their competition with Chinese companies.

As Tesla CEO Elon Musk said in January, Chinese automakers will "demolish" global rivals without trade barriers. Faced with intense competition from Chinese automakers, the US government has resorted to using excuses such as

"national security" to suppress them.

Moreover, on March 13, the US House of Representatives passed a bill by a 352-65 vote, which is aimed at banning the video-sharing app TikTok in the US, or forcing its parent Chinese company to sell its US operations to an American company.

But this reasoning is baseless. About 60 percent of TikTok's shares are held by global investors, three Americans are on its five-person board, and TikTok already stores US user data on servers operated by Oracle. Also, and strangely enough, some US lawmakers, referring to the Israel-Palestine conflict, allege TikTok videos are biased toward Hamas and have anti-Semitic content. What they refuse to understand or realize is that the videos don't reflect TikTok's policy or intention; instead, they reflect the different views of young US users who don't necessarily think like US politicians.

Many in the US oppose the government's use of national security as a pretext to target TikTok. They see the bill as being purpose-driven and in violation of the First Amendment to the Constitution. A recent survey by the Associated Press and the NORC Center for Public Affairs Research showed only 31 percent of US adults support a ban on TikTok, while 35 percent oppose it. Former US president Donald Trump, too, opposes any ban because, he said, it would benefit TikTok's competitor, Facebook. Jim Himes, Ranking Member of the House Intelligence Committee, also opposes the

bill, arguing against government censorship of newspapers, broadcasters and social media platforms.

The US administration's suppression of Chinese companies using national security as an excuse is nothing new. Since 2017, the US has been calling China the US' main "rival" and Sino-US ties as "strategic competition", abandoning the previous policy of "engagement" with China.

Emphasizing strategic competition and downplaying economic engagement have led the US administration to prioritize security over economic considerations in its China policy. The US has been increasingly securitizing economic issues, asserting that Sino-US economic interdependence threatens national security and pushing for "decoupling" or "de-risking" with China.

The US administration's use of national security harms not only China's legitimate interests but also overall Sino-US relations. The Chinese government has always opposed the US administration's abuse of power to obstruct normal economic and trade cooperation between China and the US. Using "national security" as an excuse for trade protectionism will weaken the international competitiveness of US businesses and increase costs for US consumers.

The author is a research associate at the Institute of American Studies, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Chen Weihua

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Washington is the global champion of disinformation

Ever wonder why you have read and heard so much negative news about China in the last few years? Some examples: The Belt and Road Initiative is a debt trap; China has been committing cultural genocide in the Xinjiang and Xizang; China is the biggest threat to regional and global security.

An explosive Reuters' report recently revealed just the tip of the iceberg of the reckless US disinformation and smear campaign against China.

According to the report, former US president Donald Trump authorized the Central Intelligence Agency in 2019 to launch a clandestine campaign on Chinese social media to turn public opinion in China against the government.

According to three former US officials, the CIA formed a small team of operatives who used fake internet identities to spread negative narratives about the Chinese government while "leaking" disparaging intelligence to overseas news outlets.

The fact that the US administration and the CIA have declined to comment on the Reuters report shows a tacit admission of guilt by them. Let us forget, the US has spared no efforts in recent years to accuse countries such as China and Russia of spreading disinformation. If you search on the internet, you will get innumerable such stories, reports, seminars and speeches by US officials, from President Joe Biden to Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

The Global Engagement Center created by the US State Department in 2016 and now headed by James Rubin, a former State Department spokesman and ex-husband of CNN anchor Christiane Amanpour, claims its mission is to fight foreign disinformation, but its real aim is perhaps to help maintain the US' position as the global leader of disinformation.

The US' news outlets and think tanks are often used as geopolitical tools in such government disinformation campaigns.

Shortly before the Reuters' exposure, the US intelligence community released its annual threat assessment, accusing China of trying to influence the 2024 US presidential election.

The above developments are nothing but the US administration's efforts to cover its covert disinformation campaign against China.

The Reuters report is similar to the exposure of the US Republican Senate memo in April 2020 which directed its members to blame China for the COVID-19 outbreak and avoid discussing the then president Donald Trump's handling of the public health crisis.

There is no doubt that the US is the global leader of disinformation. In fact, the disinformation and smear campaigns by the Democrats and Republicans against each other in the run-up to the 2024 presidential election show how skillful US politicians are in playing such dirty games.

Biden surely knows how dirty the accusations and counter-accusations are because, according to a CNN poll in July 2023, 69 percent of Republican members and Republican-leaning voters said his win in 2020 presidential election was not legitimate.

The US' news outlets and think tanks are often used as geopolitical tools in such government disinformation campaigns. CNN national security correspondent Kylie Atwood said, rather confessed, in a Brookings talk in March 2021 that "we're going to use all the rhetoric we have to make them (China) look like the bad guy on the world stage", with fellow participants Ryan Hass and Evan Osnos nodding their head.

The US possesses the most powerful disinformation weapons given its dominance of the global media landscape, including its control of popular social media platforms such as Facebook, Instagram and X (formerly Twitter).

It's true that the US administration's disinformation campaign targeting China has somewhat succeeded in fooling many US people as well as people in countries which are US allies and believe in the lies about China and Russia, because Washington wields outsized influence thanks to the reach of its media outlets and think tanks.

When I asked the European Commission spokesman last week about Reuters' revelatory report and its impact on the European Union, he declined to give any direct answer. Nonetheless, the Reuters' exposure is an awakening call for the EU and other economies which have for too long played along with the US and thus promoted the US' disinformation campaign against China.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Pan Hsi-tang

Taiwan must come clean on vessel capsizing

More than a month has passed since the tragic capsizing of a Chinese mainland fishing vessel near Kinmen Islands, but representatives from the two sides of the Taiwan Strait are yet to reach a consensus on what caused the vessel to capsize. Not only has the investigation into the incident been delayed, but also tensions across the Strait have increased.

The rigid stance of Taiwan is not conducive to resolving the issue, especially because the mainland's intensified countermeasures and declaration of routine enforcement in the Kinmen maritime area have taken the ruling Democratic Progressive Party on the island by surprise.

The unfortunate event has morphed from individual narratives into a political issue between the "blue" and "green" camps in Taiwan. The blue camp, represented by Kuomintang, aims for eventual reunification with the motherland, whereas the green camp, represented by the DPP, propagates "Taiwan independence". The DPP's indifferent and ever-changing stance and treatment of the incident as a political issue suggest it is concealing the truth.

The DPP should stop dragging its feet over the incident. And Taiwan's judicial authorities must swiftly make public the investigation results, and offer apologies for the incident, if needed, and admit to any law enforcement errors or excesses. The failure to do so will further escalate tensions across the Strait and have

repercussions far beyond imagination.

The root causes of the incident are the Taiwan authorities' unilateral demarcation of "restricted waters" off islands such as Kinmen and Matsu and conducting "patrols" around the islands. After Tsai Ing-wen's inauguration as the island leader in May 2016, patrolling by the island's maritime vessels increased in "prohibited, restricted waters", and continues even after Lai Ching-te was chosen the new island leader in January. Worse, the island's maritime officials have been using expulsion, detention, fines, confiscation and other means to "deal" with mainland fishermen "trespassing" into the "restricted" waters.

On Feb 14, a Taiwan "coast guard" vessel pursuing a mainland fishing boat in the waters off Kinmen caused four crew members to fall overboard, with two of them drowning. Initially, the island's "coast guard" claimed the fishing vessel capsized accidentally while evading inspection, and thus denied the use of force but failed to provide any video evidence to back its claim.

However, subsequent investigations revealed multiple collisions between the Taiwan "coast guard" vessel and the mainland's fishing boat, with the surviving fishermen testifying that they were repeatedly hit by the Taiwan vessel, strengthening the belief that the DPP was trying to conceal the truth. The Taiwan "coast guard's" initial silence on the collisions only to admit later that there were "multiple contacts" between the vessels, and misreporting the capsizing

time as well as saying they didn't have enough equipment to record the incident, have damaged their credibility.

The Taiwan "coast guard's" actions and statements raise serious doubts. Besides, the statements from the ocean affairs council of Taiwan often lack depth and are issued prematurely, raising suspicion and intensifying tensions across the Strait, which could have negative consequences.

The unfortunate capsizing of the mainland fishing vessel has cast doubts on the Taiwan "coast guard's" transparency. Despite multiple affirmations by Kuan Bi-ling, head of Taiwan's ocean affairs, that the truth cannot be hidden, Taiwan's narrative has shifted repeatedly, oscillating between acknowledging and denying the collisions.

Regrettably, communications between Taiwan and mainland representatives have yielded no results. The DPP's inconsistent statements may well be the main cause of communication crisis. If the DPP wishes to resolve the incident swiftly, it should reveal all the facts about the collision of the vessels. But the DPP keeps emphasizing the "illegality" of the mainland vessel's entry into the waters off Kinmen and the need for "law enforcement", without producing any crucial video evidence of the incident. The contradiction in Taiwan's statements and its attempt to create an illusion of "official" and "equivalent negotiations" between the two sides of the Strait shows the DPP's inability to manage cross-Strait relations.

Communication between the two sides has broken down due to the absence of video evidence and mutual trust. Cross-Strait negotiation mechanisms have come to a standstill. In such a case, the two sides should consider allowing judicial personnel from across the Strait or a neutral third party to re-examine the scene and determine the cause of the death of the fishermen. The cross-Strait judicial assistance agreement has room for cooperation on special cases.

If Taiwan "coast guard's" actions led to the collision and casualties without evidential support, involving mainland judicial personnel or experts, or inviting a neutral third party to investigate the issue could help prevent communication on the incident from being stalled over disputed facts.

The capsizing incident has further strained cross-Strait relations due to the mishandling of the situation by the Taiwan authorities. Although the incident remains unresolved, there's a general consensus, especially among Kinmen residents, that Kinmen should serve as a peace zone rather than a frontline of confrontation. Hopefully, Xiamen and Kinmen will become exemplars of cross-Strait exchanges and integration, contributing to the peaceful and integrated development of cross-Strait relations.

The author is a professor of cross-Strait relations and international relations at Fu Jen Catholic University in Taiwan. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

GLOBAL VIEWS



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

KERRY BROWN

Vive la difference

China and the West have long history of being unsure how to view each other

Over the period of the COVID-19 pandemic, I remember wondering why in recent years the dialogue between the West and China had become so fractious and difficult. It seemed that every day there were more arguments and fights on social media and elsewhere. Sitting in the United Kingdom, I was struck by how the people with the loudest, most certain opinions about the situation were those who clearly knew very little — politicians, journalists, and social media writers who seemed full of certainty about what they were saying, making very complex things black and white.

My book *China Incorporated* was published during this period, and was an attempt to set out why simple positions and arguments on the issue of China's place in the modern world were unlikely to be helpful. This is a complex situation. It is not just that China is politically different from the West. That certainly creates plenty of challenges and issues. But it seemed increasingly to me that there was something deeper running under these tensions.

In 2019, while writing a previous book on the history of modern China, I referenced the works of Gottfried Leibniz, the German philosopher from the 17th and early 18th century. I knew that he had written on China, although I had never looked in detail at what he had said. That led me to also remember that Voltaire a little later had also referred approvingly, at least early in his career, to China.

The knowledge of these two was indirect. They had studied the works of the Jesuit missionaries working in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) and early Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), of whom the most famous today is Matteo Ricci. But this had given them an awareness of a culture that was different, one that intrigued and to some extent impressed them.

Inspired by this, I decided to put together a collection of the main writings on China by key European figures, from the time of Marco Polo in the 13th century to the late 20th century. I realized that there was no source book where these important materials were gathered together in English in one place. The thinkers I picked were figures who had immense impact on the development of mainstream Western thinking, but had, separately, developed an interest in China. They included Max Weber the father of modern sociology, Bertrand Russell the British philosopher, Carl Jung the psychoanalyst, and the German philosophers Georg Hegel and Karl Marx.

It was pretty clear when I selected the key texts that these writers had produced on China that the one thing that united them across their varying perspectives and standpoints was their recognition, however they interpreted it, that the China they either had heard about, or in some cases actually visited, was different. This quality of being different figured a lot in what they said. The challenge for them was how to interpret this, and what sense to make of it.

During the Enlightenment, the German philosopher Leibniz and the French philosophers Voltaire and Montesquieu wrestled with how to make sense of a China with

its long civilization and its very (to them) distinctive world view, and the Christian Europe that was their home. Here was a place with a rich literary and philosophical tradition, and one that had seemingly developed wholly unconnected to Europe for most of the past 2,000 years or so.

The Qing governance system fascinated these writers, but it elicited very different responses from each of them. For Leibniz it was a case of trying to empirically understand why and how this system worked, and what sense to make of its underlying worldview. His attempt at a wholly realistic appraisal was countered by Voltaire, who to some degree idealized the Chinese mode of doing things. He compared the selection by exams of a bureaucratic elite with what he saw as the corrupt system in Europe, with the Roman Catholic Church being the most egregious institution.

Against these two perspectives, Montesquieu offered a largely negative portrayal of China as a place of despotism, of absolutist governance centered on the emperor, and of great power inequalities. This he held beside the aspirations for more egalitarian governance then being promoted in Europe, and soon to be embedded in the newly founded United States.

Looking back over this period and the subsequent development of history, it is striking how these three different postures largely still exist. There are those who idealize or demonize China, and then some in between who attempt to give as objective a view as they feel capable. No one, of course, feels that they really capture the full truth. But the disposition of Europe, and of the US these days, is to largely



SONG XIAOYAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

wrestle with a China that continues to be very different, and either feel this is a source of massive tension, or a source of inspiration, or, for the Leibniz of our time, a cause of contemplation.

Compiling this historic source book, and then the further book I wrote on China and its relations with the outside world, the one insight I gained is that the principal issue which the West and China have always had is how to manage their cultural differences with each other. For the West, with its

embrace of pluralism, this should surely be a manageable issue. China's rise should not be a huge problem, because in a diverse world, diverse perspectives should be welcome. I remain surprised that it is still proving so hard for some to deal with a world where there is a new player occupying a prominent place whose main characteristics is that they are culturally different. China's differences here might be challenging to become more familiar with, but they should not be threatening. We all need a more

positive outlook now. China's global role is a huge opportunity, and offers something fresh. It should not be seen as a threat, even if there are areas where there are challenges and differences.

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LIAO FAN

True multilateralism

China pursues modernization without seeking hegemony, which is significant for the international order and the rule of international law

As the Joe Biden administration promised to "bring multilateralism back", the "rules-based international order" has become a buzzword in its diplomatic rhetoric. In international law, especially international economic and trade law, being "rules-based" is supposed to contrast with being "power-based", which deceptively adds some "legitimacy" to the United States' assertions.

In essence, the so-called "rules" are defined and interpreted by the US; and the so-called "rules-based international order" is also dominated and controlled by the US. So, what the US pursues is to put its domestic law over international law, prioritize regional international law over universal international law, and politicize international law. It is a selective multilateralism in the US style.

International law is a set of rules formed through specific procedures or methods that reflect the general consensus or broad agreement of the international community. However, the US deliberately weakens "state consent", an essential element of international legal rules, thereby instituting a basis to belittle the authority of current international law, breaking away from its constraints, and formulating its own "rules" that are in line with its national interests.

For example, the Office of the US Trade Representative explicitly states that any World Trade Organization provisions and their applications that are inconsistent with US laws are not effective within the US. US economic sanctions, especially secondary sanction measures, often violate international law and fundamental principles of international relations, affecting the sovereignty, security and development interests of other countries as well as the legitimate rights and interests of individuals and businesses. The "extraterritorial jurisdiction" stemming from US civil litigation rules keeps expanding

and repeatedly infringes on the sovereignty of other countries, violates the international obligations assumed by the US and disregards the principle of "reasonableness" in international courtesy and international law.

The term "rules-based international order" and its use highlights the US-style selective multilateralism and serves as a more covert and misleading alternative to the "liberal international order". The US support for multilateralism was mainly driven by its core national interests aimed at seeking legitimacy, sharing responsibilities and maintaining leadership in international affairs, and it had a strongly practical and instrumental aspect. From this comes the common double standard of the US in international affairs, which is based on what is known as "American exceptionalism".

On the one hand, it requires other countries to abide by rules advocated by the US. On the other hand, it refuses to abide by rules that are unfavorable to it or incompatible with the kind of rules that it has in mind. This sort of instrumentalist and opportunistic approach of "using the rules if they are compatible and discarding them if they are not" is not true multilateralism, but selective multilateralism.

Openness and inclusiveness are the essence of true multilateralism, and they also mark the watershed between genuine multilateralism and selective multilateralism.

China has always adhered to the principles of openness and sharing. At the global level, China upholds the authority and effectiveness of multilateral institutions represented by the United Nations. At the



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

regional level, it has initiated the establishment of organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, and promoted the launch of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. China seeks strategic alignment and complementary advantages without replacing existing international mechanisms or

forming exclusive cliques. Inclusiveness means that the construction of the international order and the formulation of international rules must be able to accommodate and tolerate differences, whether they are differences in development stage, social

system, or ideology. In global climate change governance, China adheres to the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities. Regarding WTO reforms, China insists on special and differential treatment for developing countries. These are examples of inclusiveness.

Some Western powers have long considered themselves as standard setters of the world. They fear that China's increasing influence on international norms may change the game rules they are comfortable with.

China, a representative of developing countries and emerging powers, should adhere to international law, take the lead in safeguarding the authority of international law, disprove the theory of "a strong country must seek hegemony" with concrete actions, and transcend the world historical narrative of the periodic law of hegemony. The fragmentation of international law still persists to a considerable extent, with significant inadequacies in dialogue, consultation and coordination among various regions, mechanisms and arrangements, as well as a lack of global top-level design.

China's proposals for global development and security initiatives feature inclusiveness (aiming at all countries worldwide), equality ("initiatives" rather than "strategies" or "guidelines") and sharp focus (on development and security). The initiatives are capable enough to promote synergies among international mechanisms and arrangements. In the post-hegemonic era, no

single country has the ability to set rules for the world and support the effective operation of international systems. A pluralistic international community does not accept any single country dominating international affairs. Multilateralism and pluralistic co-governance are the inevitable choices. This objectively requires all countries in the world to abandon hegemony, confrontation, and "zero-sum" thinking and choose the path of consultation, dialogue and win-win results.

Currently, global governance is challenged by a lack of international public goods. International institutions and legal rules are needed to help tackle governance failures and promote the provision of public goods. As a responsible major country, China has launched the Belt and Road Initiative as a public good for the international community.

In the future, from the perspective of the international rule of law, while adhering to the multilateralist stance of extensive consultation, joint contribution, and shared benefits, efforts should be made to formalize and institutionalize the Belt and Road cooperation with enhanced legal governance. In this way, the BRI will become a sustainable international cooperation platform that is easier to expand.

The concepts of the "Chinese path to modernization" and the "new form of human civilization" support and advance multilateralism. Chinese-style modernization is a modernization that follows the path of peaceful development and does not seek hegemony, expansion, or spheres of influence. This is of particular significance for the multilateral international order and the rule of international law.

The author is deputy director-general and research fellow at the International Cooperation Bureau at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences and a professor at the Law School at the University of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CULTURE

If, as the American comedian Milton Berle once said, "Laughter is an instant vacation", then audiences in the Macao Special Administrative Region recently enjoyed a weeklong getaway as the first Macao International Comedy Festival garnered guffaws from March 11 to 18. Diverse comedy films and theater plays from multiple cultures were staged for local audiences at various venues, including the Macao University of Science and Technology, the MGM Theater, the theater of The Parisian Macao, and the Macao Culture Centre.

International theatrical productions, such as the Spanish musical comedy, *A Comedy of Operas*, and the Norwegian play, *A Dance Tribute to the Art of Football*, were among the highlights.

Cinematic exhibits included *Luxembourg, Luxembourg* (2022), *Rent Boys* (2011), *Friend Zone* (2019), *Back to Love* (2022), *Mr Donkey* (2016) and *Men of Deeds* (2022).

Additionally, artists took to the streets of Macao for flash mob performances of excerpts from such musicals as *Rent* and *Avenue Q*, adding to the immersive experience of the festival.

Co-organized by Chinese comedy production company Mahua FunAge and cultural communication company Beijing Damai, the festival spanned both Macao and Hengqin New Area in Zhuhai, Guangdong province.

Leong Wai-man, director of the Cultural Affairs Bureau of the Macao SAR government, notes that such cross-border collaborations contribute to deeper exchanges within the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area. She emphasizes the festival's role in showcasing China's optimism, confidence, openness and inclusivity through the universally beloved art form of comedy.

The event also features forums and salons where veteran comedians and entertainment industry professionals discussed issues related to comedy development. Renowned director Zhang Yimou, along with director Ning Hao and comedians Shen Teng and Ma Li, shared insights into the sophistication of comedy. Zhang says comedies not only elicit laughter but also prompt reflection on human nature and social phenomena.

Regarding the criteria for evaluating comedy, Ning highlights the importance of humor conveying various emotions or values beyond just laughter, stressing the potential of comedy to reach profound truths without relying solely on sentimentality.

Zhang Zheng, associate professor from the School of Journalism and Communication of Tsinghua University, affirms the hosting of this comedy festival from the perspective of industry development.

"Laughter has a broad market foundation, and comedy, as an important vertical category in the cultural industry, has vast growth potential," Zhang Zheng says.

He believes that taking comedy as a key entry point and focus of the cultural industries in Hengqin and Macao will surely lead to rapid and positive development, allowing the enduring transmission of the power of laughter and culture.

Cultivating new talent

In the diverse array of theatrical performances at the Macao International Comedy Festival, a unique addition has been the debut of a Cantonese version of the interactive whodunit play, *Shear Madness*.

Throughout the unfolding drama,



Clockwise from above left: Actors and actresses from Macao join the debut of a Cantonese version of the interactive whodunit play, *Shear Madness*, during the first Macao International Comedy Festival. Well-known comedians Shen Teng (fourth from right, front row) and Ma Li (third from left, front row) attend the festival's opening ceremony on March 11. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

You've got to be joking

The Macao International Comedy Festival stages some serious funny business, **Xing Wen** reports.



Left: Stage play *Crazy Happy Version of Liaozhai — Three Lifetimes*, produced by Mahua FunAge, is performed during the festival. Right: Spanish musical *A Comedy of Operas* was invited to perform at the festival.



a murder takes place, allowing the audience to discern clues, interrogate suspects and engage in solving the most amusing mystery in the annals of crime. The outcome varies each time, prompting many attendees to return repeatedly to witness the mayhem.

Since September 2021, Mahua

FunAge has been staging the Chinese adaptation of the whodunit play in cities, such as Shanghai, Zhejiang province's Hangzhou, Hunan province's Changsha, and Tianjin.

The Cantonese version presented at the Macao festival was specially tailored for the local audience. Most of its actors are all from the first

comedy-training class, co-organized by Mahua FunAge and the School of Theatre at the Macao Conservatory.

"For this rendition, we wanted to involve local Macao actors," explains

Zhang Chen, president of Mahua FunAge and the initiator of the Macao festival. "However, since we were unsure of the number of well-

trained actors in the region, we decided to organize a training class. Eventually, we found that young people engaged in local theater were enthusiastic and eager to sign up."

He notes that participating in stage plays allows actors to develop a perception of the audience, enabling them to accurately gauge

which comedic elements resonate with them.

To enhance the organization of the comedy festival, the Beijing-based comedy company has founded its Macao branch with plans to establish long-term residency performances in Macao to provide more acting opportunities for local young actors.

"We aim to gradually establish roots in Macao. Cultivating a new generation of actors requires careful and meticulous work," Zhang Chen adds.

Lam Wai-kei, a graduate of the University of Macau and a theater enthusiast, became the first employee hired by the Macao branch. She also serves as the producer of the Cantonese version of *Shear Madness*.

When Lam was a law student at the university, she actively participated in the university's drama club, engaging in both theater performances and production.

She attended evening classes at the School of Theatre at the Macao Conservatory, studying acting. After graduating, she joined a local Macao theater group dedicated to producing original experimental plays.

"Macao has no shortage of young people passionate about the arts. Local young actors are eager to explore different forms of theater," she says.

"I have some actor friends around me who often travel to Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou for auditions, seeking opportunities to perform in stage plays.

"What actors need are opportunities, platforms and resources. The Macao International Comedy Festival has provided us with an additional opportunity to engage with and understand comedy, especially in the Mahua FunAge-styled comedic genre," she adds.

In 2018, Lam had a work stint in Shanghai.

She found that both Shanghai and Macao are highly international cities with a fusion of Eastern and Western cultures.

However, in comparison, Macao has a relatively smaller audience size and a lower demand for theater. Lam believes that Macao needs time to mature and develop its performing arts industry.

Before the official debut of the Cantonese version of *Shear Madness*, Lam organized previews to get feedback from local audiences from different backgrounds and age groups. She noticed that the level of interaction between the audiences and actors was not as high.

"Audiences from the Chinese mainland are already familiar with immersive theater," Lam says.

"But in Macao, it's still in its early stages, and audiences rarely have the opportunity to watch stage plays with strong audience interaction. We need to stimulate interest in this aspect."

However, she is delighted that the more than 20 staff members involved in *Shear Madness* showed great enthusiasm, often engaging in intense discussions about the script.

"We hope to start with this group of actors, inspire a batch of comedy enthusiasts in the audience, create a positive cycle and ultimately establish the roots of comedy culture in Macao," she adds.

Looking ahead, the Macao festival aims to gradually produce a series of locally distinctive small to medium-sized theatrical productions. These will have residency performances in both Macao and Hengqin, hopefully fostering the growth of comedy in the region, according to the festival organizers.

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What's on



City of color

The arrival of spring conjures up one of the most scenic moments in Jiangnan, the region south of the lower reaches of the Yangtze River, where the mountains, waters and architecture, engulfed in mist and rain, seem touched by celestial elegance.

A classical painting exhibition now on at the Nanjing Museum provides an impression on paper of the city in Jiangsu province, which has been a historical and cultural center of the

Jiangnan region since ancient times. Running through to April 8, *First City in Jiangnan* is an exhibition of landscape paintings by great artists from the 14th century until today. It captures the varied scenery throughout the year at Nanjing's famous spots, including Jiming Mountain, Mochou Lake, Zhongshan Mountain and the Yuhuatai area.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 321 Zhongshan Donglu, Xuanwu district, Nanjing, Jiangsu province. 025-8480-7923.

Timeline of painting

The great leaps in technology have transformed the method and presentation of artistic creativity, but although no longer as dominant as it was once, painting remains the main canvas — quite literally — upon which many express themselves. *Questionings on Painting: a World*



Task, an exhibition at the Art Museum of the Central Academy of Fine Arts, examines the multiple orientations five artists have been exploring with paint over the years. Their paintings are representative of the painterly language of both established and emerging artists of vary-

ing ages. Chen Lei's work is grounded in the images, half-figurative and half-abstract, preserved in his memories. Chen Xi revisits a running rabbit as her main motif to demonstrate the changing mentalities of people in a world that is quickly evolving. Dai Zengjun opens up a dialogue on life with a vibrant palette and strokes of passion. Wu Xiaohai dwells on the spirituality of nature and lives lived in the wild, while Wang Xiyao's work shows the influence of living and working in a globalized context.

The exhibition is the first of its kind to be mounted by the Research Center of Contemporary Art Critics and Curation at the Central Academy of Fine Arts since its recent establishment. It runs until April 20. 9:30 am-5:30 pm, closed on Mondays. 8 Huaqiudi Nanjie, Wangjing, Chaoyang district, Beijing. 010-6477-1575.

Evolving art

A touring exhibition of selected Western art from the Tokyo Fuji Art Museum, showing the dynamic evolution of painting over the past four centuries, is now on in Chengdu, Sichuan province. *Where the Gaze Reaches* assembles work by important figures and their studios, such as French painters Jean-Auguste-Dominique Ingres and Jacques-Louis David, the Italian-born American artist John Singer Sargent and Austria's Gustav Klimt, whose pioneering brushwork kept ushering the languages of painting to new frontiers.

The exhibition is being held at the Chengdu Art Museum through to June 23 and was previously shown in Shenyang, Liaoning province, Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, Guangdong province, with the support of Art Exhibitions China.



10 am-8 pm, closed on Mondays. 181 Huayan Lu, Jinniu district, Chengdu, Sichuan province. 028-6306-8368.

LIFESHANGHAI



Tweaking the taste of spring

Traditional Qingming Festival snack gets makeover with novel stuffings, earning it appreciation beyond the Jiangnan region, **Lin Shujuan** reports.

Every year, from mid-March to early April, as the Qingming Festival approaches, Zhang Min's life revolves around the green glutinous rice balls known as *qingtuan*.

A native of Shanghai in her early 50s, Zhang previously ran a restaurant for over a decade. Thanks to her culinary expertise, she has garnered a loyal following on WeChat for her homemade seasonal delicacies, with *qingtuan* being one of her most sought-after treats.

The delicacy's shiny green exterior is made of glutinous rice flour mixed with freshly extracted green grass juice, and emits a delightful aroma. Typically, it contains stuffing like sweet red bean paste. First made about 1,000 years ago, *qingtuan* originated as a sacrificial offering and has evolved into a seasonal street snack popular in southern China during the annual Qingming Festival.

In recent years, driven by endorsements from key influencers on social media and the publicity generated by the new fillings introduced every year by established Shanghai food brands, the appeal of this seasonal delicacy has transcended its traditional production area in the Jiangnan, or the region south of the Yangtze River along its lower reaches, to get to nearly every corner of the country.

This surge in popularity is evident not only in the long queues forming outside Shanghai's venerable stores but also in the hundreds of thousands of orders placed on e-commerce platforms like Taobao and JD, as well as on fresh grocery delivery apps like Dingdong.

For Zhang, the growing popularity of *qingtuan* means an influx of orders from her friends and relatives in the three weeks leading up to Qingming, which falls on Thursday. Nevertheless, she embraces the busiest season of the year and celebrates the resurgence of *qingtuan*, which she says embodies the magic of Chinese culinary tradition.



Many traditional delicacies, like *tangyuan* (glutinous rice balls stuffed with black sesame or peanut butter) for the Lantern Festival and *zongzi* (sweet or savory stuffed rice dumplings wrapped in bamboo leaves) for the Dragon Boat Festival, use glutinous rice as a primary ingredient. What sets *qingtuan* apart is its use of the green juice extracted from tender grass, which is only available in spring. This makes it a seasonal delicacy. With its soft, sweet texture and fragrant grassy aroma, it symbolizes the end of winter and the arrival of warmer weather.

While *qingtuan* has long been cherished as a taste of spring by the people of the Jiangnan region, in 2016, Xinghualou, a century-old Shanghai brand, introduced a novel filling — salted egg yolk and pork floss — which was quickly championed by key social media influencers.

Since then, the delicacy has broken free of its status as a regional snack, and has become a must-buy for foodies around the country every Qingming. Despite initial doubts about its sustained popularity, it has proved to be an exception. New fillings have been introduced every year, and this creativity has prompted a reconsideration of the magic of this traditional yet seemingly mundane snack.

Each year, established Shanghai names, including Shendacheng, Wangjiasha, and especially Xinya, introduce new varieties, attracting novelty-seeking customers. The range of fillings has expanded from the traditional sweet red bean paste to include salted egg yolk with shredded pork, hairtail fish, dried bean curd with Indian aster, pickled freshwater fish, hairy crab roe, and even beef curry.

Xinya has been at the forefront of the most innovative offerings, with

its new varieties often being the most unexpected. This year, it has incorporated hairtail fish and Chinese toon, both seasonal ingredients, into its list of fillings. According to Chen Jie, the store manager at the Xinya branch on Nanjing East Road, it has proved particularly popular.

Currently, the daily sales at the store range from 7,000 to 8,000, peaking at close to 20,000 during busy times, Chen says.

A similar level of popularity can be seen at the Changli branch of Dexingguan, a time-honored brand that dates back over 100 years, which primarily serves *qingtuan* with traditional flavors.

Zhang Jian, the inheritor of intangible cultural heritage at Dexingguan, emphasized that their *qingtuan* are made and sold on the spot, following traditional methods and using pure natural barley grass juice, which imparts a fresh aroma

“It is generally believed that the essence of Chinese cuisine is to consume the right food in the right season. *Qingtuan* is the very embodiment of that essence.”

Zhang Min, *qingtuan* enthusiast and pastry chef

Top from left: Customers line up to purchase *qingtuan* at Shendacheng, one of the century-old delicacy brands in Shanghai that is keen on innovating new varieties of the spring snack. A tourist takes a photo of *qingtuan* bought at Shendacheng with the storefront as a background. PHOTOS BY GAO RUIQIANG / CHINA DAILY Staff members at Wangjiasha, a delicacy store with more than 60 years of history in Shanghai, prepare *qingtuan* right on the spot at the store. **Left:** *Qingtuan* stuffed with minced Indian aster and dried bean curd is one of the most popular specialties Wangjiasha has to offer. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

and retains the traditional taste. The sales of *qingtuan* currently range from 3,000 to 5,000 a day, with an estimated peak of around 10,000 during Qingming.

“The traditional method of making green rice balls allows residents to taste the spring in a timely manner,” Zhang Jian says.

One resident, also surnamed

Zhang, who has been a regular customer for years, agrees. He says purchasing *qingtuan* at Dexingguan has become a family tradition to welcome the arrival of spring.

Qingtuan also appeals to the younger generation. One tourist recently purchased eight at Dexingguan, saying that her daughter, who previously studied in Shanghai, had been feeling nostalgic for freshly made *qingtuan* from the old brand stores.

While many attribute the rise of new flavors and the enduring appeal of old sentiments to the long-standing popularity of the delicacy, Zhang Min slightly disagrees.

Though she is a Shanghai native, Zhang Min disliked the delicacy until 2018, when she participated in a small *qingtuan* workshop where her interest was piqued. It was then that she realized that it was a tradition, rather than a cheap snack.

“Once you understand the culture and tradition *qingtuan* embodies, you'll appreciate it as a seasonal delight,” Zhang Min says. “It is generally believed that the essence of Chinese cuisine is to consume the right food in the right season. *Qingtuan* is the very embodiment of that essence.”

Since then, she has become an enthusiastic maker of the delicacy and has devised a number of new fillings. Following numerous trials, she introduced new varieties featuring fillings such as jujube paste and pine nut, that have earned her a constant following.

Zhang Min is careful to use only high quality ingredients and takes a precise, caring approach to making the *qingtuan*.

“In *qingtuan*, I see the respect our ancestors had for food and nature, which is its enduring appeal for me,” she says.

Liu Kexin contributed to this story.

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By HE QI
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Bread festival butters up a new trend

Among the many street markets that Buna & Pate have taken part in, Bread Wander, a carnival for bread lovers held at the Bund Finance Center on Shanghai's Fengjing Road, was the most surprising.

The bakery and cafe, which opened in Shanghai in 2021, has had a stall at the market devoted to delectable freshly baked bread and expertly brewed coffee for the last two weekends.

Bringing together some 80 popular bakeries from around the country, Bread Wander has ignited a newfound enthusiasm for artisanal breads and has attracted numerous attendees. The shopping center hosting the market reported an increase of 125 percent year-on-year in footfall during the event, compared to the weekend average for March last year.

Although it only had a small booth, Buna & Pate's average daily sales reached nearly 20,000 yuan (\$2,771).

“This was our first time participating in Bread Wander, and the enthusiasm of the consumers exceeded my expectations. In addition, they are experts and like to choose niche products,” says Wei Xin, chief baker at Buna & Pate. “This gives us more confidence in the market.”

Apart from opening a new store last year, Wei says that the cafe's



More than 80 bakeries from across the country participated in Bread Wander, a carnival for bread lovers, at the Bund Finance Center in Shanghai earlier this month. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



number of loyal fans have grown 5 to 10 times over the past three years. This kind of growth and rising consumer enthusiasm has long been visible in the market.

According to data from Qianzhan Industry Research Institute, Shanghai is one of the fastest-growing markets for bread, and most bakery brands choose to establish their headquarters there. Revenues generated by Shanghai bakeries are also ahead of other cities.

Winshang.com, the website dedicated to commercial property information, released data in January showing that Shanghai has around 1,300 bakeries and dessert stores, nearly 500 more than Beijing. This places the city first in the country and offers its consumers a wide variety of baked products.

In further testament to the growing allure of bread in Shanghai, Shanghai Qu Na Chi (The Best Places to Eat in Shanghai), a prominent

official WeChat account that curates culinary experiences in the city, published a city bread walk route on March 18. It introduces 11 bakeries along the 1.2-kilometer-long Panyu Road in Changning district, each renowned for distinctive offerings, among them Little RoLi, Bake No Title, and Luneurs.

“Shanghai has a well-developed bakery culture in a variety of business formats. There are many types of bakeries from different coun-

tries, including France, Italy, Germany, Japan, Turkey and Australia, as well as niche products from Mexico, Portugal, and Eastern Europe,” says Lin Weijie, co-founder of Bread Wander.

“The large foreign community and deep-rooted habit of eating bread in Shanghai, coupled with its Western cuisine and commercial atmosphere, undoubtedly make baking here the most developed in the country,” he adds.

Lin explains that as early as 2010, a French bread festival appeared in Shanghai, followed by small bread markets in places such as Tianjin, Chongqing and Dali in Yunnan province.

He adds that 2023 marks the starting year of the arrival of China's first large-scale bread festival held in Chengdu which sold more than 150,000 loaves of bread over the course of three days and attracted over 200,000 attendees. Called La Fete Du Pain Chengdu then, the festival is the one that inspired this year's Bread Wander.

“Shanghai's Bread Wander was our fourth stop since our official establishment in 2023, following Dali in Yunnan, Guangzhou in Guangdong, and Chengdu,” says Lin, adding that his team has been in search of delicious bread since 2019, and is focused on communities and independent bakeries and developing community bakery maps.

“At the consumption level, bread is a more day-to-day presence in the lives of Shanghai residents, and is deeply integrated into their diets. Eating bread and drinking coffee is a very natural choice for people here, without the need for a specific reason,” Lin says.

“In the future, we will continue to launch bread activities to drive the bread craze and industry interaction, with a focus on promoting bread culture and related lifestyles,” he adds.

CULTURE



A generational odyssey

For nearly a century, a single family has committed itself to bridging the Chinese and Greek cultures, **Li Yingxue** reports.

In China, there exists a remarkable family whose legacy stretches across three generations, all bound by a singular, noble pursuit: the deepening of cultural bonds between China and Greece.

This family's story was mentioned in an article by President Xi Jinping, published in the Greek newspaper Kathimerini (The Daily) on Nov 10, 2019, during his visit to Greece.

The piece shines a light on the Luo family's unparalleled dedication to bridging two richly historical nations.

At the center of this saga is Luo Niansheng, a name now synonymous with the meticulous translation and passionate study of Greek literature and drama.

Alongside him, his son Luo Jinlin and granddaughter Luo Tong — imbued with the same fervent spirit of intellectual curiosity and cultural diplomacy — continue to weave this intergenerational tapestry.

Since the 1980s, Luo Jinlin has revitalized Greek drama in China with his father's translations and innovative Chinese opera techniques. Luo Tong further bridges the two cultures by promoting Chinese studies in Greece, establishing its first private Chinese cultural center and interpreting for Chinese diplomats.

Together, they have not only contributed to the global appreciation of classical and contemporary Greek works, but also laid the foundation for a friendship between the two nations, built on the mutual respect and understanding of each other's cultural heritage.

Grandfather, the translator

Luo Niansheng was born in 1904 in a village in Weiyuan county, Sichuan province. He studied at Tsinghua University and later became a government-sponsored student in the United States. However, he decided to leave his studies and his imminent degree to pursue his passion for Greece, becoming the first Chinese student to do so.

Learning Greek was no easy task, with its complex grammar and alphabet, but Luo Niansheng's love for the language helped him master it in just a few years.

After completing his studies, he returned to Sichuan in 1936 to teach. Luo Jinlin recalls seeing his father immersed in books all day — teaching English during the day and translating Greek works at night.

Luo Niansheng's deep commitment to Greek literature was like a profound dialogue with ancient Greek civilization. "Opening books of Greek literature every morning is my greatest joy," he once said.

From publishing his first translation of the Greek tragedy, *Iphigenia in Tauris*, in 1936, until his death in 1990, he dedicated nearly his entire life to translating Greek literature.

He left behind nearly 10 million words in translations and papers, including over 50 ancient Greek literary and artistic works, such as Aristotle's *Poetics*, and *Rhetoric*, and a collection of Greek epigrams.

Even in his final days, he was translating Homer's epic *The Iliad*. Luo Niansheng once humorously commented on his potential epitaph: "If it must be written, let it be this — 'Devoting my life to translating Greek dramas was trouble enough.'"

In December 1987, the Academy of Athens gave Luo Niansheng its highest award for literature and art. A year later, the Panteion University of Social and Political Sciences gave



him an Honorary Doctorate for his significant contributions to the study and dissemination of ancient Greek culture.

Luo Jinlin fondly recalls that his father's dedication to translating Greek literature was balanced with a humble lifestyle. His father's desk was a simple bed board, and he used the same wooden chair for decades. In his leisure time, he enjoyed walks in Zhongshan Park in Beijing and playing bridge with family and friends during holidays.

Despite returning from Western studies with progressive ideas, his father maintained traditional attire, even wearing an old cloth robe to teach in the 1960s when it was uncommon. "He never imposed his views on us; instead, he encouraged us to develop freely," Luo Jinlin says.

Father, the director

As a child, Luo Jinlin often assisted his father in copying books. However, he wasn't interested in the stories then; he was just motivated by the reward — a popsicle.

"When I joined the Central Academy of Drama, my first class was on Western theatrical history, including Greek drama," he recalls. His teacher for the class was a student of his father. Through studying, he gradually developed a deeper understanding of Greek drama.

In 1985, as Luo Jinlin rehearsed *Oedipus Rex*, his then 81-year-old father willingly offered to serve as the production's literary adviser. Despite the freezing temperatures, he passionately explained ancient Greek history and the drama to the actors.

The next year, *Oedipus Rex* premiered at the Central Academy of Drama's experimental theater, marking the Chinese mainland's first performance of an ancient Greek tragedy.

It received wide acclaim from audiences, leaving Luo Niansheng overjoyed. "After 50 years of waiting, I finally see this masterpiece shine on our stage. A dream come true," he wrote.



Top: Luo Jinlin during the curtain call after the performance of *Thebes* in 2004. Middle: Luo Jinlin (left) and Luo Tong at a rehearsal for the play *The Birds*. Above: A group photo of the *Oedipus Rex* production team shows Luo Jinlin (third from left in the second row) and Luo Niansheng (fourth from left in the third row). PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Oedipus Rex was performed over 20 times. After just its fifth show, the Greek government formally invited the company to perform in Greece. Building on this success, Luo Jinlin directed several other ancient Greek plays translated by his father.

"Ancient Greek dramas are rich in perspectives, and offer deep insights into human nature and society, even after 2,500 years," Luo Jinlin observes.

His dedication to Greek drama aims to showcase its lasting relevance, emphasizing themes of truth, goodness, and beauty, and celebrating humanity.

Plays like *The Trojan Women* criticize war and champion peace. The *Women at the Thesmophoria* advocates for gender equality. And *Oedipus Rex* prompts self-reflection. Luo Jinlin seeks to highlight the contemporary issues and human concerns in the plays.

"For decades, the challenge of my work has been to see if drama from two very different cultures and times can merge. It's about creating a mix, like coffee with milk, where elements of one are found in the

other," he explains.

He finds his solution by merging the beauty and techniques of Chinese opera with the drama of ancient Greek plays, creating a blend of two ancient cultures for today's world.

His adaptation of *Medea* into Hebei Bangzi opera was a huge hit internationally, and was performed over 250 times. It was so popular that it even outshone a performance by the famous Italian opera singer Luciano Pavarotti, which took place on the same street in Milan, with audiences filling the corridors of the theater.

"Foreign audiences really enjoy our plays and often struggle to get tickets. In Colombia, a mother and daughter shared a ticket to see it, one watching the first half, the other the second, showing just how popular it was," Luo Jinlin says.

He explains that Chinese opera's expressive power, with its abstraction and symbolism, displays a rich Asian beauty. Ancient Greek drama, known for its profound themes and solemnity, provides depth and impact. He aims to fuse these qualities, not just mix them, creating a blend where the sum is greater than its parts.

"Drama acts as a mirror to human life. Exploring the interaction and fusion between Eastern and Western theater has been enlightening for me. This journey has shown that different civilizations can coexist in harmony, complement and enrich each other," he explains.

To date, he has directed over 100 productions, including 16 ancient Greek dramas. His work has reached audiences not only in China, but also across Europe, Asia, and Latin America, with over 300 performances worldwide.

In 2009, he was honored as an Ambassador of Greek Culture by the Athens government. Additionally, in January, he received the 9th Huilin Prize for his outstanding contribution to promoting Chinese culture internationally.

Despite being 87 years old, Luo Jinlin shows no signs of slowing

down. He starts his day at 5:30 am, writing and teaching with dedication. This year, he plans to publish a comprehensive 300,000-word acting guide and to stage a production of Homer's *Odyssey*.

The cultural ambassador

Influenced by the two generations before her, Luo Tong went to study in Greece before even finishing her undergraduate degree. Unlike her elders, she decided to introduce Chinese culture to Greece.

"My grandfather's generation did a lot to bring Greece to China, but Chinese culture still lacks promotion in Greece, especially at the grassroots level. I felt it was my turn to take China to Greece," she says.

After graduating, Luo Tong began teaching at the University of Athens. In 1992, with her encouragement, the university's language school started offering Chinese language courses.

In 2001, Luo Tong founded the InterChina Cultural Center, initially focusing on teaching Chinese. Gradually, it expanded to include kung fu, calligraphy, painting and cultural performances, becoming the first — and now highly respected — Chinese cultural center in Greece.

"People used to say they studied Chinese out of curiosity for its ancient civilization. Now, besides curiosity and admiration, they see China as an emerging market with huge potential and as the future of the world. The closer the relationship with China, the better," she says.

Nikos Kazantzakis, a prominent figure in modern Greek literature, who has visited China twice, famously said, "Confucius and Socrates were two masks on the same face of human logic".

The Luo family's experiences have repeatedly proven this profound connection.

In 1988, Luo Niansheng urgently needed medical treatment in Greece for a severe intestinal issue, but faced a dire situation because his rare blood type wasn't available. Word spread, and over 200 Greeks came forward to donate blood, successfully finding a match.

Years later, when Luo Tong was studying in Greece, she learned that a Greek professor needed a blood donation. Remembering the kindness her grandfather received, she immediately went to donate.

In 2018, Luo Tong returned to China, after overseeing the widespread growth of Chinese language teaching in Greece. Back home, she also ventured into the theater industry, introducing foreign plays, assisting her father with his lectures and negotiating collaborations with theaters.

She and her father worked together on the ancient Greek comedy, *The Birds* by Aristophanes, bringing it to life on the stage of the National Centre for the Performing Arts.

They adapted the play to make it more accessible to Chinese audiences, using familiar Chinese names for the characters and incorporating Chinese paper-cut art, resulting in a surprisingly successful performance.

Luo Tong sees her father and grandfather as grounded individuals who, regardless of the world around them, have tirelessly worked toward their goals. "Their quiet dedication is a rare quality in our generation, which tends to be more impulsive and easily distracted. Their steadfastness is a silent but invaluable lesson to me," she says.

Reflecting on her journey thus far, she says, "I once said that my grandfather had done everything there was to do in bringing Greece to China. I was wrong. Times change, and so do the needs and levels of exchange. Cultural exchange is an ongoing process; it's never truly complete."

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Seminar, magazine discuss civilizational exchanges

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Mutual understanding and trust, interconnectivity, as well as mutual learning and complementation, are crucial for exchange among civilizations, said cultural expert Xiong Chengyu.

Yet, all of these serve the ultimate goal of mutual benefit and prosperity and fueling an innovative future for all, added the director of the Institute for Cultural Development and Communication at the Commu-

nication University of China.

Xiong was attending a seminar in Beijing on March 22 celebrating the 10th anniversary of President Xi Jinping's speech at the UNESCO Headquarters in Paris on March 27, 2014, during which he highlighted diversity, equality and inclusiveness among civilizations, and pointed out the importance of exchange and mutual learning between civilizations as a key impetus for human progress, global peace and development.

Wang Yiwei, director of the Institute of International Affairs at the

Renmin University of China, quoted the African philosophy of Ubuntu, "I am because we are", which emphasizes the interconnectedness of individuals and their responsibilities toward each other, and argued that a civilization cannot perfect itself without exchange and mutual learning with others in a truly equal way.

Liu Yuzhu, head of the China Foundation for Cultural Heritage Conservation, stressed in his keynote speech the importance of telling Chinese stories through cultural artifacts.

He proposed strengthening the study of Chinese civilization and creating innovative programs, such as TV shows, exhibitions and interactive digital projects, to promote traditional Chinese culture, while deepening international collaboration, enhancing talent cultivation and encouraging social participation.

A former director of the National Cultural Heritage Administration, Liu said that the Asian Fund for Cultural Heritage Conservation attached to the foundation is actively taking part in international

exchange and cooperation programs on Asian cultural heritage preservation.

The foundation is also deepening its links with other Asian countries, as well as the breadth and depth of international exchange, by funding cultural heritage conservation and joint archaeological projects, cooperating on launching exhibitions and supporting forums and personnel exchanges, he said.

During the seminar, a special issue of Civilization Magazine, 2014-2024 *Civilizational Exchange and*

Mutual Learning Illuminating the Glory of Human Civilization, was released.

The special issue discusses the origins of Chinese philosophical thinking and the Chinese viewpoint on the history of civilization, the past and present of the Silk Road, historical and modern-day practice — and the achievements — of civilizational exchanges between China and other parts of the world, as well as the role the Belt and Road Initiative has played in building a community with a shared future for mankind.