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# CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 THURSDAY, JANUARY 5, 2023


# China, Philippines vow to ensure stability

## Nations agree to advance cooperation on regional interests

By XU WEI
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China and the Philippines have agreed to expand their contributions to regional peace and stability and bring more benefits to the people of both countries.

The two nations also vowed to strengthen pragmatic cooperation in agriculture, infrastructure, energy and people-to-people exchanges when President Xi Jinping and Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr held talks in Beijing on Wednesday.

Xi said both sides had agreed to restart consultation on oil and gas exploration and had pledged to properly deal with maritime issues through friendly talks.

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Marcos was on a state visit to China, the first non-ASEAN country he has visited as president. During their talks, Xi said that Marcos is the first foreign leader China has hosted this year, which speaks volumes for close bilateral relations. Before the talks, Xi held a grand welcoming ceremony for Marcos at the Great Hall of the People.

Xi hailed the historic decision made by Marcos' father and Chinese leaders 48 years ago to establish diplomatic relations. He also commended the Marcos family for remaining committed to promoting bilateral friendship, despite changes in the international landscape and the Philippines' domestic political situation.

Beijing has always made Manila a priority in its regional diplomacy and views bilateral ties from a strategic and overall perspective, he said.

Xi said he is willing to maintain frequent strategic dialogue with Marcos to plan future steps for bilateral relations and make the two nations good neighbors, relatives and partners that understand and help each other and work together for win-win outcomes.

Xi called on the two countries to further align development strategies, help each other's modernization process and contribute to each country's development and prosperity.



President Xi Jinping and visiting Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr attend a welcoming ceremony on Wednesday before their meeting at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. SHEN HONG / XINHUA

China, in its push toward rural vitalization and for a stronger agricultural sector, is willing to help with the agricultural and rural development of the Philippines and cooperate in the development of seeding, production, processing and storage, Xi said.

He called for steps toward cooperation on infrastructure and connectivity, saying that collaboration on key infrastructure projects must be implemented.

The two sides should also expand cooperation on telecommunications, big data and e-commerce, and work closely in the green energy sector, including photovoltaics, wind power and electric vehicles, he said.

China stands ready to expand imports of high-quality agricultural and fishery produce from the Philippines and support more investment by Chinese companies in the Southeast Asian country, he said.

Xi highlighted the need to enhance people-to-people exchanges and cooperation on basic and vocational education, saying that both sides should explore opportunities to work together in meteorology and aerospace.

He reaffirmed China's readiness to focus on cooperation and development with the Philippines and other member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations and ensure the central role of the ASEAN in regional cooperation.

It is important for the region to get rid of the shadows of the Cold War, stay away from bloc confrontation and maintain its edge in development and prosperity, Xi said.

The two nations should beef up support for each other, uphold their common interests and those of developing nations, amplify the common values of humanity, and promote the building of a community with a shared future for mankind, he said.

Marcos told Xi that he was honored to have been a witness to the establishment of bilateral ties between the two countries 48 years ago. "It has now become my responsibility, and certainly my privilege, to be able to continue that legacy, to continue to promote the friendship between the Philippines and China," he said.

Marcos said he was ready to continue to improve bilateral relations and deepen cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, energy, people-to-people exchanges, trade, investment and the digital economy.

He also met with Premier Li Keqiang and Li Zhanshu, chairman of the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, China's top legislature, on Wednesday.

WORLD WATCH
By Dennis Munene

## Country seeks development, peace for humanity

During the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China in October, President Xi Jinping said that since the founding of the CPC a century ago, the Party has taken a remarkable journey of dedicating itself to achieving lasting greatness for the Chinese nation, and has committed itself to the noble cause of peace and development for humanity.

Historically, having experienced internal conflicts and the devastating impacts of wars such as the Opium Wars of 1839-42 and 1856-60, China has placed the concept of peaceful development at the core of its foreign policy.

The concept shows that China has risen to global power and leadership through peaceful means, rather than war, and that its development also contributes to world peace. In the 21st century, China has integrated the ideas of peace and development into an integrated concept that reflects the new thinking about bringing peace to Africa through development.

For China, peace and development are inextricably linked. Thus, under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the Belt and Road Initiative, the twin engines of the new China-Africa architecture of development, Beijing has expanded its investments in African countries to support their economic growth and development. The offer of "public goods" has seen China become Africa's principal cooperation partner in infrastructural development, trade, investment and economic cooperation.

Furthermore, China has taken seriously its development role by providing global public goods such as the Global Development Initiative and the Global Security Initiative to boost economic growth, reduce poverty and inequality and promote global stability.

*See* ***Commitment,*** *page 3*

## *NEW LIGHT SHED ON BEGINNINGS OF CHINESE CIVILIZATION*

Archaeologists enjoy fruitful year with series of discoveries

in-depth

By WANG KAIHAO
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While jade holds vital clues to civilizations in China dating back thousands of years, it also plays an important role in present-day life.

Last year, a ceremonial jade artifact known as a *bi* was the inspiration for the medals presented at the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics that bore concentric circle designs. The artifact was unearthed at the Lingjiatan site alongside the Yangtze River in Hanshan county, Anhui province.

The site, which is 5,300 to 5,800 years old and was first excavated in 1987, continues to provide researchers with surprises.

Last month, new discoveries at the site were announced by the Anhui Provincial Institute of Cultural Relics and Archaeology. Covering an estimated 1.6 square kilometers, the site is home to the ruins of human settlements, and is the largest of its kind in the lower reaches of the Yangtze.

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**Further opening-up can boost domestic consumption**
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## CES: Chinese companies display tech innovation

By CHANG JUN in Las Vegas
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Chinese enterprises, which account for 16 percent of exhibitors at this year's CES, are showcasing a wide array of innovative and disruptive products and services at the annual consumer electronics industry gathering.

According to the CES organizer's statistics, the 480-plus Chinese companies present include big names such as TCL, Lenovo and Hisense as well as small startups.

Product categories range from audiovisual, electric vehicles, metaverse, smart home and autonomous driving to gaming and computer software, digital health and sustainable energy.

Among the lineup from China are 180 startups and small-sized companies headquartered in Guangdong province, one of China's most economically vibrant areas, which also plays a vital role in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area.

RoboSense, based in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, joins its South China peers by bringing to CES their automotive-grade LiDAR M series and E series sensors.

Regardless of operational scale and development history, Chinese companies at CES tend to position themselves as global players, and many reiterate the importance of and their commitment to continuous innovation and research.




David Gold, president of TV manufacturer Hisense (USA), speaks at CES Media Day on Wednesday in Las Vegas. CES 2023 kicks off Thursday. CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

During a presentation Wednesday at a media preview session, David Gold, president of TV manufacturer Hisense (USA), introduced the company's new product UX — an 85-inch, 4K, mini-LED QLED TV powered by Hisense's new ULED X platform. The unit features more than 20,000 mini-LEDs.

"We are not just about innovating, we are about making technology widely available" for consumers, said Stephan Yao, general manager of Hisense USA. Accordingly, 5 percent of Hisense's yearly revenue will be used to boost R&D.

TV industry analysts ranked Hisense No 1 in China and second globally in volume of shipments in the second quarter of 2022.

That hard-won market position enabled Hisense to become an official sponsor of the recently concluded FIFA World Cup in Qatar 2022.

Evaluated by a stringent judging panel and competing against counterparts worldwide, award-winning Chinese companies were "honored for outstanding design and engineering in consumer technology products", said the CES organizer.

In home audio and video components and accessories, TCL Electronics won two innovation awards for its Mini LED 4K TV 75C935 and Mini LED 4K TV 75C835, scoring high on display, design, and viewer accessibility for home theater experiences.

Zhang Shaoyong, CEO of TCL, said the company has established a well-rounded supply chain on a global scale, with business spanning Asia, the United States, Europe, Latin America and Oceania, and sales in over 80 countries and regions.

For computer giant Lenovo, the aim is to provide individuals and small-to-medium-sized businesses with devices and computing systems in an ever-changing workplace.

The ThinkPad X1 Fold, with the adoption of a 16.3-inch display that folds down to the footprint of a 12-inch notebook, won the CES Innovation Award in the computer hardware and components category. Its Project Chronos, which captures movement via a camera that replicates users' real-time actions, propelled Lenovo to an award in virtual and augmented reality.

In robotics and smart homes, several products made in China, such as the Enabot EBO X family companion robot, Snapmaker Artisan 3-in-1 3D printer, and Airly Chair, outperformed their international counterparts and were awarded for the deployment of connectivity and artificial intelligence technologies.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

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**Left:** An arc-shaped jade ornament known as *huang* was unearthed at the Lingjiatan site in Hanshan county, Anhui province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Right:** Exquisite pottery discovered at the Nanzuo site in Qingyang, Gansu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# **Excavations:** Cultures prospered through exchanges

The discoveries included an arc-shaped jade ornament known as a *huang*. It is 23.6 centimeters in diameter and the largest such item found at a Chinese archaeological site from the Neolithic period, which in China dates back 4,000 to 10,000 years. Another slim jade artifact with a chubby dragon's head at one end, also attracted archaeologists' attention due to its design, which had not been seen before.

Since 2020, the foundations and charred earthen ruins of a huge structure for public use, estimated to cover more than 5,500 square meters, have been gradually unearthed at the site. Other key findings include pottery shards and a stone *yue* — an axe-shaped ceremonial artifact indicating power, and the largest of its type from China's Neolithic period.

Zhang Jingguo, a researcher at the Anhui institute and one of the first to excavate the site, said: "The variety and fragility of the jade unearthed at Lingjiatan has rarely been seen at other sites. It demonstrates the outstanding craftsmanship and rich spiritual world of those who lived there.

"These new findings further consolidate the site's landmark status in studying early civilizations. The site is key to unfolding the start to 5,000 years of Chinese civilization."

Zhang said jade dominated people's lives at Lingjiatan. In previous findings, *huang* shaped with tiger heads indicated a military alliance. Jade eagles adorned with sun-like designs showed that people worshipped celestial gods, while jade swabs could be clues to a fortune-telling ceremony.

"The emergence of a stratified society and ceremonial system marked an advance in social development. People nurtured emerging religions, and some social elites took on the role of communicating between the gods and humans. What we've seen at Lingjiatan depicts the dawn of a civilization," Zhang said.

Archaeological evidence shows that Lingjiatan Culture disappeared suddenly about 5,300 years ago.

Around the same time, a powerful jade-worshipping "regional state" rose in the Yangtze River Delta centered on the Liangzhu site in what is now Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and which lasted for about 1,000 years. In 2019, the Archaeological Ruins of Liangzhu City were inscribed as a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

Although there is still a lack of direct archaeological proof to link Lingjiatan and Liangzhu, Zhang believes there could have been close communications between people from the two cultures.

"They could have migrated from Lingjiatan along the Yangtze River to strongly influence the birth and development of Liangzhu Culture," he said.

## Efforts urged

Numerous mysteries still surround early civilizations in China, but archaeologists' work in recent decades has provided vital clues to the past.

Presiding over a group study session of the Political Bureau of the Communist Party of China Central Committee in May, Xi Jinping, general secretary of CPC Central Committee, urged further efforts to advance the studies of Chinese civilization to help boost the nation's cultural confidence.

Last year marked the 20th anniversary of a national research program dedicated to tracing the origins of Chinese civilization. Some 400 scholars nationwide working in 20 natural and social sciences disciplines have taken part in the program, with archaeologists playing the main roles.

Four archaeological sites dating from between 3500 BC and 1500 BC — Taosi in Shanxi province, Shimao in Shaanxi province, Erlitou in Henan province, and Liangzhu — have been the focus of related studies. Numerous other major ruins from this period, mainly along the Yangtze, Yellow and Liaohe rivers, have also been highlighted.

Along with the Lingjiatan site, many others yielded rewarding discoveries last year.

At the Niuheliang site in Chaoyang, Liaoning province, which is 5,000 to 5,500 years old, archaeologists discovered nine symmetrical stone platforms on a mountain, well-equipped drainage facilities and relics used for rituals.

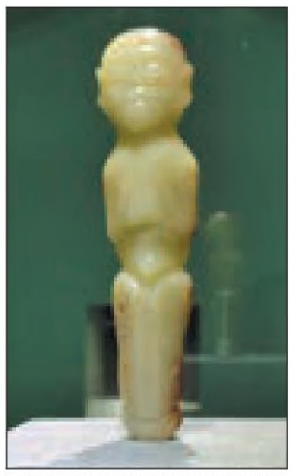
Jia Xiaobing, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology, who worked at the site, said other constructions may have been used for different functions. "The overall design of such a large-scale construction project demonstrates a society's ability to mobilize and organize," he said.

At the Bicun site in Lyuliang, Shanxi, which is about 50 km from Shimao, ruins that are 3,800 to 4,200 years old are thought to have marked the frontier of a regional power, and probably played a crucial role in a complicated defensive system.

Zhang Guanghui, a researcher at the Shanxi Archaeology Academy who led the ongoing excavation, said, "There might have been a key strategic route connecting Central and Western China, which was pivotal for society at the time."

At the Nanzuo site in Qingyang, Gansu province, archaeologists unearthed the ruins of a huge city dating back 4,700 to 5,200 years. A palace, whose design can be seen in imperial cities in later dynasties, and exquisite pottery may provide clues to a previously unimaginable power hub on the edge of Loess Plateau.





**Left:** Ceremonial jade blades, known as *yazhang*, were unearthed at the Erlitou site in Yanshi, Henan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Right:** A jade figurine excavated at the Niuheliang site in Chaoyang, Liaoning province. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY

Han Jianye, an archaeology professor at Renmin University of China who led the excavation, said the site may have functioned like a national capital.

Wang Wei, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Academic Division of History and a leading expert in the origins-tracing program, said, "The development of Chinese civilization has been continuous, and various roots of our civilization were linked with and frequently exchanged with others, gradually forming a shared community.

"For example, it cannot be mere coincidence that various regions had the same admiration for jade and many of their jade patterns were similar," Wang said.

"A network for communication and exchanging information probably existed among upper classes in different societies. Dragons were also commonplace in various belief systems. These factors formed the foundation for a united Chinese civilization in later history."

Although Niuheliang and Lingjiatan are more than 1,400 km apart, their jade has a high degree of similarity.

Liu Guoxiang, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology, said various types of jade had the same influential effect.

"People interacted and learned from each other, and cultures prospered as a result," he said.

"They recognized each other's values, views and morals, and provided a big picture of how people from northern and southern areas of present-day China mixed between one another."

## Cultural core

Throughout history, the Central China Plains, also known as Zhongyuan, which are mainly located in Henan, were considered the cradle of Chinese civilization, mainly due to ancient documents recording the area's glorious past.

But in recent decades, excavations nationwide have largely changed public perception of this concept, with archaeologists now comparing the infancy of Chinese civilization to a starry night sky.

In 2020, the 5,300-year-old Shuanghuaishu site in Gongyi, Henan, became arguably one of the most rewarding discoveries for those exploring the origins of Chinese civilization in recent years.

Covering more than 1.17 sq km, the site yielded the ruins of what may have been a national capital with moats, public graveyards, a large-scale residential area, sacrificial altars, along with many other key heritage findings. An exquisite ivory silkworm sculpture provided crucial clues to the origins of silk.

Further studies at the Huangshan site in Nanyang, Henan, attracted public attention last year.

A large complex of ruins dating back 4,000 to 7,000 years depicts a crossroads of cultures.

Yuan Guangkuo, an archaeology professor at Capital Normal University, said numerous jade processing workshops, residential compounds, and the ruins of canals and piers provide a picture of a grand transportation network that involved mining, the handicraft industry and jade production.

In addition, various cultural elements from the Yellow River to the north and the Yangtze River to the south were found at the Huangshan site.

"These findings expand our knowledge of Chinese jade," Yuan said. "They are also an example of how a society became complex as it absorbed different cultural elements and stepped into an era of civilization."

When the Erlitou site emerged in Henan about 3,500 years ago, the Central China Plains became the "brightest star in the sky". Usually considered the capital city of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC), the first central Chinese dynasty recorded in history, the site marked the initial boom of Chinese bronze civilization.

Wang, from the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said: "A united community was gradually formed in China through lasting interactions among various regions. Regional cultures became part of a grand melting pot of civilization and the Central China Plains finally rose to the fore as advanced elements from elsewhere emerged in Erlitou."

## More expected

In tracing the origins of Chinese civilization, researchers used to focus mainly on the period dating back 3,500 to 5,500 years. Looking to the future, Wang expects the study range to be expanded.

For example, as highly developed agriculture was one of the keys to forming civilization, the inclusion of the birth of agriculture in China in relevant studies can broaden people's horizons, Wang said, adding, "This means we can focus on even earlier times."

At the Jiahu site in Henan, turquoise was found in 8,000-year-old tombs, while some tombs housed flutes made from bones. "The division of social roles and differentiation between social classes can be seen from the scale of the graves and the objects they contain," Wang said.

He added that such a prelude to civilization commonly appeared elsewhere, and followup studies may produce more related discoveries.

Chen Xingcan, head of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology, said interdisciplinary research involving more natural science can provide a better view of how civilization started and endured.

"For example, studies of plants can tell us what different groups of people ate and also show how they migrated and communicated with others," he said.

Wang added that natural science can help analyze unearthed relics. For instance, in-depth studies of climate change and the environment will help people today understand the conditions that influenced the evolution of civilization.

Chen said historical documentation should never be excluded in tracing the origins of Chinese civilization.

"These documents offer a framework for us to learn about the past. Archaeological excavations fill in the gaps by providing previously unknown physical evidence concerning people's daily lives. These documents and excavations can provide us with the full picture," he said.

Chen also stressed the importance of comparative studies involving other major ancient civilizations elsewhere in the world.

"We can form a better view of Chinese civilization in the context of cultural communications across the Eurasian continent. As a big picture of civilizations begins to emerge worldwide, we can better understand our own characteristics," he said.

*Fang Aiqing and Wang Ru contributed to this story.*





**Left:** The Bicun site in Lyuliang, Shanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Right:** An archaeologist works at the Huangshan site in Nanyang, Henan. CHEN HUI / XINHUA



Part of the exterior city wall unearthed at the Shimao site in Yulin, Shaanxi province. The site is one of four dating from between 3500 BC and 1500 BC to feature in related studies. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# TOP NEWS



Cleaners stand in an empty concourse at London's Waterloo Station on Tuesday as rail workers in the UK continue to strike over pay. TOBY MELVILLE / REUTERS

## Strikes over pay make for bleak midwinter in UK

By **WANG MINGJIE** in London
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As the cost of living has skyrocketed and wages have remained stagnant this winter, a wave of strikes has swept across the public sector in the United Kingdom, disrupting the lives of millions of people.

Experts warn that with the government unwilling to budge, the various industrial actions could result in prolonged harm to economic recovery.

Nurses, rail workers, ambulance staff, customs and immigration staff, bus drivers and postal workers are all either in the middle of strike action or are planning walkouts.

"The reason why there are so many strikes is that the cost of living has dramatically increased, which means that real wages have dramatically decreased," said Bernd Brandl, a professor of management at Durham University Business School. "If wages are not adjusted to rising living cost and inflation, employees have to bear the costs for the increases."

According to the Office of National Statistics, inflation in the UK has been hovering at around 10 percent since July, hitting a 41-year high of 11.1 percent in October, before dropping slightly to 10.7 percent in November.

However, average wages in Britain have risen much slower than inflation, at around 5.7 percent. The Office of National Statistics reported that in the public sector, regular pay growth from July to September was just 2.2 percent, compared with 6.6 percent in the private sector.

Nora Colton, director of the Global Business School for Health at University College London, said: "This situation means that the real wages of employees in the UK are not keeping pace with the costs, so the purchasing power of the pound is weak. Alongside this, the costs of essential goods, such as food and fuel, have risen and, in some cases, at a rate higher than the average inflation.

"Given the inflation levels in the UK and concerns about a looming recession, public sector employees who are worried about their future and their ability to keep up with the uncertain economic outlook are striking for more pay."

Mick Pender, a lecturer of human resource management at Keele University, said, "It is important to recognize that the current disputes to some extent represent the culmination of a number of years of wage stagnation, especially in the public services, where the government has attempted to freeze or keep pay rises to very modest levels since the 2008 financial crash."

However, it would be a mistake to view all of this action as purely economic, Pender said. In many cases, workers have also seen their workloads increase as a result of spending cuts in the public services, and in some sectors, understaffing has added to work intensification.

In an escalation of their pay dispute with the government, nurses are set to walk out at dozens of hospitals across England on Jan 18 and 19, while network railway workers started a fresh wave of strikes on Jan 3.

Despite the chaos, the government does not seem willing to reopen pay negotiations, insisting that high pay demands will hit the fight against inflation and jeopardize recovery.

Chris Bovis, a law professor at the University of Hull, said, "The government does not want to give in during the industrial disputes because such action will adversely affect the perception of the government and allow every sector of the economy to demand pay rises, which in turn will escalate the rising of inflation."

The government is hoping the frequent disruptions in public services will result in public support fading away, Bovis said. However, such an assumption is not safe, because the cost of living and the negative economic outlook of many sectors could instead galvanize support for existing industrial action and even prompt other sectors to join in.

"My worst feeling is that the industrial disputes will be widespread over the next year, often with disruptive effects which have not been seen in the UK for at least 40 years," Bovis added.

Brandl said the reason that Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's office is standing firm is because it wants to show strength and the ability to resist demands, and the government has the impression that it has more chances of winning in the medium term.

"It is very much unknown if the government's solution impacts spiraling inflation at all," Brandl said. "The main reason behind this is that the reason for the inflation is not caused by higher wage demands. ... Even though politicians and some media are saying that there will be (a) wage inflation spiral, this is far from true because the cause of inflation is imported inflation."

## Panda Yaya well cared for, expert says

By **LI HONGYANG**
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Giant panda Yaya has been well cared for since being lent to the Memphis Zoo in the United States in 2003, and no signs of neglect have been found, a Chinese expert said in response to panda lovers' concerns about her health.

Xie Zhong, senior engineer and vice-president of the Chinese Association of Zoological Gardens, also said that China will bring back two giant pandas lent to the US, including Yaya, as soon as possible because the two are old and Yaya, who is 22, has skin disease.

Xie said that the association organized experts from zoos and research centers to assess Yaya's health condition after giant panda lovers raised concerns about whether Yaya had been neglected.

Results based on videos of the giant panda, monthly health reports and annual physical examinations showed that Yaya's blood tested normal and nothing was detected in an imaging examination. The panda's health level was found to be moderate.

A representative sent by the Chinese Embassy in the US to inspect the breeding of giant pandas at the Memphis Zoo confirmed that the pandas have been cared for well.

In 2006, Yaya began to lightly shed fur, and the situation worsened in 2014. Experts from the Memphis Zoo and China adopted many treatment options but didn't get good results, Xie said.

"The skin disease has genetic origins. As the panda gets older, hormonal fluctuations caused by changes of season can result in sparse and uneven fur. It is difficult to cure the disease, which poses a big challenge to current captive giant panda breeding," Xie said.

In 2003, Yaya, who was born in the Beijing Zoo, and male giant panda Lele, born in the Shanghai Zoo in July 1998, traveled to the Memphis Zoo in the US state of Tennessee as part of a Sino-US giant panda protection and research program.

It had been determined that the Memphis Zoo, founded in 1906, had capable wildlife breeding management, disease prevention and control, and safety management programs, Xie said.

The zoo spent $16 million to build a giant panda facility with traditional Chinese cultural elements, set up a breeding management and veterinary team, and planted about 4 hectares of bamboo.

A special team collects fresh bamboo for the giant pandas every day and provides them with biscuits, grapes and sugar cane.

Since the giant pandas arrived in the US, the zoo has submitted to the Chinese side monthly health reports, including their daily weight and food intake. The zoo also submits annual medical examination reports, Xie said.

# China to remain crucial market for global firms

### Country has advantages in attracting foreign investors with industrial competitiveness

By **ZHONG NAN** and **LIU ZHIHUA**

China will remain a crucial market for global companies as high-level opening-up, emerging industries and the size of the consumer base boost confidence amid subdued global investment sentiment, according to analysts and heads of foreign business chambers.

With China entering a new era of innovation and green-led growth, multinational corporations will focus on building digitally enabled factories and research facilities. They will also look to expanding their market share in sectors such as the automotive industry, green development, consumer goods and high-end manufacturing, they said.

The Chinese market is vital for many German companies, said Jens Hildebrandt, executive director of the German Chamber of Commerce in North China.

He said German businesses will keep investing in the country and they expect growth in many industries, especially in areas related to decarbonization of manufacturing, electric-powered vehicles and internet-connected vehicles.

Liu Chang, president of the government affairs forum at the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China, said China-US or China-EU decoupling is not realistic and any such move would likely harm both sides. The decoupling scenario would not be realistic because of market demand, supply chain stability, multinationals' existing presence and the current growth in China and future development strategy, she said.

"After decades of growth, multinational corporations have fully integrated into the development pattern of the Chinese economy and its industries and become an integral part of globalization," she said.

The actual use of foreign direct investment into the Chinese mainland expanded 9.9 percent year-on-year to 1.16 trillion yuan ($168.43 billion) from January to November, while foreign-funded companies saw their export value grow by 2.4 percent year-on-year to 6.87 trillion yuan, data from the Ministry of Commerce shows.

While some countries are seeking to exclude China from their industrial and supply chains, the country has great advantages to attract foreign investors, said Zhang Fei, associate director of the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation's Institute of Foreign Investment. Among them are industrial competitiveness, a supersized market and an improving business environment.

Sang Baichuan, dean of the Institute of International Economy at the University of International Business and Economics in Beijing, said that against the background of a changing global economic and trade order, China is expected to further expand its high-standard opening-up. The country will strive to follow high-standard international economic and trade rules and introduce policies to facilitate foreign investment, Sang said.

Mohammed Alajlan, chairman of the Saudi-Chinese Business Council, which is based in Riyadh and Shanghai, said China has advanced technologies, services and products in emerging fields, such as AI, big data, biotech, fintech and automation.

"We have seen many cooperation efforts between Chinese and Saudi companies in the country, and there will be many more in the future," he said.

To further improve the environment for doing business, local commerce authorities in China stopped filing and registering foreign trade operators from Friday, in accordance with the revised law on foreign trade, the Ministry of Commerce said on Tuesday.

The relevant authorities will no longer require market entities applying for certain certificates and qualifications to provide foreign trade operator filing and registration records, the ministry said.

"We are optimistic about China's high-quality development and the resilience of China's manufacturing and supply chain," said Wang Lei, global executive vice-president of British pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca.

"As China continues to deepen reforms and boost market confidence, we feel that China's attitude toward opening-up has never faltered," he said.

*Contact the writers at zhongnan@chinadaily.com.cn*



Workers move a piece of equipment at a factory of German pump manufacturer Wilo SE in Beijing on Wednesday. WANG ZHUANGFEI / CHINA DAILY

## **Commitment**: Nation proposes initiatives to address major challenges

*From page 1*

Committed to ensuring that there is peace and development for humanity, China has moved the concept of peaceful development to a whole new level. President Xi unveiled the Global Development Initiative as China's new framework for providing global public goods. The GDI's fundamental purpose is to assist the global community and the United Nations in achieving the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Goals and reverse the devastating impacts of COVID-19 on development in developing countries, address the challenges of environmental degradation and climate change, and promote green recovery and the principles of an ecological civilization to harmonize development and the natural environment.

Without peace, there is no development. China, cognizant of this fact, further unveiled the Global Security Initiative, which aims to uphold the principles of multilateralism and international solidarity and the shared desire of all peoples to work together to overcome difficulties and build a better world. For China, the GSI will solve the persistent needs of the international community to maintain world peace and prevent conflicts and wars, especially at a time when traditional and nontraditional security threats are posing a challenge to the existence of humanity.

Today, the Horn of Africa has become a new theater of renewed tensions. The geopolitical spinoffs from competitive and strategic positioning of vested interests in the area have made the region more volatile.

Learning from experience, China has avoided any military conflict over the past three decades, and as a result of this long spell of peace, it became a rapidly developing nation. Thus, guided by the ethos of shared prosperity for all mankind, China proposed in January last year the Outlook on Peace and Development in the Horn of Africa. The initiative seeks to localize the ideals of the GDI and GSI in the Horn region.

**China's provision of global public goods will lead to the attainment of peace and development for all mankind.**

During a trip to Eritrea, Kenya and Comoros in January last year, Wang Yi, then Chinese foreign minister, clarified that the peace and development initiatives will support countries in the region in addressing security, development and governance challenges.

Beijing also appointed a special envoy for the Horn of Africa to help galvanize regional consensus on a political, security and development agenda to realize lasting peace, stability and prosperity.

China's support for multilateralism, free trade, international security and peacekeeping might prompt competition for influence from other major powers, but China should continue to stand firm in the provision of sustainable security and development, guided by the principles of peaceful coexistence.

Indeed, China's provision of global public goods will lead to the attainment of peace and development for all mankind.

*The author is executive director of the China-Africa Center at the Africa Policy Institute in Kenya. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# CHINA

## Critical care



A medical worker tends to a severe COVID-19 patient at the Second People's Hospital in Hefei, Anhui province, on Tuesday. Major hospitals in the city are operating around the clock to deal with the surge of infections. HUANG YANGYANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Nation to continue monitoring viral mutations of COVID-19

### Scientists and medics will keep track of disease after management downgraded

**By ZHANG ZHIHAO**
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China will continue to monitor the mutation, transmissibility and virulence of the COVID-19 virus to optimize future epidemic prevention and control measures, according to a document released by the National Health Commission.

According to the document, China is set to downgrade its management of COVID-19 from Class A to Class B on Sunday, a major change to the nation's epidemic control strategy made possible by the reduced virulence of the Omicron variant, wide vaccination coverage and better treatment methods and resources.

Tracking of close contacts and classification of at-risk areas will be canceled after the adjustments. Quarantine and nucleic acid tests will also be scrapped for inbound travelers.

However, Chinese scientists and health workers will still keep track of the virus' mutation, monitor and manage regional outbreaks, and minimize the impact of outbreaks on socioeconomic development.

Experts said these measures are needed since they can provide first-hand data on the situation for researchers and keep the public informed to avoid unnecessary panic.

> "We have not seen a reemergence of Delta or the original strains."
>
> **Tong Yigang,** dean of the College of Life Science and Technology at Beijing University of Chemical Technology

X-ray images of the whited-out lungs of recently infected patients have been circulating on Chinese social media lately, prompting speculation that more severe but less transmissible variants of COVID-19, such as the original and Delta strains, are spreading in the country.

Xu Wenbo, head of the National Institute for Viral Disease Control and Prevention with the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said real-time epidemiological data show no trace of the Delta strain in the country, nor of a recombinant of the Delta and Omicron strains.

Since early December, nine Omicron variants have been circulating in China and they were responsible for the vast majority of new cases, he told China Central Television.

Xu said that the BA.5.2 and BF.7 strains are the dominant variants in China, accounting for over 80 percent of cases. However, 31 Omicron strains are present on the mainland, including the BQ.1 and XBB variants that are driving up cases in other countries.

Yang Xiaobing, director of the department of infectious disease prevention of the Wuhan Center for Disease Control and Prevention, said the dominant strain in the city is the BA.5.2 Omicron variant, and there is no evidence that the original COVID-19 strain has returned.

Although the Omicron variants primarily target the upper respiratory tract and cause relatively less severe symptoms compared to previous strains, they can still cause pneumonia, Yang said.

If someone experiences coughing, fever, chest tightness and other symptoms that do not ameliorate over time, they should seek immediate medical attention to avoid becoming severely ill, he added.

Jiao Yahui, director of the National Health Commission's bureau of medical administration, said in a recent news briefing that scans with whited-out lungs are a sign of severe pneumonia that could result in breathing difficulties and low blood oxygen levels.

But the recent cases are not caused by the spread of the original COVID-19 viral strain or from vaccinations, she said.

Wang Guiqiang, director of the Department of Infectious Diseases at Peking University First Hospital, said that for most people who are not immune compromised, the chance of reinfection by the same strain of virus is extremely low.

He added that even if such reinfection were to occur, symptoms would most likely be mild.

But if a new strain of the virus with greater ability to evade immunity were to emerge, then there is a chance of reinfection, Wang said.

"Therefore, people should still protect themselves after this wave is over," he said.

Tong Yigang, dean of the College of Life Science and Technology at Beijing University of Chemical Technology, said severely ill people are the focus of epidemiological surveys, and if their symptoms are caused by previous strains of COVID-19, scientists would know right away.

Every province has designated hospitals that test samples from patients and upload the virus' genetic data to the Chinese CDC every week.

"We have not seen a reemergence of Delta or the original strains," Tong said. If Omicron and Delta strains emerge at the same place, Omicron will eventually out-compete Delta due to it being far more transmissible.

According to the COVID-19 viral variant tracker of the World Health Organization, the Omicron strains have largely replaced other variants and become the dominant variants circulating globally, accounting for over 98 percent of viral sequences shared after February 2022.

# Experts answer questions on emerging XBB variant

**Editor's note:** *The Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention answers key questions on XBB.1.5, the emerging Omicron strain that is raising concerns globally.*

**What is XBB.1.5?**

The XBB variant is a recombinant strain of BJ.1 and BM.1.1.1 — both being sublineages of the BA.2 variant of Omicron. Offshoots of XBB are rising in the United States and other countries, and one descendant in particular — XBB.1.5 — is gaining an advantage in transmission.

**How widespread is XBB.1.5 globally?**

Since November, the proportion of cases infected with XBB.1.5 has been increasing in the US. By Dec 30, its ratio was estimated to have reached 40.5 percent and would likely replace BQ.1.1 and BQ.1 to become the dominant strain in the country.

Worldwide, XBB.1.5 has been detected in at least 25 countries or regions by Monday.

**What's XBB.1.5's domestic spread like?**

From October to December, the mainland had detected 199 cases infected with nine different sublineages of XBB, including four cases contracting XBB.1.5.

During the same period, the mainland had identified 16 domestic cases infected with XBB, all of them being the XBB.1 strain. No locally transmitted XBB.1.5 infections had been reported.

Currently, the dominant strains on the mainland are BA.5.2 and BF.7.

**Will XBB.1.5 attack the intestines?**

There is no evidence suggesting that XBB.1.5 results in more severe diarrhea or other gastrointestinal symptoms.

Angiotensin converting enzyme 2 (ACE2) is the functional receptor on cell surfaces through which the novel coronavirus enters the host cells. ACE2 is expressed not only in the lungs, but also in the intestines.

All viral mutations, including the highly watched XBB.1.5, can infect intestinal mucosa, but whether such an infection will lead to clinical symptoms can vary depending on the health condition of individuals.

**Will XBB.1.5 spark a new wave of outbreaks?**

Some reports suggest that XBB.1.5 is highly immune evasive. But surveillance data from the US disease control body shows that while the ratio of XBB variants is rising in recent weeks, the numbers of new cases, hospitalizations and deaths have not increased significantly.

The amount of neutralizing antibodies generated after an infection with BA.5.2 or BF.7 can persist at a high level for about three months. They are also protective against other variants, including XBB.

The possibility of seeing another major outbreak driven by XBB in the next three months is very small.

**Is XBB.1.5 more pathogenic and virulent?**

No countries have reported that XBB.1.5 has higher pathogenicity, or causes more hospitalizations or deaths. Clinical symptoms induced by the strain are no different from other variants.

In the US, the number of COVID-19 deaths reported in the past few weeks stayed at a low level despite wider transmission of XBB.

**What can we prepare?**

Individuals are advised to continue practicing personal protective measures and wear masks when visiting public spaces. Particular attention should be paid to protecting the elderly and those with serious preexisting illnesses.

WANG XIAOYU

# Chongqing, Sichuan work together on virus response

**By HUANG ZHILING** in Chengdu
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A senior official of the Communist Party of China called for effectively coordinating the epidemic response with economic and social development in an orderly transition to Class-B management of COVID-19.

Liu Guozhong, a member of the Political Bureau of the CPC Central Committee, paid a visit to Sichuan province and its neighboring Chongqing municipality from Sunday to Tuesday, and learned about the epidemic response in the regions.

Liu visited rural communities, urban pharmacies, pharmaceutical companies, general hospitals, children's hospitals and community health service centers in the province and municipality.

He said that the focus of prevention and control work should be shifted to "ensuring health and preventing severe diseases".

If the elderly and those with underlying diseases and high risk of severe diseases need to be hospitalized, they should be treated in hospital in a timely manner, he said.

Stressing that great importance should be given to epidemic prevention and control in rural localities, Liu urged for efforts to ensure adequate medical supplies, especially in township-level healthcare centers and village clinics.

In addition, medical kits for COVID-19 treatment should be delivered to key groups in outlying mountainous areas, while medical personnel should be dispatched to provide services at the doorsteps of people in remote regions, said Liu, adding that a mechanism of quick referral for rural COVID-19 patients receiving treatment in medical institutions in the city should be improved.

Sichuan and Chongqing have taken measures recently to guarantee necessary treatment for vulnerable groups.

Chongqing has paid special attention to the elderly with underlying diseases, pregnant women, lonely elderly people and left-behind children, and improved the health records of the key groups.

Officials in communities and villages have visited key groups to understand their current health conditions, Chen Yong, deputy director of the Chongqing Agriculture and Rural Affairs Commission, said at a news conference on COVID-19 prevention and control on Tuesday.

Chongqing is allocating free "health kits" for the elderly over 60 years old in all its rural areas. The kits include antipyretic, analgesic and detoxification drugs and antigen detection reagents, he said.

The number of daily patient visits in fever clinics above the secondary level in Chongqing and fever clinics in grassroots medical institutions reached a peak of about 49,000 on Dec 20, and has fallen to about 7,000 at present.

Judging from the figures, we can conclude that Chongqing's peak infection period must have passed, Li Pan, deputy director of the Chongqing Health Commission, said at the news conference on Tuesday.

Chongqing has built a designated hospital treatment system and has increased the number of its treatment beds to 16,527 and intensive care beds to 3,358 since December, Li said.

All city-level designated hospitals have set up hemodialysis centers, delivery rooms and pediatric wards equipped with corresponding facilities to ensure the treatment needs of special patients, he said.

## Filling orders



Workers rapidly produce antibody medication on a production line at Nanyue Biopharming Corp in Hengyang, Hunan province, on Wednesday. PENG BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Guizhou primes control measures before festival

**By YANG JUN** in Guiyang
and **ZOU SHUO**

Guizhou province has made considerable preparations for rural epidemic control as many migrant workers and students are expected to return to the province during the upcoming Spring Festival, local officials said on Wednesday.

Zhang Yuqiong, deputy director of the Guizhou Provincial Health Commission, said epidemic control in rural areas has been one of the top priorities and the commission has taken various measures to ensure the safety of rural people.

All township hospitals and medical centers have opened fever clinics, which can receive up to 86,000 people every day in total, she said at a news conference.

Village hospitals have also opened fever treatment centers to treat asymptomatic and mild cases and alleviate the pressure on hospitals, she said.

Online consultations are being offered by experts to improve the medical treatment level in rural areas and experts have also conducted training for medical workers in rural areas so they can identify patients whose symptoms might become severe, she said.

The province has also made sure that more than half of its drugs go to communities and it has offered free epidemic control equipment and drugs to key groups, Zhang said.

Zhang Yuanxin, deputy director of the Guizhou Provincial Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, said the province has established a special working group on rural epidemic control.

Rural areas have a large number of people who are elderly, disabled or pregnant and are in relatively frail medical conditions, he said.

The group is responsible for ensuring epidemic control measures are implemented, solving problems, coordinating resources, making sure severe patients get timely treatment, and ensuring normal production in rural areas, he added.

Wang Songlin, head of a hospital in Yunwu township of Guizhou's Guiding county, said the hospital opened a fever clinic on Dec 12, which has received more than 506 patients so far. The number of daily patients peaked at 119 on Dec 24, and has since gradually declined.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# CHINA

## Lending old clothes new life

### Designer helps young fashionistas express themselves while helping environment

By **LIU KUN** in Wuhan
and **ZHENG CAIXIONG**



Wang Yi works at one of her three creative clothes altering stores in Wuhan, Hubei province.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Wang Yi believes her success as an entrepreneur lies in finding the right market, plus low startup costs.

The fashion designer now runs three creative clothes altering stores in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province.

Wang helped clients alter more than 1,300 old garments in the first 11 months of last year, more than 80 percent of whom are regular customers and half of whom are local residents.

Wang spent just 500 yuan ($71.63) to rent a 10-square-meter store on her housing estate to start her business, and she was able to recover that fee in the first two weeks of opening in 2021.

She is redefining an ancient industry with her creativity, turning discarded old clothes into new, fashionable pieces.

"Most customers are really pleased with my alterations when they come to fetch their clothes," Wang said.

In 2021, a woman in her early 40s came to have a brown skirt altered. She was suffering from breast cancer and had been forced to close her company to concentrate on getting better.

Wang said the skirt could still be worn, but the woman thought it showed too much of her belly, which concerned her because the medicine she was taking had caused her to gain a little weight.

Wang attached a shoulder belt to the skirt and lifted the waistband to chest level to turn it into a vest skirt to be worn over sweaters and shirts, which allowed the original wide hemline to disguise the woman's larger belly.

Wang said that the woman was so pleased with the alteration that she often wore the skirt to go out and posted pictures on her WeChat account.

After graduating from Wuhan Textile University in 2014 with a major in fashion design, Wang worked as an editor and designer at major clothing companies in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, and in Wuhan before launching her business.

She was inspired to open her stores after reading an article on social media saying that more than 62 million metric tons of old clothes were dumped worldwide each year, and that between 17 to 20 percent of industrial wastewater comes from the textile dyeing and processing industries.

"That's why I think creative alterations are a sustainable, environmentally friendly and fashionable trend that has broad prospects for development," she said, adding that she is the first person to have opened a creative alteration store in Wuhan.

Her store is quite popular and has been praised by clients.

One young mother who previously bought two skirts of the same style and color was also happy when Wang turned one of the skirts into a pair of shorts for her son, creating a matching parent-child outfit.

The mother said she liked the transformation and later altered one of her shirts for her son.

"Most of my customers are young people who believe in beauty and individuality," she said. "They want to add distinctive elements through creative alterations. What they care about is what kind of clothes best reflect their own style and individuality."

In the winter of 2021, tight-waisted bomber jackets became popular, and one client wanted to make hers unique.

Wang removed the patterns on the front of the jacket and added a navy collar embroidered with pictures and stars to create an interesting story.

The jacket is blue and white, like the sky and clouds, and the navy collar is made of black fabric. With the stars, it represents the boundless universe.

The girl was surprised and expressed her pleasure at the change.

According to Wang, creative alteration is actually a process of redesign and production that gives old clothes a new soul.

"Different clothes express different states and feelings through different cuts and changes. Creative alteration is like a chemical reaction. The garment might still have some of its original flavor, but it is a new piece, full of soul," she said.

Wang usually tries to find out about her clients' hobbies first and talks to them to get to know them before she starts altering their clothes.

In addition to creative alterations, Wang also customizes clothing for individuals as well as for companies and schools.

"But altering old clothes is still the main part of what I do and accounts for the largest part of my business," she said.

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## Cartoon culture festival concludes in Hangzhou

By **MA ZHENHUAN** in Hangzhou
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The 18th China International Cartoon and Animation Festival concluded in Hangzhou in Zhejiang province recently.

The well-managed festival featured a variety of events, both online and live, including exhibitions, forums, contract matchmaking, cosplay shows, livestreams and competitions.

It attracted 292 Chinese and foreign companies and institutions, as well as 1,400 exhibitors, merchants and professionals from 52 countries and regions who participated in various on-site activities and conducted 4,073 one-on-one matchmaking meetings. As a result, contracts worth a total of 554 million yuan ($78.45 million) were signed.

Around 32,000 people visited the festival, and a further 10.2 million people participated virtually through the Online CICAF platform. Media groups and companies from places such as Beijing, Shanghai and the provinces of Zhejiang, Jiangsu and Guangdong offered a glimpse into the achievements of China's animation industry and revealed the potential of the metaverse, metahumans and holographic techniques.

In addition, animation produced by studios in Hangzhou, Zhejiang's capital, shone at the event. Ten films dealing with the government policy of common prosperity were presented.

Winners of the Golden Monkey King Awards, a top honor in the Chinese cartoon and animation industry, were presented to 34 of the nearly 1,000 original entries from 19 countries and regions, according to organizers.

"Cartoons and animation are an art form, both traditional and modern, that have a relaxing tone but a profound philosophy," Yan Xiaoming, deputy director of the China Media Group, told the event via video message.

Created by artists from all over the world, cartoons and animation are rooted in culture and customs, which enriches the development of the industry, Yan added. Moreover, the integration of information technology has made the sector pivotal to the cultural industry as a whole, and China's animation sector has made great progress.

*Jiang Ziya: Legend of Deification* won the Gold Award for the General Awards Animated Feature Film. It not only represents the peak of domestic animation in terms of production technology, but also lends its main character, the hero Jiang Ziya, deeper cultural significance, making traditional Chinese culture more attractive in the process.

According to Gao Weihua, the film's producer, it gave audiences a chance to re-evaluate the beauty of Chinese culture and history.

*Xiajiang: The Dream of Common Prosperity* won the Special Award for Red Animation Awards. Xiajiang village in Hangzhou has become a demonstration village for rural development thanks to the great changes that have taken place there over the past decade. These days, the village's mountains are lush and its rivers are once again clear.

At the opening ceremony, local authorities released a set of guidelines regarding the development of Hangzhou's cartoon, animation and esports industries. The guidelines proposed that the combined annual revenue of the three sectors should reach 60 billion yuan by 2025.

Moreover, they stipulated that 100 million yuan in special funds will be allocated every year to support the integration and mutual promotion of the animated games and esports sectors.

The CICAF has become the largest, most popular and most influential professional animation event in China, playing a pivotal role as a platform and bridge in advancing the national cartoon and animation industry, and expediting in-depth exchange and cooperation between China and other countries.

*Zhang Xiang and Fang Xiaoying contributed to this story.*



A cosplay show is staged during the 18th China International Cartoon and Animation Festival in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province.
PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Rare black-necked cranes can count on Tibetan villager for protection in winter

By **DAQIONG** and
**PALDEN NYIMA** in Lhasa



Black-necked cranes winter in Lhundrub county in the Tibet autonomous region on Feb 22. JIANG FAN / XINHUA

As the distant snow-capped mountains are bathed in the early morning light, the sound of ruddy shelducks and black-necked cranes fills the area as they search for food in the fields of Lhundrub county in the Tibet autonomous region.

At around 8 am, wildlife ranger Tenzin dons his jacket with the red armband and takes off on his motorbike to check on the birds.

He is one of nine patrolmen employed by the local forestry and grassland bureau to protect wildlife in the area.

As a first-class nationally protected species, the crane is also categorized as vulnerable by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and the Tibetans regard the birds as harbingers of prosperity and auspiciousness. "I am very proud the black-necked cranes have chosen my hometown as their habitat. The villagers think they're glorious," Tenzin said.

Provided with a limited monthly subsidy by the bureau, he said protecting the rare birds is not just a job, but also a mission of the heart.

During the winter, Tenzin patrols daily to make sure the cranes have not been harmed or disturbed by people or stray dogs.

As he makes his rounds, he enjoys watching all sorts of birds, but especially the cranes.

"I am pleased and proud to protect black-necked cranes, and I've treated them as if they were my own children over the last decade," chinanews.com quoted Tenzin as saying.

He said that he has saved the lives of four cranes during that time, and even taken care of an injured bird at home for eight months.

"I spent a lot of time with the crane, so when the day came to release it back into the wild, I became very emotional," he added.

Located in Khardong village in Tsodo township, Tenzin's hometown is dotted with open farmland and a huge reservoir and is surrounded by mountains, which makes it a safe harbor for the birds.

Every year around October, the cranes migrate to winter in Lhundrub and then leave in March.

"As a result of increased protection over the last decade, the number of black-necked cranes has dramatically increased," he said, adding that the population in his village was less than 20 in 2013, but now 200 to 300 visit each year.

According to Tenzin, the increase is in part due to county government efforts.

Every year in mid-December, government workers deliver wheat to 10 feeding sites, as there isn't much else for the cranes to eat in the area. It is enough to see the birds through the winter.

During their stay, Tenzin protects the birds from dogs, but admits that it's a challenge, as the dogs run in packs and charge the birds from different directions when they attack.

Having been on patrol for years now, Tenzin is a master crane protector and rescuer.

Whenever villagers find an injured bird, they call him to come help.

His work is a reflection of the government's mission to protect wildlife in Tibet. Thanks to efforts over the years, the region's black-necked crane population has increased from fewer than 3,000 in 1995 to more than 10,000 today.

Since 2016, the regional government has created 700,000 environmental jobs for rural residents, increasing numbers of whom are being employed to work as wildlife rangers.

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## Raccoon dogs thriving in Shanghai communities

SHANGHAI — Raccoon dogs are ballooning in number and their habitats are expanding in Shanghai, a new survey of the crafty urban dwellers has shown.

The metropolis is home to about 25 million people and thousands of wild raccoon dogs, a State-protected mammal that roams city streets and residential complexes much like weasels in Beijing and foxes in London.

The latest study, conducted in the Songjiang district, found the mammal present in 22 out of 50 residential complexes, in numbers ranging from one to 50, with an average of 10.82 per compound.

The raccoon dog population is estimated to be between 3,000 and 5,000, according to Wang Fang, a researcher with Fudan University, which conducted the study with the Shanghai Forestry Station and the Shan Shui Conservation Center.

Their density is related to neighborhood management. The improper feeding of stray cats and random disposal of kitchen waste, for instance, doubles the number of raccoon dogs in a residential area.

Eastern China's financial hub was once home to many mammals, such as leopard cats, badgers and Siberian weasels, many of which lost their habitats as a result of rapid urbanization.

Raccoon dogs, however, have adapted to urbanization, and their population is rapidly increasing, Wang said, adding that they have also benefited from the expansion of the city's green spaces, including wetlands and parks.

In recent years, they have become more frequently spotted, sometimes making it into the news for fighting with pet dogs.

The study is intended to help local authorities find ways for coexistence between city dwellers and their wild neighbors, according to Zheng Yunxiang, who works at the Shanghai Forestry Station.

"Reducing the feeding of strays and the proper disposal of kitchen garbage are key to controlling the raccoon dog population in residential areas, and to avoiding conflict between residents and wildlife," Zheng said.

XINHUA

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# WORLD

## Bare ski slopes make for bleak climate view

By **JULIAN SHEA** in London
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The full extent of the climate crisis has been underlined by the decision to host next weekend's Ski World Cup at the Swiss mountain resort of Adelboden on artificial snow, as unseasonably high temperatures in some of Europe's most popular and lucrative winter sports regions have left slopes bare of snow and instead showing mud and grass to the world.

According to a 2020 article in Forbes magazine looking at how the sector was being affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Alpine skiing industry is worth $33 billion each year, so its economic contribution to countries, including Austria, Switzerland, France, Italy and Germany, is enormous.

But this year, it is weather rather than the pandemic that is threatening to deal the winter sports sector a heavy blow.

On New Year's Eve, Switzerland's national weather agency MeteoSwiss recorded temperatures in some parts of the country to be 16 degrees higher than normal. And at the Jura Mountains resort of Delemont, a temperature of around 21 C was recorded.

"The climate is changing a bit, but what should we do here? Shall we stop with life?" Adelboden course director Toni Hadi told The Associated Press. "Everything is difficult."

France also ended a year that saw forest fires and record-breaking heat in the summer with some of the highest winter temperatures ever recorded, backing up evidence supplied by the United Nations' World Meteorological Organization, or WMO, earlier in the year, showing that the past eight years are on track to be the eight warmest on record.

> "The climate is changing a bit, but what should we do here?"
>
> **Toni Hadi,** Adelboden course director

The final global weather statistics for 2022 are due later this month, but data published by the WMO during the COP27 climate summit painted a bleak picture of the health of Europe's winter regions.

"In the European Alps, glacier melt records were shattered in 2022. Average thickness losses of between 3 and over 4 meters were measured throughout the Alps, substantially more than in the previous record year 2003," the organization said.

### Glacier ice volume

"In Switzerland, 6 percent of the glacier ice volume was lost between 2021 and 2022, according to initial measurements ... between 2001 and 2022, the volume of glacier ice in Switzerland decreased from 77 cubic kilometers to 49 cubic kilometers, a decline of more than a third."

Some Swiss resorts have opened up summer biking trails rather than relying on snow sports for their seasonal trade.

Even though snow cannons are being used to create artificial snow to allow skiing to go ahead, that too comes at an environmental cost.

The BBC reported that Europe's energy crisis had led to Switzerland trying to preserve water to focus on hydroelectric power, and a study by the University of Basel said increased use of artificial snow in affected regions could send water consumption up by as much as 80 percent.

## Under control



Firefighters bring a fire under control at premises storing bales of straw in Sternberg, Germany, on Tuesday. Police estimated the damage from the blaze at around 150,000 euros ($159,240). BERND W'STNECK/ AP

## Urgent task



Workers build a flood protection barrier at the entrance to a business in San Francisco, California, on Tuesday. While California tries to clean up from floods and mudslides that killed at least one person over the weekend, the next in a series of atmospheric rivers is bearing down on the state later this week. VIA GETTY IMAGES

# New FM Qin: US ties 'important mission'

By **ZHAO HUANXIN** in Washington
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China's new foreign minister has made it clear that building on relations with the United States will remain "an important mission" for him in his new position, as he believes the future of the planet hinges on the sound and stable growth of such ties.

Qin Gang, 56, who was named foreign minister on Friday after serving as ambassador to the US for about 17 months, noted that he left Washington more convinced that the door to China-US relations will remain open and cannot be closed, and that Americans, just like the Chinese people, are broad-minded, friendly and hard-working.

"My time here also reminds me that China-US relations should not be a zero-sum game in which one side out-competes the other or one nation thrives at the expense of the other," Qin wrote in an op-ed piece published in The Washington Post on Tuesday.

"The world is wide enough for China and the United States to both develop and prosper," he wrote in the article titled "The Planet's Future Depends on a Stable China-US Relationship".

Qin, who still holds the ambassadorial post, recalled that he went to Washington at a complex and tough time for bilateral relations, with almost all of the dialogue and exchange mechanisms suspended, and Chinese enterprises unfairly sanctioned.

"Compounded by the pandemic, people-to-people exchanges were severely impacted. China was often described as America's 'most serious competitor'," he wrote.

> The world is wide enough for China and the United States to both develop and prosper."
>
> **Qin Gang**, China's new foreign minister who has served as ambassador to the United States for 17 months

In a speech on Dec 6, Qin said the US administration defines China as a most serious competitor and the most serious, long-term geographical challenge, which is a "great strategic misperception and misjudgment".

"The successes of our two countries are shared opportunities, not winner-take-all challenges. We must not allow prejudice or misperception to ignite confrontation or conflict between two great peoples," he wrote.

The two sides should follow the strategic guidance of their presidents and find the right way to get along for the well-being of the world, he added.

Qin described the memorable scenes from his time in the US, including how his visits to 22 states have laid before his eyes a country different from what he knew in Washington DC.

"In the spring, I visited the Kimberley Farm in Iowa, which President Xi Jinping visited in 2012. I tried my hand at driving a John Deere tractor and tasted the local produce. In the fall, I visited a corn and soybean farm in Missouri and was deeply moved by my hosts' sincerity and hospitality," he recounted.

He also recalled teaching a class in a Chinese-language immersion school in Minneapolis and seeing huge stacks of to-and-from-China containers at the ports of Boston and Long Beach, a testament to the high degree of China-US economic interdependence and a reminder that decoupling serves no one's interest.

"These are, for me, important memories about this country, and I will hold them in my heart," Qin wrote. "Going forward, the development of China-US relations will remain an important mission of mine in my new position."

On Tuesday, while bidding farewell to the people of the US on his Twitter account, Qin said he would "continue to care about and support the growth of China-US relations, encourage dialogue, mutual understanding and affinity between the two peoples".

Days before he left for Beijing, Qin noted in an article published in The National Interest that the US and China should and can listen to each other, narrow their gap in perceptions of the world and explore a way to get along based on mutual respect, peaceful coexistence and win-win cooperation.

While in the US, Qin had met with more than 80 members of Congress, including some well-known China hawks, to explain China's positions and concerns while he listened to theirs as well.

"I was encouraged by the business community's confidence in the Chinese market and its strong desire for continued cooperation," he wrote.

## UN Security Council gets new voice from Africa

By **OTIATO OPALI** in Nairobi, Kenya
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Mozambique replaced Kenya at the United Nations Security Council on Tuesday with a promise to prioritize the fight against terrorism. The country will serve at the council as a non-permanent member for the next two years.

Kenya has served in the council since June 2020 and was represented by its Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Martin Kimani. Mozambique began its tenure at the council on Jan 1.

In his farewell message, Kimani said his country had done a good job at the UN.

"Our work in the Security Council is done, and to mark the occasion, I am wearing the National Defense College tie in honor of the men and women of the Kenya Defense Forces who exemplify what the UN stands for," Kimani said in a statement published over the weekend.

"In the coming days, I will communicate some of the important lessons we learned. But for now, all I feel is overwhelming gratitude for the opportunity."

Joining Mozambique are Ecuador, Japan, Malta and Switzerland. All five countries will take up non-permanent seats for the next two years.

Pedro Comissario, Mozambican ambassador to the UN, said his country is ready to deal with terrorism during its tenure. While speaking at a flag installation ceremony for the five new members outside Mozambique's council chamber, Comissario said the international community should work together to stamp out terrorism.

"Paramount among contemporary threats to international peace and security is the progressive Africanization of terrorism affecting our continent," Comissario said.

### Pushing for reforms

He added that Mozambique will push for reforms at the Security Council to address African concerns.

"It is necessary to pay attention to reforming the Security Council to reflect African concerns, a region that has suffered historical injustice. We have no permanent member on the Security Council," Comissario said.

Mozambique has been battling an extremist insurgency in its northern Cabo Delgado Province for the past five years. The conflict has displaced over 1 million people and killed around 4,000 others, according to UN data.

Mozambique's President Filipe Jacinto Nyusi is among African leaders who have called for increased UNSC representation and a rebalanced council to more equitably reflect Africa's role in the global community.

That has long been an issue of concern for the African Union and member nations, as articulated in the Ezulwini Consensus reached in 2005. Africans have pressed for reforms that would deliver two permanent seats on the council and two additional non-permanent seats for African nations, but have never achieved those goals.

## France signals flexibility in face of pension reform resistance

PARIS — The French government said on Tuesday it could be flexible on its plan to raise the retirement age to 65, part of a hugely controversial pension reform project pushed by President Emmanuel Macron.

Speaking ahead of crunch talks with unions that have fiercely resisted any change, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne told Franceinfo radio that the age of 65 is "not set in stone".

She added that "other solutions" could help the government reach its target of balancing the pensions system by 2030.

She said the plan, a flagship domestic policy of Macron's second term, would be presented to the cabinet on Jan 23 before being debated in parliament at the beginning of February.

Full details of the plan, with its banner policy of raising the retirement age from the current level of 62 having been rejected by the unions, are to be unveiled on Jan 10.

Macron's overhaul would be one of the most extensive in a series of pension reforms enacted by successive governments on both the left and right in recent decades aiming to end budget shortfalls.

Former prime minister Edouard Philippe summed up politicians' frustration at failing to manage a pensions breakthrough despite long-standing attempts.

"The English have their Ireland problem, the Americans their weapons problem, and we have our pensions problem," he told Agence France-Presse recently.

### Pandemic impact

Philippe's own attempt at pension reform when he was Macron's prime minister between 2017 and 2020 was abandoned when the COVID-19 pandemic changed the government's priorities. A majority of French — 54 percent — oppose the reform, a Harris-Interactive poll showed on Monday.

"The only group in favor are retired people of 65 and over," Frederic Dabi, head of the Ifop polling institute, said.

The revamp was supposed to have been announced in mid-December but Macron, whose ruling party lost its overall parliament majority in polls last year, delayed the announcement to allow further talks.

But he said he would not be sidetracked. "This year will be the year of pension reform," he said in his traditional New Year's address.

He promised a new system would be implemented "by the end of the summer".

Later on Tuesday, Borne was due to hold new discussions with unions, which have already signaled that even a less ambitious pension age increase to 64 would not be acceptable.

Any change in the pension age would be "a red line", Laurent Berger, head of the moderate CFDT union, said.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

## FDA expands access to abortion pill

By **MAY ZHOU** in Houston
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The US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) has expanded access to abortion through medication by allowing certified retail drug stores including large chains and mail-order companies to dispense the abortion pill mifepristone.

Before the federal agency on Tuesday finalized a rule change, mifepristone was tightly controlled and could only be dispensed by specially certified clinics or doctors, and by a few mail-order pharmacies.

The mail-order option wasn't even available until 2021, when the FDA allowed telemedicine prescription and mail-order delivery to overcome in-person restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Mifepristone, combined with a second drug called misoprostol, has been used to induce an abortion up to 10 weeks into a pregnancy. Under the new regulation, prescription is still required to obtain the pills.

The latest data from the Guttmacher Institute, an abortion rights organization, indicated that medication abortion accounted for 53 percent of all facility-based abortions in the United States in 2020.

A previous report found medication abortion accounted for 39 percent of all abortions in 2017, indicating a fast growth of pill use.

"Under the Mifepristone REMS (risk evaluation and mitigation strategy) Program, as modified, Mifeprex and its approved generic can be dispensed by certified pharmacies or by or under the supervision of a certified prescriber," the FDA stated on its website Tuesday.

Abortion rights activists said that the drug, available since 2000, has proven to be safe, effective and without risk of overdose or addiction. It's available over the counter in some countries such as Mexico and India.

Planned Parenthood President Alexis Johnson called the FDA's decision "a step in the right direction for health equity".

"Being able to access your prescribed medication abortion through the mail or to pick it up in person from a pharmacy like any other prescription is a game changer for people trying to access basic health care," Johnson said in a statement.

Anti-abortion groups condemned the decision.

"The Biden administration has once again proved that it values abortion industry profits over women's safety and unborn children's lives. Abortion activists want to turn every post office and pharmacy into an abortion business, and the Biden FDA is a willing participant," Marjorie Dannenfelser, president of Susan Anthony Pro-Life America, said in a statement.

However, access to the abortion pills is restricted in more than 10 states where abortion is banned after the US Supreme Court overturned Roe vs Wade to overturn the constitutional right to abortion.

Guttmacher Institute reported that 16 of those states have introduced legislation to ban or limit availability to medication abortion.

But women in states where abortion is banned can get the medicine from a pharmacy by simply crossing the state border to another state, abortion activists say.

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



WORLD US

# CES: Focus on wearables, smart-home tech

By LIA ZHU in Las Vegas
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A visitor to the CES Media Day on Wednesday looks at one of the innovation award-winning products on display. CES 2023 kicks off Thursday in Las Vegas. CHANG JUN / CHINA DAILY

A virtual reality headset that allows you to smell; a smart mirror that tells you whether you are brushing your teeth properly; a refrigerator that can change colors to suit your mood for the moment; an autonomous tractor that allows farmers to operate from their smartphones ...

Those are just a few examples of the latest technologies of wearables, smart-home gadgets, appliances, cars and even machinery to be shown at this year's CES.

Formerly known as the Consumer Electronics Show, the largest technology exhibition in the world went online in 2021 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. CES 2022 saw a quarter of the event's typical attendance.

The Consumer Technology Association (CTA), which organizes the CES, expected the attendance to hit 100,000, over 70 percent more than last year.

This year, digital transformation continues to intensify across industries. "Born out of the health crisis over the past two to three years, we're entering into a new phase of automation and virtualization," said Steve Koenig, vice-president of research at CTA, at a conference ahead of the CES, which officially runs from Thursday through Sunday.

"We're going to see progressively more and more industrial IoT (internet of things) applications across the rest of the economy," said Koenig, highlighting the concept of "the Metaverse of Things".

Metaverse is a 3D interface for IoT, in which people can experience life in ways they could not in the physical world. Though it's often met with skepticism, Koenig said metaverse is the next generation of the internet, and CES 2023 will be evidence that metaverse provides an elevated online experience and an elevated sense of immersion.

In retail space, for instance, the virtualized 3D interactive environment can improve the online shopping experience with Touchcast, a virtual experience and event platform.

"Whether we're shopping for a computer or a new pair of sneakers, we can have a cutaway of the shoes to see exactly how this foam protects the runner's foot, or we can look inside the machine and see exactly how things are working," Koenig explained.

Automotive technology has taken central stage at past events, and that sector will be bigger this year, with nearly 300 exhibitors bringing the latest self-driving technologies, electric vehicles and personal mobility devices.

John Deere's autonomous tractor, an awardee of the CES' Best of Innovations, is an advanced robot that uses GPS guidance, sensors and AI technology to perform farm tasks without an operator in the cabin, which helps address the growing labor shortage.

> "This time, I think the powerful new waves of technological change that really remedy inflation and restore growth, global GDP growth, will really come from the enterprise side."
>
> **Steve Koenig**, vice-president of research of the Consumer Technology Association

Digital therapeutics is in full force at CES this year. Telemedicine and telehealth are getting more attention during the pandemic with more sensors, wearables and other diagnostic tools are coming in.

Abbott's Proclaim Plus therapeutic system, another winner of the CES innovation award, is an example of advanced therapies using technology to manage pain. SK Zero Glasses, a wearable with sensors, can predict epileptic seizures.

Telemedicine is not just about managing chronic disease or visits with doctors. It's also about health and fitness. It's useful for remote patient monitoring: Instead of staying in the hospital for days after an operation, a patient can be monitored at home. For mental wellness purposes, the technology can be used to manage anxiety by monitoring depression.

Sustainability will be front and center for hundreds of exhibitors at this year's CES, featuring technologies that can conserve energy and increase power generation, address food shortages and create more sustainable agricultural systems.

ACWA Robotics' intelligent robot can save millions of cubic meters of water and help optimize cities' water infrastructure investments as a clean water pathfinder. LeydenJar's pure silicon anodes help conserve the environment, as silicone is neutral for the environment.

ZF Group's "Heat Belt" contact-heating device enables lower settings for cabin heating to conserve energy and help extend electric-vehicle range.

This year's CES comes on the heels of a tough year for the tech industry, with disrupted supply chains, decades' high inflation, and widespread layoffs. For the first time, the CES has a theme — how technology is addressing the world's biggest challenges.

For the global challenges, such as climate change, health crises, shortages of energy and labor, people can find answers in technology, said Koenig.

"During these periods of economic downturn, innovation tends to accelerate and even punch up," said Koenig. using the Great Recession in 2008 as an example. The last economic downturn around 2008 brought new waves of technology innovation, such as the arrival of the 4G and LTE network, and the advancement of smartphones, he added.

"This time, I think the powerful new waves of technological change that really remedy inflation and restore growth, global GDP growth, will really come from the enterprise side," said Koenig.

# US House again fails to elect a speaker

By AI HEPING in New York
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The US House of Representatives on Wednesday continued for a second day its historic inability to approve a speaker as Republican Kevin McCarthy failed to get the needed votes on three more ballots, blocked by hard-line conservatives who ignored a plea from former president Donald Trump to unite behind the California congressman.

After a sixth ballot, the House on Wednesday had adjourned until 8 pm but still couldn't reach a breakthrough. The chamber then barely voted to adjourn until noon on Thursday, with Democrats opposed.

"I don't think voting tonight is productive," McCarthy said after the late vote to adjourn until Thursday. But he said voting "in the future will make a difference".

The failure to elect a new speaker is delaying the swearing in of hundreds of members of Congress, putting off any legislative work.

Trump said McCarthy "will do a good job, and maybe even a GREAT JOB" but he failed to sway 20 Republicans — the same number who voted against McCarthy in the final of three ballots Tuesday.

Just hours before voting began Wednesday, former vice-president Mike Pence joined Trump and urged Republicans to rally around McCarthy.

But Colorado Representative Lauren Boebert finished her renomination speech for Florida Representative-elect Byron Donalds in the fifth ballot by saying Trump should tell McCarthy, "Sir, you do not have the votes, and it's time to withdraw.

Florida Representative Matt Gaetz, one of Trump's staunchest congressional supporters and one of the 20 House Republicans opposing McCarthy's bid, dismissed Trump's effort, calling it "sad".

Later on Wednesday, Trump wrote on his social media platform that he "always supported" Donalds and "consistently endorsed him". The 44-year-old is "a young man with a great future!" Trump wrote. "He will have his day, and it will be a big one, but not now!"

Trump also wrote that a statement circulating publicly claiming that he had endorsed Donalds for speaker is "fake and fraudulent".

Gaetz on Wednesday demanded to know why McCarthy was using the office reserved for the House speaker after losing three straight votes on Tuesday. Gaetz suggested McCarthy could eventually be physically removed from the office if he doesn't win the speaker's race soon.

"How long will he remain there until he is considered a squatter?" Gaetz said.

McCarthy was considered the presumptive speaker of the House since winning a majority of his Republican colleagues in a caucus vote after the midterm election.

More than half of the lawmakers who have voted against McCarthy have said that the 2020 election had been stolen or rigged or that Trump was the rightful winner over Joe Biden, according to The New York Times.

The dissenters who voted for Ohio Representative Jim Jordan in the third vote yesterday all backed Donalds as a new alternative, knowing he won't win but showing their dissatisfaction with McCarthy.

Donalds has represented a Florida district since 2021 and was one of 147 Republicans who voted to reject the results of the 2020 presidential election.

In nominating him at the start of the fourth vote on Wednesday, Representative Chip Roy of Texas noted that Donalds is black and that this was the first time two black candidates had been nominated for speaker.

The Democratic nominee, Representative Hakeem Jeffries of New York, became the first black leader of any party's House caucus on Tuesday. There has never been a black speaker.

Donalds said on Twitter this week that McCarthy "doesn't have the votes" to win.

After losing on the first three ballots Tuesday, McCarthy switched strategies Wednesday by asking Republican members who oppose him to vote "present" rather than backing another candidate, a move to lower the threshold needed to win the speakership.

Only one lawmaker who had voted for McCarthy three times voted present.

Instead, the 20 GOP lawmakers remained steadfast Wednesday by throwing their support to Donalds, and McCarthy lost three more votes Wednesday afternoon.

The thin Republican majority in the House means almost all the party's members must agree on a speaker. If all members of the House are voting and participating, the winner needs 218 votes. Republicans control 222 seats. On Tuesday, McCarthy drew at most 203 votes. On Wednesday, his total slipped to 201.

"Well, it's Groundhog Day," said Florida Representative Kat Cammack in nominating McCarthy on the sixth ballot.

She said, "To all Americans watching right now, we hear you. And we will get through this — no matter how messy."

Biden on Wednesday called the chaos in the House an embarrassment to the United States on a global stage.

"It's a little embarrassing that it's taking so long and the way they're dealing with each other — and the rest of the world is looking," he told reporters at the White House.

# Controversy over Colorado's plan to send migrants to NYC

By HENG WEILI in New York
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While the Republican governors of Texas and Florida have relocated migrants to Democratic states, a Democratic governor also will now participate in such transfers, which has drawn criticism from the mayor of New York City.

Colorado Governor Jared Polis is planning to send migrants to cities including New York, according to Democratic Mayor Eric Adams, who said he was notified of the plan on Monday evening.

"This is just unfair for local governments to have to take on this national obligation," the New York mayor said during an interview with radio station WABC on Tuesday. "We've done our job. There is no more room at the inn."

US President Joe Biden told reporters in Kentucky on Wednesday that it is his "intention" to visit the US-Mexico border as part of a trip to Mexico City for a summit next week.

Biden told reporters the administration is "working out the details" for the North American Leaders' Summit in Mexico City on Monday and Tuesday.

In a statement Tuesday, the Colorado governor said: "About 70 percent of the migrants arriving in Denver don't have Colorado as a final destination and due to weather and workforce shortage, they have been experiencing transportation cancellations.

"In order to facilitate the safe and voluntary transit of people to their desired destination, the state is working with culturally competent navigators to ensure that each individual is voluntarily making their own travel decision," the statement said.

The governor said that "the majority of migrants have a final destination other than Denver, and the state of Colorado in partnership with the City and County of Denver has begun taking steps to carry that out".

A spokesperson for Polis told The Hill website that the Mountain West city has been purchasing bus tickets for migrants, most of whom have indicated an interest in going to New York City, Chicago, Atlanta or Miami.

New York City has been the destination of hundreds of buses sent from Texas in the latter part of 2022, and Adams has clashed with Governor Greg Abbott over the issue.

> When I say the federal government, I'm talking about Congress and the executive branch resolving this issue of our migrants. That's what I'm talking about."
>
> **New York City Mayor Eric Adams**, commenting on an influx of migrants to the city

El Paso, Texas, a Democratic-led city, also had been sending migrants to other locations in the US.

In New York, Adams said on Tuesday: "We received over 30,000 asylum seekers that are in need of not only shelter or food, education for children, healthcare, some of the basic items that are needed, and this is really impacting on the quality of life in New York and our ability to provide for everyday, long-term New Yorkers on the needs that they have during this difficult time. This must be addressed."

In November, Adams called for $1 billion in funding from the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) to help with the migrant situation, which he called a "national embarrassment".

"We have a problem at our borders. El Paso shouldn't be going through this, and no other city should be going through this," Adams said.

"When I say the federal government, I'm talking about Congress and the executive branch resolving this issue of our migrants. That's what I'm talking about."

The Colorado governor expressed a similar sentiment.

"I think it's important that we have a national coordinated approach to this, and I really hope the Biden administration steps up and shows leadership in this area, particularly around provisional work permits," Polis said at a news conference Tuesday.

Texas, which shares a border with Mexico, also has regularly bused migrants to Chicago, Philadelphia and Washington DC. The state has maintained that it has been overwhelmed by the surge in migration.

In fiscal year 2022, which concluded on Sept 30, the US Border Patrol encountered more than 2.3 million migrants at the southern border. The record influx has continued in FY 2023.

Arizona also had sent migrants to Washington DC, while Florida Governor Ron De Santis in September flew migrants to wealthy Martha's Vineyard in Massachusetts, a move that drew national political attention.

Denver, the largest city in Colorado, has been struggling to address a recent influx of migrants, and Mayor Michael Hancock declared a state of emergency last month. The city said in a release on Monday that it has helped 3,485 migrants since Dec 9.

"States and cities not on the border are ill-equipped to address these challenges, and absent federal support and leadership, we're left to strategize and take actions to ensure this vulnerable population — people who've come here with no resources or means — are safe and treated humanely," Hancock, a Democrat, said in a statement Tuesday.

The nearest city in Mexico to Denver is Ciudad Juarez, which is 640 miles (1,030 kilometers) away.

"Our resources to respond to this crisis remain at capacity and we continue to call on the federal government, private businesses, and area non-profits to assist," the city of Denver website said in a statement Monday.

Migrants had increasingly headed to the southern border due to the lifting of Title 42, a World War II-era health order, which permits turning away of many asylum seekers in connection with COVID-19.

Title 42 was due to end on Dec 21, but the US Supreme Court on Dec 27 delayed its lifting. The court is expected to hear arguments over the policy in the spring.

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036. Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.
Vol. 38 — No.1000

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# BUSINESS

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RIGHT TRACK

## Fiscal spending, fine-tuning of policy set to ensure recovery

### Official stresses debt risk management, consumption are key to growth in 2023

By **ZHANG YUE**
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China will strengthen fiscal policy adjustment and optimize policy mix to walk the fine line between supporting growth and defusing systemic risks, and will step up fiscal expansion appropriately in 2023 to aid economic recovery, Finance Minister Liu Kun said.

Economists said such an approach would provide a significant lift to growth this year, with the country's deficit-to-GDP ratio expected to increase from last year.

Their comments emerged after Liu said in an interview with Xinhua News Agency, which was published on Tuesday, that China's economic recovery is not yet solid as demand has been contracting amid supply disruptions, weakening expectations and volatile external environment.

**2.8 percent**
the deficit-to-GDP ratio China set for 2022

Elaborating on the key decisions taken at the Central Economic Work Conference in mid-December, like requiring fiscal policy to be stepped up and made more efficient, Liu said fiscal expenditure will be expanded this year, with an optimized mix of fiscal deficit, local government special bonds and fiscal subsidies for interest expenses. The government will also use local government special bonds to drive investment and increase transfer payments from the central government to less-developed areas, Liu said.

Fiscal policy will also be made more efficient with more targeted tax breaks and fee-deduction policies to lessen financial burdens on businesses effectively.

Analysts said they expect stronger fiscal spending this year. Ding Shuang, an economist at Standard Chartered Bank, said in a Caixin report that he expects a fiscal deficit ratio of slightly higher than 3 percent this year.

Gao Ruidong, chief macro economist at Everbright Securities, said he expects the deficit ratio to exceed 3.1 percent as part of an expansionary fiscal policy for steady economic recovery.

China has set the deficit-to-GDP ratio at around 2.8 percent for 2022 and at around 3.2 percent for 2021.

"This year, we expect fiscal spending structure to be optimized. Fiscal spending could lean more heavily on consumption to substantially expand domestic demand," Gao said on Wednesday.

In a similar vein, Wu Ge, chief economist of Changjiang Securities, suggested that fiscal policy should offer greater support to households in order to drive consumption, which will likely be the top priority in this year's recovery agenda.

The expected increase in fiscal spending will also create fresh business prospects for multinational corporations operating in China as it broadly boosts market sentiment and helps rev up consumption, said Shi Yinghua, a professor at the Chinese Academy of Fiscal Sciences.

In the Xinhua interview, Finance Minister Liu said that though the imbalance between fiscal revenue and spending remains acute, the government will not hold back expenditures that can improve people's livelihoods.

The minister has also put fresh emphasis on strengthening government debt regulation and curbing local government debt risks.

He said China will standardize the management of local government financing vehicles to guard against related debt risks.



Employees work on the solar panel production line at a company in Lianyungang, Jiangsu province. SI WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

## China seeks to balance energy needs, green power transition

By **LIU YUKUN**
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China is accelerating wind and solar power development for its transition to green energy even as it increases coal, oil, and gas output to ensure energy security this year, the National Energy Administration said.

By this year-end, the installed capacity of wind power will reach about 430 million kilowatts, and the installed capacity of solar power will reach about 490 million kW, the NEA said at a recent conference that mapped out goals for this year.

It also said more efforts will be made to coordinate hydropower development and ecological protection with a goal of 423 million kW of installed hydropower capacity by 2023.

The NEA also vowed to actively develop nuclear power in a safe and orderly manner. The goal is to increase the installed capacity of nuclear power by 2.89 million kW.

"China will make efforts to improve the ability to ensure energy supply, increase the security and stability of the supply chain in the energy sector. Meanwhile, the country will increase the share of non-fossil energy under its green commitment and continue to increase the supply of clean energies," said Zhang Jianhua, head of the NEA, at the conference.

> "China will make efforts to improve the ability to ensure energy supply, increase the security and stability of the supply chain in the energy sector."
>
> **Zhang Jianhua,** head of the NEA

To improve the ability to ensure energy production and supply, further efforts will be made to approve the construction of smart coal mines, push the coal mines under construction to start production as soon as possible, and enhance the ability to safely increase coal production and ensure supply. It is also important to promote the planning and construction of trans-provincial power transmission channels, the NEA said.

Wang Lining, director of the oil market department at the Economics and Technology Research Institute, an affiliate with the China National Petroleum Corp, said that with the rapid development of new energies, the role of coal in China's energy structure will continue to change, from being the main source of supply to a supporting role and as an emergency back-up in case of shortage of new energy resources.

The share of coal in the energy structure will continue to decline to 44.3 percent in 2030 and 5.8 percent in 2060, according to the institute's estimates.

It is also important to increase oil and gas production and supply, promote major pipeline projects, and improve the oil and gas reserve capacity. It is estimated that crude oil production will reach 205 million metric tons and natural gas output will increase by more than 6 billion cubic meters by the end of this year, NEA said.

The NEA also said international cooperation on clean energy will be deepened by establishing China-ASEAN and China-Arab clean energy cooperation centers, and by facilitating cooperation with European countries in areas like hydrogen energy, energy storage, wind power and smart energy.

## Blossoming exchanges help data proliferate

By **SHI JING** in Shanghai
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Thriving data exchanges across China, including the Shanghai Data Exchange — which began official operations recently — have demonstrated market entities' rising interest in data trading amid the country's efforts to build an ecosystem for this burgeoning trading activity, said experts.

After more than a year of trial operations, the Shanghai Data Exchange, initiated on Nov 25, 2021 to become the country's first national-level exchange of its kind, announced on Tuesday the commencement of official operations. The exchange will begin to charge service and transaction fees based on its September announcement.

For data buyers, service fees will involve a one-time cost of 9,980 yuan ($1,448). The additional service fee for the data supplier is set at 2.5 percent of total trading value, according to the SDE's announcement.

The time is prime for the SDE's official launch of operations as its 13-month trial run has nurtured a complete services process including a set of regulations, a data product registration system and a trading mechanism, according to SDE officials.

To date, all of SDE's data products can be traded online. While the trading system for financial data products has been completed, that for transportation and manufacturing data products is undergoing orderly construction, they added.

At present, there are more than 800 data products listed on the SDE, while only 20 products debuted on the first day of the exchange's trial run. The annual trading value of the SDE topped over 100 million yuan in 2022, with the number expected to top over 1 billion yuan this year in light of the rising trading activity, said SDE General Manager Tang Qifeng.

One major strength of the SDE is the trading mechanisms built over the past year. It will introduce more trading participants from key industries such as smart manufacturing, energy saving, carbon emissions reduction, green construction and green energy, Tang said.

Huang Lihua, professor at Fudan University's School of Management, said another nine data exchanges have been established throughout China ever since the trial launch of the SDE. The network of these data exchanges is not only conducive to a smoother data flow but also the maturity of the market. The rising number of both data buyers and suppliers reflects the higher trading activity, she said.

The Shenzhen Data Exchange launched on Nov 15 is one example. Its total trading value exceeded 1.2 billion yuan at the end of 2022.

Chongqing-based Western China Data Exchange started its trial run in December 2021, with total trading value hitting 1 billion yuan in one year's time.

According to a report released by the SDE in late November, there were about 1.92 million data companies in China, which indicates that data are the major production object or material for these market entities.

But as Huang explained, most of these data companies are traditional information technology service providers. Companies with data transaction as their prime business are still a rarity.

Therefore, exchanges are of great importance in fully activating and utilizing key data generated every day. For cities undergoing digital transformation, such exchanges will also play an important role in driving economic growth by using data more efficiently and extensively, she added.

According to the guideline released by the State Council on Dec 19, efforts should be made to complete the infrastructure and build a multi-layered ecosystem for data. The development of data exchanges across the country should be coordinated. A set of nationwide unified data trading rules should be introduced to lower trading costs and better regulate such transactions.

## Briefly

### New railway line links Beijing, Tangshan

A 150-kilometer intercity high-speed railway line, linking Beijing and Tangshan in North China's Hebei province, has begun operating. With a designed speed of 350 kilometers per hour, the new line, partially constructed by China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp Ltd, a unit of China Railway Construction Corp, has slashed the travel time between the two cities to around one hour. This intercity railway not only facilitates travel for residents in areas close to Beijing, but also improves the development prospects of the city cluster.

### China Minmetals to see record profits

China Minmetals Corp, the country's largest metals and minerals group, expects to see record-high revenue and profit figures for 2022, the company said at its annual work conference. In 2022, the operating revenues of the mineral giant are expected to rise 9.2 percent year-on-year to nearly 900 billion yuan ($129.5 billion), and its profits and net profits are expected to respectively increase by 18.4 percent and 28.3 percent from 2021.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

## Ant's consumer finance unit gets nod to raise $1.5b

By **FAN FEIFEI**
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Chinese regulators have approved tech heavyweight Alibaba's financial arm Ant Group to raise 10.5 billion yuan ($1.5 billion) for its consumer finance unit, marking a significant step forward for the revamp of the financial technology company's lucrative consumer loan business.

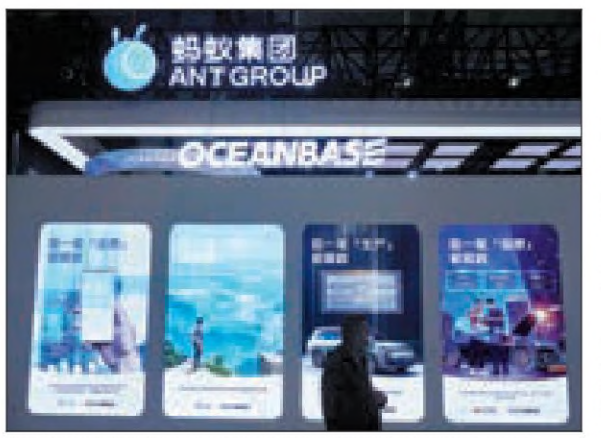
Chongqing Ant Consumer Finance Co Ltd had gained approval to increase its registered capital to 18.5 billion yuan from 8 billion yuan, the Chongqing Office of the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission said in a notice on Friday.

Under the latest capital expansion plan, Ant will invest 9.25 billion yuan for a 50 percent stake in its Chongqing consumer finance unit, while the digital technology unit of State-owned investment firm Hangzhou Finance Investment Group will invest 1.85 billion yuan to become the second-largest shareholder with a 10 percent stake.

Other investors in the deal include Nanyang Commercial Bank, Sunny Optical Technology Group Co Ltd and Hangzhou-based Transfar Zhilian Co Ltd.

Alibaba shares in Hong Kong jumped 8.74 percent to close at HK$96.4 ($12.3) on Wednesday.

The approval came weeks after the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference last month stated that platform companies will be supported to "fully display their capabilities" in bolstering economic growth, job creation and global competition.




Ant Group's booth at an expo in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. LONG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Ant is restructuring after its IPO plan was halted in late 2020 with regulators citing a change in the regulatory environment to ensure market fairness.

Wang Pengbo, a senior analyst at market consultancy Botong Analysys, said the capital expansion approval for Ant Group has signified that the company's rectification work has made some achievements to meet regulatory requirements, and the move will help the company to expand its current consumer finance business scale and seek further growth.

Ant officially set up a consumer finance company in Chongqing in June 2021, which offers credit to millions of Chinese consumers through a pair of lending services — Huabei and Jiebei.

In the first three quarters of 2022, revenue of Ant's consumer finance business stood at 3.21 billion yuan, while its net profit stood at 386 million yuan.

Leon Qi, an analyst with Daiwa Capital Markets Hong Kong Ltd, said in a research note, "We view it as a signal of Ant's regulatory rectification wrap-up."

> "The authority has sent a clear signal to support the development of platform companies ..."
>
> **Su Xiaorui,** a senior analyst with consultancy Analysys

The consumer finance unit will be able to handle 1.1 trillion yuan in loans once the fundraising is complete, Qi said.

The major revamp of Ant includes disconnecting its payment app Alipay from sister credit products like Huabei and Jiebei, ending its monopoly on information collection, improving managing liquidity risks of important fund products and reducing the balance of its money market fund Yu'ebao.

Su Xiaorui, a senior analyst with consultancy Analysys, said:"The authority has sent a clear signal to support the development of platform companies and Ant's latest move is expected to inject vitality into the consumer finance industry."

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# BUSINESS

# Firms, govt up efforts to drive momentum

## Regulators, biz owners boost incentives to secure labor supply amid fast recovery

By **WANG YING**
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As the president of Easy-Try Cycles (Tianjin) Co Ltd, Li Qing is delighted to see his company's production schedule is fully booked until April, but it is also a headache to retain employees after the Chinese Lunar New Year to deliver products to its overseas customers.

A Tianjin-based bike and motorcycle export enterprise, Easy-Try Cycles experienced a rapid recovery in November and orders started to spike in December, making the delivery dates extend into April.

As the Spring Festival approaches, many workers go home for family reunions.

Li decided to offer preferable conditions to employees who promised to return to the factory after the holiday, including an extra bonus, an annual gathering, awards to outstanding employees and lucky draws.

Thanks to these attempts, more than 95 percent of the employees are going to return to their current positions at Easy-Try Cycles after the Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan 22 this year.

The optimization of COVID-19 prevention and control measures has greatly boosted the recovery of the economy. And enterprises, be they big or small, are facing similar problems in retaining workers as Easy-Try Cycles.

ZTO, an express delivery company based in Shanghai, has announced several incentives to retain the workforce during the holiday to ensure the smooth operation of services, such as setting up special teams, providing subsidies, speeding up recruitment and allocating the transportation capacity of all parties.

Wang Shuo, head of a ZTO delivery outlet in Beijing's Tongzhou district, said he is recruiting part-time workers to get prepared for the possible work shortages during the Spring Festival.

"Most of our 26 couriers are non-local and more than half of them are going back home for the traditional Chinese holiday," said Wang.

According to Wang, their outlet has already seen a surge of 20 percent year-on-year in parcel volume by receiving about 300 packages every day and dispatching some 8,000 units on a daily basis.

In Beijing, more than 200 outlets under ZTO Express are raising supplement capacity by recruiting part-time or temporary staff.

JD Logistics, the logistics unit of Chinese e-commerce giant JD, plans to provide subsidies higher than the national standard to their employees. For those who live in different cities with their children, JD Logistics offers a special subsidy for family reunions and encourages its staff to bring their children to the city where they work to spend the festival together.

In the meantime, various logistics channels of highways, railways and airways were allocated to satisfy transportation demand. More than 700 unmanned vehicles and 600 intelligent express vehicles, as well as more than 100 indoor delivery robots, will be equipped in 30 cities across the nation to strengthen the company's terminal delivery capability.

With such efforts, consumers living in 366 cities nationwide can place their orders and receive packages normally, even on Chinese New Year's Eve and the Lunar New Year.

To tackle the transportation capacity shortage, on-demand food delivery platform Ele.me announced it raised 50 million yuan ($7.2 million) to recruit new food delivery workers, as well as provide extra subsidies to existing workers.

"I used to complete some 80 delivery orders per day and now I dispatch more than 100 orders. I can get more from each order. But I work more not only for the extra income but out of social responsibility during this special time," said Wen Jian, a delivery worker in Shanghai.

Along with the various measures made by corporations to ensure the normal operation of business and life, local governments are also working hard to pitch in.

The municipal government of Shanghai is offering subsidies ranging from 60 yuan to 150 yuan per person per day for delivery workers at e-commerce companies and couriers who stay on their posts from Dec 25 to Jan 27.

"The Shanghai government's supportive policies allow us to offer delivery service in a better way," said Fang Rongcheng, general manager of ZTO Express' Shanghai management center.

## Better transport booster



Construction workers are seen working at a bridge connecting project in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Wednesday. Builders from China Railway No 4 Engineering Group Co Ltd have fully connected the Guiwan River Bridge in Shenzhen, helping to perfect Qianhai area's transport. Officials in Shenzhen said this will aid the internationalization of its Qianhai Shenzhen-Hong Kong Modern Service Industrial Cooperation Zone. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# CBIRC to guide more financial support for consumption

By **JIANG XUEQING**
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**2.95 trillion yuan**
growth in renminbi deposits in China in November

The China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission is launching new efforts to bolster the real economy by boosting consumption.

China's financial policy should cooperate with its fiscal and social policies more proactively by giving priority to its support for consumption recovery and expansion, according to decisions made at a recent meeting of the CBIRC.

The regulator said it will optimize consumer financial products and services to encourage consumption of durable goods, including new energy vehicles and eco-friendly home appliances, and promote the increase of consumption related to home purchasing, renting and furnishings. It will also provide credit support and insurance coverage to new types of consumption and service consumption.

As part of the move to achieve the goals, the CBIRC announced on Dec 29 that it has proposed the first revision of the rules governing auto finance companies since 2008 to strengthen oversight of such companies and help boost auto-related consumption.

The regulator intends to allow car buyers to apply for financing for add-on products such as navigation equipment, charging piles and batteries after they have received auto loans.

It also intends to allow auto finance companies to provide dealers and vehicle after-sales service providers with loans to buy maintenance equipment and build auto showrooms.

According to the draft regulation, the CBIRC will encourage auto finance companies to enrich financial products and step up support for micro, small and medium-sized car dealers, auto sales service providers and car buyers to further boost the steady growth of auto consumption.

Both housing finance and consumer finance are expected to pick up in 2023, and the expansion of consumer loans is expected to be the highlight this year, said a person in charge of the credit management department of China Construction Bank Corp, a large State-owned commercial lender, at a recent investor conference.

Wang Jun, director of the China Chief Economist Forum, said the lifting of COVID-19 restrictions in China will promote consumption recovery, which will also be driven by other factors like excessive savings and pent-up willingness to consume during the pandemic over the last three years.

However, whether excessive savings will become a driver for a consumption rebound still remains to be seen, some experts said.

Although the optimization of COVID-19 prevention and control measures is expected to spur consumption growth, continuous improvement of consumption will still rely on whether China can stabilize household income expectations and achieve recovery of consumer spending power, said Lu Zhe, chief macroeconomist at Topsperity Securities.

In the fourth quarter of 2022, the People's Bank of China, the central bank, conducted a survey on 20,000 depositors in 50 cities across the country.

Of the people surveyed, 22.8 percent preferred more consumption, basically the same as the previous quarter; 61.8 percent were in favor of more savings deposits — up 3.7 percentage points quarter-on-quarter — and 15.5 percent were inclined to make more investments, down 3.7 percentage points from the previous quarter.

In November, renminbi deposits in China increased by 2.95 trillion yuan ($428.76 billion), an expansion of 1.81 trillion yuan year-on-year. Among the total, household deposits rose by 2.25 trillion yuan, the PBOC said.

The huge increase of household deposits was caused by both short-term and long-term factors, including unstable employment and uncertainties brought by COVID-19 as well as China's imperfect social security system, said Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance Co.

In order to better promote the development of the real economy, the government should face up to this phenomenon, take measures to guide rational expectations for improvement of household incomes, and increase people's willingness and capacity to consume and invest, Dong said.

China must strengthen efforts to ensure employment, which will help stabilize household income expectations, said Gao Ruidong, chief economist at Everbright Securities.

Given that the impact of COVID-19 on low-income groups is fairly large, policymakers should consider giving out consumption vouchers and increasing transfer payments to local governments to reverse the downturn in consumption, Gao said.




Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



BUSINESSFOCUS

# Platform firms poised to better serve real economy

Sector giants like Alibaba, Tencent expected to usher in new chapter of growth, overseas expansion in 2023

By **LIU WEIFENG** and **CHENG YU**



Visitors check out Alibaba Cloud's intelligent industrial internet platform during the World Manufacturing Convention in Hefei, Anhui province, in September. YUAN BIN / FOR CHINA DAILY




Visitors gather at Tencent's booth during an expo in Fuzhou, Fujian province, in July. LYU MING / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Robots work on Meituan's automated sorting line during the 2022 World Robot Conference in Beijing in August. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

2022 year in Review

The year 2022 saw an apparent slimming down of Chinese platform enterprises, with many of them cutting off unnecessary business undertakings amid China's antitrust efforts. Meanwhile, many of these operators strived to build up muscle in terms of industrial transformation to serve the real economy.

With healthy corrections, the country's platform enterprises, which mainly include internet and tech firms like Alibaba Group and Tencent Holdings, are expected to usher in a new chapter of growth and overseas expansion this year, said industry experts and company executives.

Wang Xiaoming, head of industrial and technological innovation at the Institute of Science and Development at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said: "As an important part of the new economy, platform economy has undergone a period of healthy governance, coupled with gradual improvement of related laws and regulations, and it now has the conditions to radiate vitality and speed up further development. Amid internal and external economic uncertainties, enterprises are expected to play a better leading role in driving both domestic economic growth and global industrial advancement."

Shan Zhiguang, director of the information and industrial development department at the State Information Center, said: "Moving forward, a group of platform enterprises will lead digital transformation in various industrial sectors including consumption, entertainment, and medical care. They will drive the formation of several innovation ecosystems related to artificial intelligence, cloud computing, blockchain, big data and processors. It will be a new normal for major economies to compete in the above ecosystems."

## Positive support

The remarks were made following the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference that took place in December. The meeting emphasized that platform companies will be supported to "fully display their capabilities" in bolstering economic growth, job creation and international competition.

It was at a critical moment that the government sent a strong supportive signal to develop the platform economy. At the 2020 Central Economic Work Conference, the central authorities pledged to prevent the "disorderly expansion of capital". In 2021, the conference maintained that the country should set red and green lights for capital market activity to prevent "haphazard growth".

Since 2020, a group of platform companies including Alibaba and Meituan, which had been engaging in monopolistic practices, underwent corrective measures. Data from the State Administration for Market Regulation showed that as of July, the market regulator had looked into over 100 cases of improper behavior and levied fines on 98 monopolistic instances in the internet sector.

Wei Jianguo, former vice-minister of commerce and vice-chairman of the China Center for International Economic Exchanges, said: "The conference has sent a strong signal that China will vigorously develop digital economy and encourage the development of the platform economy in the years to come. It is an affirmation from the government on the role of platform companies in driving economic growth, as well as encouragement for them to take another step forward now."

A white paper released by the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, a government think tank, showed that the market scale of China's digital economy reached $7.1 trillion last year, which was the second-largest globally.

"This positive shift aims to enable platform companies to not only lead development in various business sectors in the domestic market, but also compete further on the global stage in the future. To some extent, China's platform economy is expected to usher in a new round of healthy development," Wei said.

Following the move, several authorities, including the top securities regulator and the central bank, are ramping up calls to support and facilitate the development of platform companies.

On Tuesday, Jin Zhuanglong, minister of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, said that more efforts will be made to deepen industrial transformation, including building a batch of 5G-connected factories, world-class intelligent factories, smart supply chains, and promoting such models to be used by more small and medium-sized enterprises.

Accelerated efforts will also be made to create a better environment for the development of digital economy, Jin added.

In late December, the China Securities Regulatory Commission said in a meeting that it will accelerate the process for approving "green light" cases for overseas listings of platform enterprises, and will work to implement the reform of the overseas listing system for such companies.

In a separate meeting chaired by Yi Gang, governor of the People's Bank of China — the central bank — Yi vowed to improve the level of normalized supervision over financial activities by platform companies and guide their financial business activities to develop in a standardized and healthy manner.

After the Central Economic Work Conference, many government officials paid visits to local tech and internet companies. Yi Lianhong, newly appointed Party chief of Zhejiang province, visited Alibaba's campus in December and urged the company to "become a model of normalized development and a leader of innovative development".

Beijing's Deputy Party Chief and Acting Mayor Yin Yong visited Meituan and Douyin — or TikTok — last Friday. Yin encouraged Meituan to play a bigger role in facilitating people's lives and helping more small and micro-sized enterprises to carry out digital transformation.

Yin also suggested Douyin further beef up investment in research and development and actively explore "the entrance for the next generation of internet development".

## Industrial transformation

With the government's support of platform economy, platform companies are getting more mature and becoming more focused in terms of industrial internet, as well as pruning their various business lines to focus on their major business activities and will invest more in technologies and services that serve the real economy.

Zhang Lei, founder and CEO of investment firm Hillhouse Capital Group, said: "Industrial internet is different from the past, and it needs companies to conduct business seriously. Investment should not lead to bubbles, but should become a catalyst between technological innovations and the real economy."

Peking University economist Justin Lin Yifu said in a note that China's advantages in digital economy can penetrate various industries in the real economy. Accelerating the digital transformation of industries will not only help increase the proportion of China's digital economy in its gross domestic product, making the proportion reach or even exceed that of developed economies, but also improve the quality and efficiency of manufacturing and the real economy, he said.

Tencent, which owns the country's largest social networking platform, announced its transformation to industrial internet years ago. In December, the Shenzhen, Guangdong province-based company said that it is looking to transform from "integrator to enabler and connector of other companies" for its cloud business to stay competitive amid an accelerated digital transformation.

"With the strategic transformation, Tencent aims to become a platform that can be integrated instead of acting as an integrator, which means becoming more focused on our own products and technologies, thus further enabling other companies," said Dowson Tong, senior vice-president of Tencent and CEO of Tencent's cloud and smart industries group, during the Tencent Digital Ecosystem Summit held in December.

Tong said that being an integrator requires a lot of experience, including stringing together different processes of an entire project, collecting different products, offering huge human capital support during bidding processes, making budgets with finance teams as well as communicating with customers.

"These are actually what Tencent was not good at before. By enabling ecosystem partners to do the integration work instead, win-win cooperation, rather than competition, will be formed among Tencent and other companies," he said.

Soon after the remarks, Tencent announced that it had formed a new unit to serve rather than compete with local telecommunications carriers.

Zhang Yong, board chairman and CEO of Alibaba, also said in July that it is embracing "both consumer and industrial internet businesses" and venturing into new growth areas.

"Alibaba has gained a deeper understanding of platform economy in the past year. A platform company needs to think more deeply about how much social value it can create, how many core technological bottlenecks it can solve and how to better support rural revitalization and become greener and more sustainable," Zhang said.

In December, Zhang also became acting president of Alibaba Cloud intelligence and enterprise communications app DingTalk, which, according to industry experts, showed that the cloud business, an important driver of industrial internet, has become more important to Alibaba's future.

"Alibaba, an e-commerce company and a platform enterprise, greatly empowers the real economy. It enables many low-skilled people to start businesses online, lowering the threshold for entrepreneurship, which is also a good way to achieve common prosperity," said Shi Hongxiu, a professor of economics at the National Academy of Governance.

"On the other hand, its cloud business directly serves industrial manufacturing and the real economy, as its technological innovations can be quickly turned into productive forces," Shi said.

According to data tracking company Qichacha, Alibaba Group's investments were tightened over the past two years, but still focused on its three main businesses of e-commerce logistics, corporate services and lifestyle-related services. The number of early-stage investments by Tencent in the entertainment sector has been declining, but corporate service investments have exceeded 16 cases since 2020, the highest ever.

Wind data showed that among all of the 280 US-listed Chinese companies, only 27 saw their share prices rise since the beginning of last year, accounting for less than 10 percent of the total. The market value of US-listed Chinese companies including Pinduoduo and JD shrank by more than $20 billion.

"Most of the current US industrial internet companies are multinationals that control the industrial chain and ecosystem. In this regard, China still has gaps," said Wang Changlin, president of the Academy of Macroeconomic Research.

Compared with the United States, China still lags behind in terms of industrial internet. Among the top 20 listed US technology companies, seven are related to industrial internet. But China doesn't have an industrial internet giant so far in the internet sector.

Wang said more efforts are needed to encourage these platform companies to do more innovations and compete on the global stage.

"Products will be good only after they can be used. It is necessary to increase government procurement policy support to encourage domestic enterprises to use domestic products, and improve the security level of the supply chain," he added.

## Development amid regulation

Supporting the healthy development of platform companies doesn't mean a lack of regulation. In late December, China National Knowledge Infrastructure, the country's largest online academic database platform, was fined 87.6 million yuan ($12.72 million) for monopolistic behavior.

According to the State Administration for Market Regulation, since 2014, CNKI had abused its dominant market position to sell its database services at increasingly higher prices. The company had also restricted academic journals' and universities' ability to authorize the use of data by third parties through the signing of exclusive cooperation agreements.

Despite the already high fees for its services, CNKI had continued to increase its prices, with an annual average increase of about 10 percent seen for years. According to the penalty notice issued by the regulator, CNKI owned more than 95 percent of published Chinese academic papers, accounting for 90 percent of universities nationwide.

"The latest antitrust efforts on CNKI showed that China's antimonopoly efforts are getting normalized, under which the country aims to ultimately drive the development of various industries through proper regulation," said Zhong Gang, executive director of the Competition Law Research Institute at the East China University of Political Science and Law.

"The move will promote the free flow and dissemination of academic resources, reduce the cost of knowledge acquisition for consumers, and finally drive the fair and sound development of related markets," he said.

While supporting the digital economy, the Central Economic Work Conference also emphasized that the country will continue to improve the level of "normalized supervision", which, according to Wang Xianlin, a member of the expert advisory group of the State Council's antimonopoly commission, is aimed at creating a more predictable business environment.

"This means that the country will avoid sudden, intensive and special rectifications of improper behavior in platform economy in the future, which will be another firm support for platform companies to develop," Wang said.

A report by Sealand Securities said that given the importance of data elements and the important role of platform economy in employment and ensuring market supply, the upcoming policy is expected to be "more stable". And the next stage of supervision will set a clearer red line for platform companies, with the aim of promoting their development in a reasonable and legal manner, it said.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said that a group of green light investment cases are likely to be announced soon, and detailed policies and measures to support the standardized and healthy development of platform economy are expected to be unveiled this year.

Green lights are mainly given to tech and internet investment deals, and those that can help boost the development of the real economy, Zhu said.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# COMMENT

Editorials

## Marcos' visit chance for neighbors to consolidate friendly relations

In his meeting with Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr. on Wednesday, President Xi Jinping once again highlighted the great significance China attaches to its neighborhood diplomacy, and its pursuit of mutual understanding and win-win cooperation with regional partners such as the Philippines.

Noting that China observes bilateral ties from strategic heights bearing the whole picture in mind, President Xi said that China appreciates that the Philippines can play a bigger role in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to help the region get rid of the shadow of a new Cold War, steer clear of bloc confrontation and remain a high ground for sustained prosperity.

President Marcos responded positively to Xi's remarks, expressing the Philippines' willingness to continue to settle maritime disputes through friendly negotiations in a proper way and jointly explore the oil and gas resources in the region. And the Philippine leader anchored the steady development of bilateral ties in various fields in the foreseeable future by saying that nothing can hinder the continuity and development of bilateral friendship. That's in line with the interests of both countries and the region, and sends a clear signal to the external powers that their attempts to drive a wedge between regional countries and China are doomed to failure.

Marcos is the first foreign head of state to visit China in 2023, the visit is the first to China by Marcos as Philippine leader, and this is a rare first-of-the-year overseas visit by a Philippine president that is not to an ASEAN country. In spite of outsider instigation for the Philippines to get "tough" against China in the emerging geopolitical contest, President Marcos' "a friend to all, an enemy to none" foreign policy is a boon for bilateral relations.

As President Xi indicated, to strengthen their connectivity and development synergy, more exchanges, communications and collaboration will be carried out at different levels so that the two sides can effectively draw on each other's experience, better dock their development strategies and weave their ties closer in their respective pursuit of modernization.

Marcos was correct in observing that China-Philippine relations should not be defined by the maritime issues, because after all they are only one aspect of what he deems a "deep, multi-faceted, and mutually beneficial" relationship.

"The issues between our two countries are problems that do not belong between two friends such as the Philippines and China," he said. "We will seek to resolve those issues to the mutual benefit of our two countries."

The two sides can take the visit as an opportunity to advance cooperation in the four previously identified key areas of agriculture, infrastructure, energy, and cultural and people-to-people exchanges and consolidate their relations as good neighbors, good relatives and good partners.

With both Beijing and Manila committing to a more constructive approach to their relationship, thriving bilateral ties will deliver increasing benefits to both peoples.

## UK should straighten out its colonial past

The United Kingdom and Mauritius have begun talks on the sovereignty of the disputed Chagos Archipelago, Mauritian Prime Minister Pravind Jugnauth announced on Sunday in a New Year address, describing the latest developments on the Chagos issue as being "very encouraging".

The archipelago in the Indian Ocean was historically part of Mauritius' territory but has been occupied by the UK since 1814. After Mauritius gained independence from the UK in 1968 following more than 150 years of colonization, it has long fought for the return of the archipelago to its territory. But the UK, which has a joint military base with the United States on Diego Garcia — the largest of the 60 small islands of the Chagos Archipelago — has rejected Mauritius' rightful demand and continued to occupy the territory despite international support for the African country's sovereignty claim.

A 2019 International Court of Justice ruling backed the claim by Mauritius and said the UK should give up its "unlawful" administration of the islands. The decision by the United Nations' highest court was followed by a UN General Assembly resolution in May 2019 that stressed, "The Chagos Archipelago forms an integral part of the territory of Mauritius", calling on the UK to withdraw from it within six months.

Yet it was not until November 2022 that UK Foreign Secretary James Cleverly announced that the UK and Mauritius had agreed to launch "constructive negotiations" on the disputed territory, on the premise that the joint UK-US military base will continue to operate regardless of the outcome of negotiations. The long-delayed settlement of the historical issue attests to denied justice that the UK owes to its former colony.

One of the most aggressive countries in human history, the UK has invaded almost 90 percent of the UN recognized countries in the world, according to *All the Countries We've Ever Invaded: And the Few We Never Got Round To* by Stuart Laycock, which views the British empire's incursion record as a whole.

Yet rather than straighten out its colonial past, the UK continues to drag its feet on settling many of the territorial disputes left over from history through negotiations. Apart from Chagos, for example, the UK still occupies the Malvinas (Falkland) Islands and refuses to conduct talks over its sovereignty with Argentina that also claims them. This despite the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf issuing a ruling in 2016 that confirms the extension of Argentina's maritime territory to include the archipelago, and the Organization of American States in 2012 stating well-established and unconditional support for a peaceful resolution to the demand by Argentina for sovereignty over the islands.

It would be in the interest of the UK to set straight its colonial past at an early date and abide by the spirit and resolutions of the UN Charter to resolve all territorial disputes with other countries.

## Reciprocal arrival measures justified

Authoritative medical experts from different countries have said that entry restrictions on travelers arriving from the Chinese mainland, or with any travel history there within seven days, are unnecessary. China firmly opposes some countries' politicization of their virus control measures for arrivals exclusively from the mainland.

These discriminatory practices are devoid of any scientific basis and do not serve their stated purpose. Instead, they seek to strengthen the image some China-bashers in Western countries are dying to create that China is the source of all troubles.

But that has not prevented China from acting responsibly as the major exporter and donator of essential medical supplies and life necessities for the rest of the world, including those countries doing nothing to control spillovers of the virus or taking the initiative to smear China with baseless charges, slander and lies.

China always distinguishes the few bad apples from the rest of the foreign peoples, and it has never stopped doing all it can to help foreign countries overcome their practical difficulties while protecting its own people from the virus.

And contrary to the claims of those trying to tar China with a malign brush, the country has been sharing relevant information and data in an open and transparent manner with the international community, including sharing the genome data of the virus from the latest COVID cases in China via the Global Initiative on Sharing Avian Influenza Data. Therefore, it is fully justified for the spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China to say, on the one hand, that China stands ready to step up communication with the rest of the international community and work together to prevail over COVID, and on the other, that it firmly rejects using COVID measures for political purposes and "will take corresponding measures in response to varying situations based on the principle of reciprocity".

Predictably this has provoked a reaction from the China-bashing politicians, who claim it is proof of China's "double standard", referring to the fact that China has carried out stringent entry virus control measures for three years.

However, as always, their smears are selective as they intentionally omit the fact that many countries controlled their borders at that time as well. Nor did China target arrivals from any particular country or region. The measures were an integral part of the country's overall COVID policy, based on science and the actual pandemic situation. So there are fundamental differences between the politicized and discriminatory entry restriction measures arrivals from the mainland are being subjected to now and those that China previously applied.

It is these China-bashers that have been criticizing China's strict virus control policies as a grave mistake, and it is also these people that are doing the same now that the country has lifted its controls at the proper time. That is not a coincidence.

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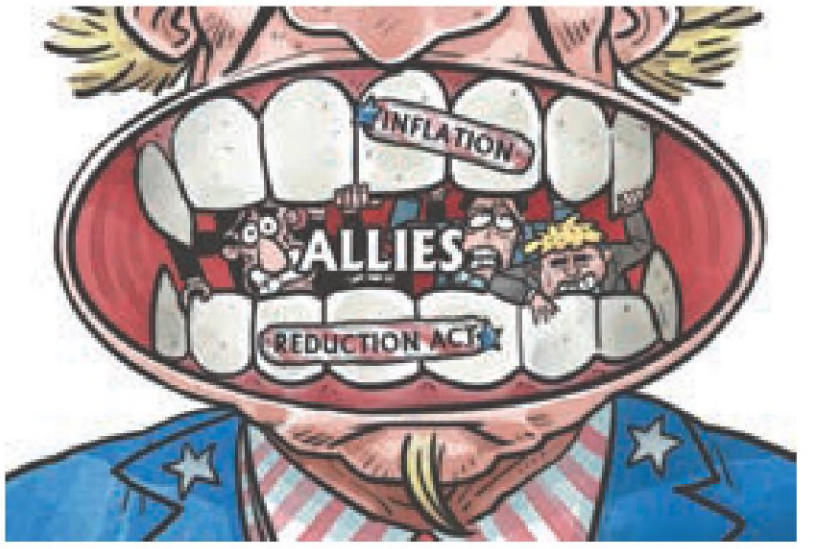
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Cai Meng




Opinion Line

## High-quality development calls for opening-up of service sector

The State Council, China's Cabinet, recently approved a three-year pilot program for Shenyang, Nanjing, Hangzhou, Wuhan, Guangzhou and Chengdu to expand the opening-up of the service sector, increasing the number of such Chinese cities to 11. In 2015, Beijing became the first city in China to conduct a comprehensive pilot program for opening-up the service sector further.

The service sector is an important indicator of a country or region's economic and social development level. In recent years, China has regarded the further opening-up of this sector as an important step toward building a new development pattern. The State Council's latest approval shows once again China's determination to promote a higher level of opening-up. Through this, the country can vigorously attract global high-end service enterprises to enter the domestic market, and stimulate innovation vitality and the growth potential of domestic service providers through fiercer competition, to promote the high-quality development of the country's service sector.

Advancing the pilot program is an important policy arrangement made by the top authorities to promote high-level opening-up. In the past decade, a series of major policies and measures have been introduced to promote the high-level institutional opening-up of the service sector, and high-level trade and investment liberalization and facilitation.

China's per capita GDP has exceeded $10,000, and its consumption pattern is promoting the transformation from a goods-focused to a service-oriented one. However, the current value added of China's service sector accounts for about 55 percent of GDP, about 20 percentage points lower than that of developed countries. China's service sector also faces such problems as insufficient integration with the manufacturing sector, and insufficient development of modern services. Thus it needs opening-up further to foster new growth drivers and create new advantages in international competition and cooperation.

It is conceivable that through multi-dimensional innovation and exploration, the pilot cities will play an exemplary role in the opening-up of the sector nationwide, help further promote the reform and setting up of rules, regulations, and promote management know-how and standards in the sector, accelerate the development of modern services, promote the integration of modern services and advanced manufacturing, and lubricate China's high-quality development.

As China continues to expand the opening-up of its service sector, "Chinese services" are accelerating their global reach. As China takes bigger steps toward opening this sector, more domestic service enterprises will go global, highlighting the global significance of the expanded opening-up of China's service sector.

— BEIJING YOUTH DAILY

## Take Japan to court for nuclear water dumping

The Japanese government had announced in April 2020 that it plans to dump nuclear waste water from its wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean from the spring of 2023.

As the date approaches, and given Japan's record, it will not be surprising if Japan starts dumping the water any time soon without giving other countries advance notice.

While the action will save the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company money and trouble, it will also shift the trouble and cost onto other nations, the Pacific ones in particular. There is a precedent here. Years after the United States carried out nuclear tests on the Bikini Atoll, also in the Pacific, from 1946 to 1958, radiation levels there were considered too high to allow resettlement in 1998.

Fishermen from China, the Republic of Korea and other Southeast Asian countries, including from Japan, depend on the waters in the region to make a living. No wonder, Japanese fishermen were protesting the move to dump nuclear waste into the waters.

The US, which Japan always looks up to, has supported Japan's plan despite studies showing that the region most polluted by the discharge will be the US' west coast in two years.

One can imagine the scale of disaster if over 1.3 million metric tons of nuclear waste is dumped into the ocean. As some environmentalists in the Pacific have said, that's like waging a "nuclear war" on the Pacific people.

Senior Japanese officials, despite bowing politely at news conferences, have shown no sincerity in negotiating with their Pacific neighbors. When they announced the decision to dump the water into the ocean, they did not ask for understanding from any side except the US.

There is the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and multiple nuclear safety conventions to which Japan is a signatory, but it has helped little. It is time for all sides involved to sue the Japanese government in international courts. Japan cannot do this evil deed and just walk away unpunished.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

## EU-US alliance riven with mutual suspicion

Although trying to persuade the United States to have second thoughts before giving a green light to the implementation of its Inflation Reduction Act was an important objective of French President Emmanuel Macron's state visit to the United States last month, and he was received with high standards, it is clear that the US thinks European interests are expendable.

As the French leader unequivocally expressed when speaking with the US media in Washington after his meeting with his US counterpart, the act is a "killer" of jobs and businesses in Europe, despite it being a promoter of the two in the US. As the US government will, in light of the act, offer subsidies several times higher than those the European Union countries are allowed to give to enterprises in green industries, that will arguably reshape the future of the industrial and economic landscape across the Atlantic.

It is predictable that companies, investment, talents and technologies will be attracted to the US from Europe in a short time if the EU side cannot remove the cap on its green industry subsidies, which is fixed at a rational level to promote healthy market competition and prevent the government from interfering too much in market activities.

However, the Inflation Reduction Act will make the playground immediately lopsided by breaking the basic rules of the market. Its contribution to the US' national interests comes at the cost of other players. As Macron warned, the act will prompt more EU countries to do the same — they would have no choice if the US sticks to the act — to protect their own interests, and that will shake the foundation of the free trade and market competition.

The irony is what the US is trying to do — offering excessive state subsidies to market entities — is exactly what it falsely accuses China and some EU countries of doing.

No wonder Macron questioned the nature of the alliance between the US and the EU, which it seems is being hollowed out by such US-first practices as the act and the US' exploiting of the EU's energy crisis to turn a profit.

Those America-first-minded politicians in Washington should realize that if the US goes too far in fleecing the EU, it will only be a matter of time for the foundation of their so-called value-based alliance to be shaken, as the Ukraine crisis, which the US is prolonging for its own narrow ends, has already served to show how fractured the alliance is, and the depth of their mutual suspicion.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# COMMENT

Ikenna Emewu

## China's reopening good omen for world

The vestiges of international travel restrictions due to the COVID-19 pandemic will ebb on Jan 8 with China set to open up to the world again. Since the world's second-largest economy and the biggest manufacturing power is essential to global economic stability, the news of China opening up to the world, once again, hit the headlines all over the world.

The news has raised speculation that the world will return to win-win trade and economic development with China returning to full capacity production in the factories, farms and general services.

In the almost three years of travel restrictions, global trade and tourism have suffered immeasurably, making the revival of the global economy a big challenge. But with the main driver of global growth back on the global economic stage, expectations of a full-scale worldwide recovery are rising.

In fact China is still expected to contribute to about 30 percent of the global growth in 2022 and 2023 based on indicators of inflation-adjusted estimates. This shows that China's absence from the global economic stage for a long time has left a yawning vacuum, and its return to the stage has come as a big relief.

In February 2019, The Economist magazine said: "Since 2012 China has been the world's biggest source of tourists. Chinese travellers racked up nearly 150 million trips abroad last year. Their spending — over $250 billion in 2017 — far outstrips that of their American counterparts."

In so many ways, China demonstrated it is committed to protecting people's lives and health by implementing strict measures to contain the pandemic. Even though the pandemic struck without warning, China picked up the gauntlet and fought back courageously. The quick, split-second strategies and steps encouraged the world to fight the virus and, in the end, achieve victory.

China first ordered the lockdown of Wuhan in 2020. The move was followed by the implementation of strict prevention and control measures, including lockdowns, in many places.

The lightning speed at which China built new hospitals, converted facilities into temporary healthcare centers and recruited volunteers, medical experts, military personnel, and others to fight the pandemic was simply amazing.

While the Chinese government stood with the people, encouraging them to keep fighting the virus, many medical experts sacrificed their lives to save those of others.

But after the variants and sub-variants of the novel coronavirus became less lethal — but more infectious, China's central authorities announced that the people need to better balance economic development with anti-pandemic measures.

Despite facing multiple challenges on multiple fronts, China continued working with the international community to contain the virus, and the strategies China worked out to contain the pandemic were later adopted by other countries.

According to the Chinese foreign ministry, the country also sent medical experts to 38 countries to assist them to control the spread of the virus and supported over 180 countries and international organizations with treatment protocols and containment methods. It followed this up with the sending of COVID-19 vaccines (a large percentage for free) and later outsourced the production of Sinovac vaccines to companies in Egypt, Algeria, the United Arab Emirates, Serbia, Indonesia, Morocco, and Brazil.

**China has been at the forefront of scientific and technological development, including in medical equipment production and medical know-how, with the goal of reducing the threat from the pandemic.**

In March 2020, China donated $20 million to the World Health Organization, and followed it up with another $30 million in April, and a $2 billion pledge in May. All these were in the face of the US' withdrawal from the WHO and its refusal to assist the agency at such a trying moment. Altogether, the country gave over $2.2 billion doses of vaccines to 120 countries and international bodies, including the WHO.

China has spared no efforts in fighting the virus, and learned that despite the advances made by medical science, human beings have to cohabit with the virus.

China has been at the forefront of scientific and technological development, including in medical equipment production and medical know-how, with the goal of reducing the threat from the pandemic. Since resilience and adaptability are the most potent weapons of conquest at man's disposal, China and the rest of the world will be just fine from Jan 8.

*The author is a journalist and editor-in-chief of Africa China Economy Magazine based in Lagos, Nigeria.*
*The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Chris Bradley and Marc Canal Noguer

## It's critical to return to progress for all

Until the COVID-19 pandemic, humanity was making great strides in extending lives and increasing economic prosperity. It is critical that we return to that trajectory as the global economy recovers. New research, which examines progress at a granular level, can help us get there.

Typically, human progress is assessed at a country level. On average, the 178 countries where data are readily available have an area of 700,000 square kilometers (about 270,000 square miles), populations of some 40 million people, and produce around $700 billion in GDP. But there obviously are vast differences across and within countries, and the effectiveness of efforts to enhance economic prosperity and human well-being depends on understanding these differences.

That is why our new report, "Pixels of Progress: A Granular Look at Human Development Around the World", paints a picture that is 230 times more detailed than a country-level perspective. Using night-time luminosity and other cutting-edge techniques to gather and analyze data, we examine population patterns, economic performance, and changes in life expectancy from 2000 to 2019 across more than 40,000 microregions, each averaging 3,000 square kilometers in area, 180,000 people, and $3 billion in GDP.

This approach revealed, for example, that in 2019, almost half of the world's population enjoyed living standards that, just 20 years earlier, had been attained by only 21 percent of humanity (largely in OECD countries). In 2000, 12 microregions along China's coast — with populations of 71 million — boasted life expectancies of more than 72.5 years and GDP exceeding $8,300 per capita, putting them in the top 30 percent globally for both of these metrics. By 2019, 86 percent of China's population — 1.2 billion people — lived in a microregion with living standards exceeding those thresholds. Beyond China, microregions containing 920 million people spread across 75 countries crossed the same threshold.

Similar gains were made at the other end of the spectrum. In 2000, more than one billion people resided in microregions with the lowest standards of living. By 2019, the figure had dropped to just over 400 million people, despite population growth. India in 2000 accounted for 43 percent of microregions where longevity was less than 65.6 years and income was lower than $2,400 (the bottom 30 percent globally); in 2019, it no longer had a single microregion in that category.

Overall, our granular approach shows that living standards declined only rarely, and in places often identifiable only through a microregional lens. Country averages obscure differences in microregional realities: using regression analysis, we found that a country's growth rate of GDP per capita explains only about 20 percent of the variation in growth rates in its microregions. In other words, economic progress is primarily explained locally.

For example, in places where a country-level view showed falling GDP per capita, our analysis tells a more nuanced story. A country-level analysis shows that 191 million people living in 20 countries experienced negative income growth from 2000 to 2019. But as we zoom in, we can see exactly where GDP per capita fell: in 6,300 microregions that are home to three times as many people — 574 million — in 100 countries. For 80 percent of these people, income losses can be explained not by overall economic decline, but rather by rapid population growth.

**With a more granular understanding of how past progress unfolded – one that informs, for example, how we deploy resources – we can put ourselves on a path toward fulfilling that potential. We may even be able to chart a faster, clearer, and more efficient course.**

Then there are the microregions that have made particularly rapid progress. Consider Dibër, a microregion tucked away in the Albanian Alps. Dibër's economy remains highly agrarian, but, since Albania joined NATO in 2009, the local authorities have been working to revive its once-thriving tourism sector — catering to affluent European travelers visiting the Peshkopi thermal baths — with the help of international agencies.

During the period we studied, the number of health tourists rose steadily as accommodations increased, while glacial lakes and old-growth forests attracted hikers and trekkers. Such developments may have helped to boost health and incomes in Dibër, where GDP per capita more than tripled — from $3,300 to $10,200 — between 2000 and 2019, and average life expectancy rose from 74.1 to 78.3 years.

Dibër's experience is representative of a broader trend: income and longevity have grown faster in microregions that started out further behind, narrowing global gaps in health and prosperity. In 2000, the bottom 5 percent of the world's population lived in microregions where life expectancy was less than 49.7 years, and the top 5 percent could expect to live over 30 years longer (more than 79.5 years). By 2019, that gap had narrowed to 23 years.

The pandemic interrupted — and even reversed — the progress we examined, but it did not extinguish the potential for further gains. With a more granular understanding of how past progress unfolded — one that informs, for example, how we deploy resources — we can put ourselves on a path toward fulfilling that potential. We may even be able to chart a faster, clearer, and more efficient course.

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*The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.*

Yasir Masood

## Bizarre policies to disparage Chinese pandemic fight

The global resurgence of COVID-19 has prompted media outlets in some Western countries, including the United States, to launch yet another campaign to tarnish China.

A quick flashback of the ravages of the pandemic will show how some US politicians and media outlets' allegations — that the virus had spread across the world at an amazing speed due to China's lack of transparency during the first wave of infections — were unfair. They also criticized Beijing for being too strict with its lockdown regulations. And now those people are criticizing China for easing the strict anti-pandemic measures, saying it could spread the virus at a much faster speed.

The fact is that the Chinese authorities eased the restrictions after leading epidemiologists analyzed that the move will not endanger most people's lives. This shows some Western politicians' primary objective is to undermine Beijing's domestic and international efforts to combat the pandemic.

During the early days of the pandemic, China promptly shared the results of its pandemic-prevention and control measures, setting an important example for the rest of the world to follow. Implementing strict measures, it checked the spread of the virus at home faster than any other country. It also sent medical teams, masks, and medical equipment to several countries.

In the past three years China has pledged to donate at least $3 billion to the international fight against the pandemic. It has also been actively involved in the international COVID-19 vaccine development, medical treatment, and prevention and control measures. China also continued to advocate coordinating global measures to fight the virus and build a global public health emergency response mechanism to fight future pandemics.

**Besides, epidemiologists argue that no new variant from China has been observed thus far and the screening policy adopted against Chinese visitors by some countries including the US and Japan is "discriminatory", especially considering that China has now considerably relaxed its inbound travel rules.**

China outperformed the US in developing effective virus-control strategies. Before the reopening, China took strict but effective measures to contain the pandemic when the virus was more deadly. And the strict approach protected most people from the virus.

Meanwhile, China actively implemented its vaccination policy to cover all citizens for free, which was aimed at helping most people gain immunity. By the end of 2022 it had vaccinated more than 1.3 billion people in the country. And it has been monitoring the spread of the virus and warning locals about possible outbreaks.

China has delivered more than 2.2 billion doses of vaccines to more than 120 countries and international organizations in Africa, the Asia-Pacific, South America and Europe.

When some people in the US and some other developed countries accuse another country of not reporting daily number of infections, they probably ignore the fact that the US itself stopped reporting daily COVID-19 cases since October last year, and miserably failed to curb the spread of the deadly variants of the virus, which raised the death toll in the US to more than 1 million — the highest in the world.

The CNBC reported that the US alone had more than 100 million formally diagnosed and registered COVID-19 patients by last week, but experts estimate the number of Americans infected since the start of the pandemic may be twice as much as the official figure.

Besides, epidemiologists argue that no new variant from China has been observed thus far and the screening policy adopted against Chinese visitors by some countries including the US and Japan is "discriminatory", especially considering that China has now considerably relaxed its inbound travel rules.

Unable to contain the pandemic and boost the economy, some Western politicians and media outlets are now resorting to bizarre policies to cover up their own countries' failures by disparaging China's spectacular achievements. They have also been fabricating false stories and propagating them across the world through diplomatic lobbying and social media platforms, as well as the mainstream media.

Given China's amazing strides across many fields, the US' contrived strategies and media blitz may only serve to jeopardize global cooperation and peace. So in the war of narratives, the world should objectively deconstruct such discourses rather than becoming a victim of the "hybrid wars" of perception-making policies.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# GLOBAL VIEWS

WANG SHITING

## Upholding true multilaterism

China and Switzerland should continue cooperating on the principle of mutual respect, injecting positive energy into world peace and development

China-Switzerland relations have become a model of friendly cooperation between countries of different social systems, development stages and sizes.

China and Switzerland formally established diplomatic relations on Sept 14, 1950. By far, their ties and friendly cooperation have seen extraordinary years. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties 73 years ago, especially in the past decade, the two sides have continued to deepen political mutual trust, promote exchanges and cooperation in various fields, made considerable progress in bilateral relations and established an innovative strategic partnership in 2016.

The head-of-state diplomacy has guided China-Switzerland relations to advance in the right direction and high-level exchanges have continued. At the beginning of 2017, President Xi Jinping made a state visit to Switzerland, the first Chinese head of state's visit to the Alpine country in the 21st century.

President Xi and President of the Swiss Confederation Doris Leuthard attended eight important bilateral events, jointly witnessing the signing of 10 bilateral agreements, strongly promoting the upgrading of practical cooperation in various fields between the two countries and injecting new vitality into the China-Switzerland innovative strategic partnership.

In the past 10 years, China and Switzerland have maintained close high-level contacts and exchanged visits nearly 50 times. Since 2021, the two foreign ministers have made three phone calls to maintain strategic communication on bilateral relations and international issues of common concern. By maintaining close high-level exchanges, the two countries have reached many consensus in consolidating political mutual trust, strengthened strategic coordination, and enhanced cooperation on international and regional affairs.

They have seen fruitful economic, trade and financial cooperation. Switzerland is the first European continental country to sign a free trade agreement with China, and the two sides are promoting joint research on upgrading their free trade agreement.

Switzerland is a supporter and active participant of the Belt and Road Initiative. China has been Switzerland's third-largest trading partner for seven consecutive years. In 2021, the bilateral trade volume between the two countries reached $44.11 billion, with a year-on-year growth of 96.7 percent. This year, it is expected to exceed $50 billion.

At present, Swiss enterprises have made a total investment of more than $9 billion in more than 2,000 projects in China. In 2022, 10 plus Chinese enterprises have applied or are planning to issue global depository receipts on Switzerland's SIX Swiss Exchange. These enterprises cover the fields of machinery, medical care, and new energy. Financial cooperation between the two countries is still developing.

There is a promising future for the cultural exchanges and people-to-people bonds between the two states. According to the cultural agreement inked by the two sides, China will set up a Chinese cultural center in the Swiss capital Bern. After deliberate preparation, the center is expected to be unveiled this year.

Before the COVID-19 outbreak, China and Switzerland witnessed 1.37 million visits, and the number of person night stays in Switzerland reached 1.71 million. Although the epidemic affected personnel exchanges, the enthusiasm for people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries has never diminished.

In the winter of 2021, China's embassy in Switzerland held a promotional event themed on the Beijing 2022 Winter Olympics at the Olympic Museum in Lausanne. Artists from Switzerland, which is known as the kingdom of ice and snow sports, expressed their blessing for the sports event in Beijing in their unique way. It is believed that with the global epidemic situation improving, people-to-people and cultural exchanges between the two countries will become more frequent.

Under the new situation, the two sides should continue to cooperate on the principle of mutual respect, equal treatment and win-win cooperation, build a bilateral relationship with a stronger foundation of mutual trust and deep integration of interests, promote their relations to usher in a better future, and inject positive energy into world peace and development.

First, they should cherish the hard-won achievements of bilateral relations. Since the establishment of diplomatic ties between China and Switzerland more than 70 years ago, Switzerland has been at the forefront of China's relations with Western countries, reflecting both sides' vision and extraordinary courage to seize development opportunities.

The most important experience gained from these achievements is to adhere to the equality of large and small countries, mutual respect and mutual trust. China and Switzerland must seek common ground while reserving differences, adhere to the main tone of win-win cooperation, properly handle differences and jointly safeguard their bilateral friendly cooperation.

Second, they should continue to deepen their innovative and practical cooperation. The two countries enjoy highly complementary advantages and huge potential for cooperation. China has a large consumer market with a population of 1.4 billion and a middle-income group of over 400 million.

The economy has been improving for a long time, and is accelerating the high-level opening-up and establishing a unified national market. Switzerland is an export-oriented economy and a global innovation highland.

The two countries have broad prospects for cooperation in the Belt and Road construction, economy and trade, finance, science and technology, sustainable development and more. They should keep pace with the times to promote innovative and pragmatic cooperation, and deepen and expand it and share the dividends.

Third, they should jointly defend multilateralism and the free trade system. As advocates of globalization and multilateralism, both China and Switzerland play a constructive role in promoting the political settlement of international disputes in their own ways.

The two countries should work together to practice true multilateralism, take a clear stance against "camp confrontation" and "zero sum games", jointly safeguard the international system with the United Nations at its core, preserve the international order based on international law and the multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core, and inject confidence and contribute to global development and security.

*The author is China's ambassador to Switzerland. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.*



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

ZHANG MONAN

## Potential unleashed

China needs to advance higher-level opening-up to broaden the appeal of its domestic market

To implement the strategy to expand domestic demand and fully develop and unleash the potential of consumption, it is imperative that China open its door wider, especially by pushing institutional opening-up.

The expanding domestic market of China in recent years is largely attributable to the efforts made in opening-up on a larger scale and at a deeper level. First, China has been promoting the facilitation of trade and investment. China has fully delivered on the promises it made when joining the World Trade Organization: the country has lowered its overall tariff level and slashed the institutional costs of imports.

During the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-20), China lowered its import tariffs on 1,585 taxable items. The overall tariff level dropped from 9.8 percent in 2010 to 7.4 percent in 2021. China has implemented all measures stipulated in the Trade Facilitation Agreement.

Second, China has opened more areas to foreign investment since 2012, and eased the restrictions on foreign investors by pushing institutional innovations such as the negative list for foreign investment access, which was first put forward in 2013. It should now promote higher-level opening-up with the focus on developing the service trade.

Third, China has made vigorous efforts to foster a world-class business environment since 2012 and intensified reforms to streamline government administration, decentralize power, improve regulation and upgrade services. The country has relentlessly pushed for free cross-border flows of factors of production, refined the legal systems underpinning the market economy, such as those for market access and regulation, property rights protection and social credit. Also, the Foreign Investment Law has become the basic law for foreign investment management, and serves as a fundamental guarantee for protecting the rights and interests of foreign investors.

Fourth, China has been promoting the alignment of Chinese rules and standards with international practices. Since 2012, it has rolled out a raft of policies to align with high-standard global rules, including adjusting and regulating subsidy policies, scraping differentiated treatment for domestic and foreign businesses, and deepened its reform of government procurement. Facing the pressure from the new round of global competition of rules making, China has deepened the reforms of its pilot free trade zones and free trade ports. For instance, the Hainan Free Trade Port has stepped up the pace of experimenting with the integrated management of the negative lists for foreign investment and the cross-border service trade.

At the same time, upgrading free trade zones has become an important part of China's efforts to carry out institutional opening-up. So far, China has signed 19 free trade agreements with 26 countries and regions, and is negotiating on 10 FTAs and studying the feasibility of eight free trade zones. In the past decade, the number of free trade agreements China has signed has nearly doubled, and its trade volume with FTA partners now accounts for around 35 percent of its total trade.

China has also promoted the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership agreement and applied to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Digital Economic Partnership Agreement, demonstrating the country's resolve to push domestic reforms through opening its door wider, and comprehensively expanding its opening-up.

Since the RCEP took effect at the beginning of last year, many policy dividends have been released. In the first 10 months of 2022, China's imports and exports to other RCEP members grew 8.4 percent year-on-year, and its imports and exports to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations member countries increased by 15.8 percent. ASEAN remains the largest trading partner of China, accounting for 15.2 percent of China's foreign trade. China should optimize its opening-up by focusing on the RCEP, which would help amplify the interplay between domestic and international markets and resources, and be beneficial to promoting the economic integration of the Asia-Pacific region.

The primary task of institutional opening-up is to align domestic rules with high-standard global trade and economic rules, and to accelerate the building of a unified, open, competitive and orderly modern market system. To further unleash the tremendous vitality of China's ultra-large domestic market and build up a high-standard market system, the country should start reforming its system of rules, and strive to build a more systematic and strategic system of institutional opening-up.

The key to China's pursuit of higher-quality and higher-level opening-up lies in furthering reform to promote trade and investment liberalization. The country should focus on improving the system of property rights and market-based allocation of production factors, lift hidden barriers to market access, and promote free flows of production factors. The country should further shorten the negative list of foreign investment and ease market access to fully unleash the potential and vitality of domestic consumption with more transparent market rules, a sounder service system and more efficient rights and interests protection, thus offering more high-quality products and services to consumers and pooling high-end production factors from home and abroad.

As the world undergoes momentous changes and the competition between China and the United States intensifies, the changes to international trade and economic rules reflect the major adjustments and changes in the global economic order. Since 2018, a series of ultra-large free trade agreements have been signed worldwide, including the CPTPP, the US-Canada-Mexico Agreement and the Japan-EU Economic Partner Agreement. These deals cover a wide range of diversified sectors, and involve trade cooperation of high standards, with the fields covered by the rules shifting from traditional "border measures" such as tariffs, quotas, customs supervision and non-tariff reduction, to "post-border measures" such as those about the trade in services, competitive neutrality, intellectual property rights, government procurement, State-owned enterprises, transparency and environmental standards. The evolving domestic and international situations present new challenges to China.

High-level opening-up relies on the building of a high-standard market system. To further develop and unlock its huge consumption potential, it is imperative for China to clear the blockages to the flows of production forces, shore up points of weakness, and remove institutional barriers to unlock the potential of domestic consumption. The country should also promote institutional opening-up, work toward meeting the highest international standards, improve and reform "post-border measures", align domestic industrial, innovation and competition policies with international rules, thus creating a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment, and providing new dividends to the rest of the world through its development.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# LIFE

The living past



A bronze ornament featuring the face of an animal, excavated from the Jiuwutou site in Yuncheng, Shanxi province.




CHINA DAILY

# Saving the best for last

How a foiled robbery attempt led to the unexpected discovery of a tomb full of relics that shed light on a key part of Shang history, report **Yang Feiyue** and **Sun Ruisheng** in Taiyuan.

Dozens of tombs, with more than 600 artifacts of ceremonial bronze, jade, pottery and bones, have recently been shown to the public, painting a vivid picture of a dynasty that faded into history more than 3,000 years ago.

The relics were displayed by the Archaeology Institute of Shanxi Province in December after years of studies at the Jiuwutou site in Wenxi county, Yuncheng city, North China's Shanxi province.

The findings provide important clues to the study of the history, rituals, culture and political structure of the late stage of the Shang Dynasty (c. 16th century-11th century BC), according to the institute.

"The Shang political structure was a management model that centered on military strongholds," says Wang Xiaoyi, president of the Shanxi archaeology institute.

"With the eastward and southward movement of the Shang Dynasty's power, the number and scale of settlements in the southern Shanxi area during the late Shang period declined sharply, compared with those of the early Shang, and no previous archaeological work had found large-scale late Shang sites in this region. Therefore, the appearance of the burial items at Jiuwutou is of great historical and archaeological importance," Wang says.

It was named among the country's top 10 archaeological findings in 2018, when the judging committee said that the discovery and excavation of the cemetery was a major breakthrough in archaeological studies of the Shang period. The committee noted that the discovery ascertained the provenance of the bronze artifacts and filled a void in late Shang research in the south of Shanxi. Many of the bronze items unearthed from the tombs at Jiuwutou are carved with a Chinese character that reads like *ni*. The same character had earlier been found etched on bronze items on display at museums at home and abroad.

However, there were few related historical accounts of *ni*, and people couldn't decipher its meaning, says Ma Sheng, who was in charge of the archaeological excavation at Jiuwutou.

Until, that is, archaeologists made new discoveries over the long course of the excavations in Shanxi.

"We found the existence of Bing, Xian, Peng, Ba and other vassal states, and by the same token, Ni was also the name of a state," Ma explains. "It was the discovery of Ni wares that lifted the veil of the mysterious Ni clan."

The large quantity of bronze and weapons, such as battle-axes, axes, dagger-axes and arrowheads, shows the military strength of the Ni clan.

Jiuwutou was located on the western edge of the Shang territory and surrounded by mountains to the north, east and south. Today the area is at the junction of the Yuanqu, Yuncheng and Linfen basins and adjacent to rich salt and copper resources.

The "tomb masters" are believed to have played an important role in guarding the capital and transporting resources to the leading local powers during the late Shang period. All such information led to the conclusion that the Ni clan was made of high-class nobles, appointed by the Shang king, to rule the state of Ni in Jiuwutou. Yet, the excavation of Jiuwutou only started after the site had been robbed many times.

In the second half of 2014, a gang of five "tomb raiders" ransacked an ancient tomb at the site, and each acquired a share of 20 bronze artifacts, while the remaining loot was sold for 4.3 million yuan ($615,800).



An archaeologist photographs the excavation process at the Jiuwutou site. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY







**Above:** A bird's-eye view of the Jiuwutou excavation site in Yuncheng, Shanxi province. **Left, right and below:** Cultural relics found at the site, including a type of bronze vessel called *gu*, a bronze tripod goblet called *jue*, and a jade fish.



A second gang was encouraged to try their hand at raiding the site. These two acts of robbery quickly drew the attention of a local major gang, which in May 2015 extended its interest to the Shang tomb cluster at Jiuwutou. The gang used explosives to blast its way into the tombs, and the noise eventually alerted the Wenxi county public security bureau.

After arresting several suspects, local authorities found out about the existence and value of the Jiuwutou tomb cluster. The local public security bureau wasted no time in setting up a round-the-clock protection detail at the site.

In November 2016, local cultural relics and public security departments invited experts to make a preliminary determination of the history of the site. Well-known domestic archaeologists, such as Li Boqian, Liu Xu and Zhu Fenghan, investigated the area and concluded that the tomb cluster might belong to a high-ranking official of the late Shang Dynasty and should be protected and excavated as soon as possible.

"At that time, the site was riddled with holes made by the robbers during their 'exploration' of the tombs," says Duan Linhui, an official of the Wenxi public security bureau, adding that they were so numerous, when those arrested were brought to the scene, even they were unable to identify which holes they had made.

Due to the seriousness of the theft, a rescue excavation was approved by the National Cultural Heritage Administration. It was launched in June 2017 by the Shanxi archaeology institute in cooperation with archaeologists from Yuncheng city and Wenxi county.

Ma, who was in charge of the excavation, recalls the first time he saw the site. "There were more than a dozen large and small holes on the surface through which robbers got in, some of which were made with explosives," Ma says. "Everyone was overwhelmed by a sense of frustration, despair and anger."

As archaeologists speculated, several tombs within the complex were left empty, with only a few fragments of pottery and bronze remaining, causing irreversible damage to archaeological and historical research.

It was in October 2017 when the excavation team came upon a tomb in the easternmost part of the site that had not been damaged by robbers. As the team meticulously cleaned it up, the tomb turned out to be big, featuring sacrificial animals and a pit with chariots and horses.

Judging by the shape of the tomb, and those of the excavated ornaments and bronze items, archaeologists were able to ascertain that the site was from the late Shang Dynasty, exactly as experts had predicted during the preliminary investigation.

"This made everyone exceptionally excited, because in the southern Shanxi region, the late Shang period had remained a blank spot," says Bai Shuzhang, an expert who joined the excavation.

Most importantly, a large number of complete bronze items were unearthed in the tomb, which undoubtedly highlights the dignified status of the tomb owner.

"Everyone agreed that it was possible that the owner of the tomb was a person from the same clan as the Shang king who was sent to establish his own territory here," Bai says.

The excavation work was completed in December 2018 and eventually uncovered 12 tombs from the late Shang Dynasty, which led to the discovery of more than 600 bronze, jade, ceramic and bone artifacts in an area of more than 5,000 square meters.

At the same time, the Shanxi authorities launched a three-year fight against the theft of cultural relics and managed to retrieve 29 of the stolen historical items, all of which were identified by archaeologists as being from Jiuwutou.

"The recovery of the artifacts has made the historical information of the Jiuwutou tomb site nearly complete," Wang says.

"When they make their way to the museums, they will be opening a window through which the public can view and understand the material civilization and social circumstances of the time back then."

*Peng Ke'er contributed to the story.*

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# Evidence of human activity dating back 20,000 years found in East China

FUZHOU — A relic site dating back to the late Paleolithic period has been discovered near the Mulanxi River in Putian, East China's Fujian province, the municipal culture and tourism bureau says, adding that the discovery shows that the area started to see human activity at least 20,000 years ago.

Fan Xuechun, head of the archaeological team focusing on the river basin of Mulanxi, says that, during the excavation and research work, which lasted for about a year, the team found a total of 26 prehistorical sites, including one Paleolithic, seven Neolithic, and 18 Bronze Age sites.

**26 sites**
the number of prehistoric sites found in a year on the river basin of Mulanxi in Putian, Fujian province

Hundreds of collected specimens and nearly 100 complete or recoverable objects were unearthed.

The discovery has filled many archaeological gaps in the region, according to Fan.

Fan says the discoveries showed that the Mulanxi river basin is one of the areas where ancient human activities were frequent.

It was the intersection zone where the prehistoric culture of northern Fujian province met with that of southern Fujian province, which is of great research value.

The Mulanxi is the mother river of Putian. More than 20 relic sites dating back to the pre-Qin period (pre-221 BC) have been discovered along the river in recent decades.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# LIFE



# *A time to celebrate tradition*

Minor Cold, a Chinese solar term, is set to usher in preparations for the Lunar New Year, **Zhang Lei** reports.

The Chinese astronomical calendar shows that at 23:04:39 (Beijing time) on Thursday, *xiaohan* or Minor Cold, arrives. The 23rd term of the 24 traditional Chinese solar terms, which spans 15 days, marks the onset of the coldest period of the year.

The calendar is published by the Purple Mountain Observatory with Chinese Academy of Sciences, an authoritative astronomical measurement institution in China. Responsible for the implementation of the country's calendar calculation, it compiles the annual lunar calendar, including the time of the occurrence of the solar terms.

Luo Shuwei, a researcher at the Tianjin Academy of Social Sciences, says every year around this time, a cold air mass moves from Siberia toward the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, with the strongest cold wave peaking during the following solar term Major Cold in 15 days.

Despite the severe cold, yang, a positive and active force in the Chinese yin-yang theory, continues to grow. During *xiaohan*, as the yang energy is slightly higher than that of Winter Solstice, wild geese begin to migrate to the north because they feel the growth of yang during the first five days of *xiaohan*.

Ancient Chinese also recorded during the next five days that magpies were seen in the north, starting to build their nests as they also felt an increase of yang. As a result of this energy gaining momentum over five days, pheasants started to tweet loudly.

Among the Twenty-Four Solar Terms, only White Dew and Minor Cold are marked as being bird-related in phenology. It is believed that birds can sense the flows of yin and yang before people do.

The surroundings of snow, ice and rocks have the grandeur of wilderness.

However, the plum blossoms during this time of the year have inspired many romantics, especially people of letters, to come up with the expression *huaxinfeng*, or "flower-greeting wind", conferring people to boundless reverie.

"Cold and cloudy as it is, the sun is growing at the beginning of dawn; before the news of spring is announced, the early thin wintersweet (a flowering plant with Chinese name *lamei* meaning "plum in wax") blossoms first, with shallow buds and fine pistils; evenly fragrant, it is born with casual and elegant bearing," wrote Song Dynasty (960-1279) poet Yu Zhi in *Scent of Wintersweet*, a poem dedicated to *xiaohan*.

Some 24 names for the "flower-greeting wind" first appeared in the Record of Jingchu Region, an important book on folk custom in Hubei province in the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581).

People call it the "flower-greeting wind", as it literally brings news of flowering. Five days are regarded as one section, and three sections make up one solar term. Every year, the blooming of a distinct flower is recorded across the 24 sections in the eight solar terms from Minor Cold to Grain Rain in April. *Xiaohan* is the starting point of the 24 "flower-greeting wind" journeys, with plum blossoms in the first section, with camellia, narcissus following suit.

Plum tops the chart in China as a popular flower for its lofty and unyielding character. It is listed as one of the "four gentlemen" along with orchid, bamboo and chrysanthemum, and one of the "three friends of severe cold" along with pine and bamboo.

Many regions in the north during *xiaohan* are ideal for anyone who would like to swish around through the snow and ice.

"At this time, ice rinks in Beijing's Beihai Park, Shichahai scenic area and other places are all open," says folklore expert Gao Wei. "Especially at night, it is more beautiful than during the day. The lights in the ice rink are bright, reflecting the white surface of ice. The White Pagoda in Beihai Park, from an era when entertainment was scarce, is today a nostalgic winter memory for many who grew up in Beijing."

The success of the 2022 Winter Olympics in China has spawned a new wave of popularity in ice and snow sports.

"This is a manifestation of the change of customs. Folk customs are not static. They evolve with the changes in lifestyles," Gao says.

*Xiaohan* also precedes the Chinese New Year. There is a folk proverb that goes, "Prepare for the New Year during Minor Cold and Major Cold".

After *xiaohan*, the atmosphere of the Lunar New Year picks up with families. People begin to write Spring Festival couplets, use the paper-cutting craft to make window decorations, clean the house, go to the market to buy firecrackers, incense and lanterns.




ARTWORK BY WANG XIAOYING AND SUN YUE

小寒

**Minor Cold**

*Xiaohan* falls on the 12th month of the lunar calendar, and often around *laba*, the eighth day of the 12th month. In Beijing, *laba* is generally considered to be the beginning of the Chinese New Year celebrations. Virtually every household in the city eats porridge on that day. *Laba* porridge is made of ingredients such as glutinous rice, sesame, barley rice, longan, red dates, shiitake mushrooms and lotus seeds. This tradition of making the porridge can be traced back to the Song Dynasty, extolling the significance of diligence and thrift.

The festival is also a grand occasion in Buddhism. Before Sakyamuni became enlightened, he practiced asceticism for many years, and found that asceticism was not the way to ultimate liberation, so he decided to give it up. At that time, he met a shepherdess who offered him porridge. His physical strength recovered, and he sat under a tree to meditate and became enlightened on the eighth day of the 12 month in the lunar calendar.

To commemorate this event, Buddhists hold rituals on the day, offering rice and fruit porridge to the Buddha and the poor.

The twelfth lunar month is also called *layue*, or preserved month.

"The word *la* itself refers to various preserved foods that are used for sacrifices. In nature, one cycle of four seasons ends and another cycle is about to begin. At this time, people offer sacrifices to heaven and earth to acquire psychological satisfaction and joy. That's related to the Chinese saying 'be happy during auspicious events,'" Gao says.

Folklore expert Liu Xiaochang says *xiaohan* was connected with a sense of ritual in the old days, as *la* also symbolized a new beginning. For example, people in Chengdu, Sichuan province, used to hold a grand sacrifice around *xiaohan*. It was not only to worship ancestors, but also to worship the gods for good harvests. After a year's hard work, farmers also ushered in the season when they could take a breather.

"They took the holiday as an opportunity to relax," he says.

In Tianjin, in the old days, there was a custom of eating yellow sprouts on *xiaohan*.

Yellow sprouts are a specialty of Tianjin, made from cabbage sprouts. After Winter Solstice, locals cut off the stems and leaves of cabbages, leaving only the core areas, about 5 centimeters above the ground. When eaten after half a month, it is extremely crispy and tender.

The ancient farming society attached great importance to *xiaohan*, but with the passing of time, many customs have gradually disappeared. However, the custom of eating vegetable rice and chicken soup in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, has been preserved to this day.

Folklore expert Wang Yongjian says Nanjing people's custom of eating vegetable rice on *xiaohan* may have something to do with the need for something warm in the cold weather. Stir-fried vegetables and rice are mixed together with bacon, sausage, ham and diced salted duck. Among the ingredients, the salted duck is the specialty food of Nanjing. The seemingly common ingredients today were enjoyed by only rich families in the past. Poor people were reluctant to add meat, and would toss a spoonful of lard in the vegetable rice for seasoning instead.

For nine days since winter solstice, Nanjing locals even today manage the cold by having chicken soup and eggs as indispensable foods during *xiaohan*. With the changes of time and a shift toward health preservation, people now have formed new folk customs during this period. For example, many young people in Nanjing have started to have mutton soup and beef soup as "tonics".

Cantonese who are very particular about dietary therapy are used to eating glutinous rice for breakfast during *xiaohan*, with bacon, diced sausage and peanuts. In traditional Chinese medicine it is believed that the recipe can nourish the heart, help the lungs, and regulate *qi* in the kidneys.

Mutton hotpot, sugar roasted chestnuts and grilled sweet potatoes have become popular during *xiaohan*, especially among young people.

"No matter what you eat, as long as you can let young people and children know more about the solar terms by eating these seasonal foods, it is good. The 24 solar terms are the essence of traditional Chinese culture and these customs should be kept alive," Wang says.





**Top:** A bird on a plum tree in a park in Zunyi, Guizhou province on the day of Minor Cold last year.
MU MINGFEI / XINHUA

**From left:** Children at a care center wait for their *laba* rice porridge on *xiaohan*. People play with snow in a park in Beijing. A worker takes orchids in a market to customers. Pupils play ice hockey in a primary school in Hebei province.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY





Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM

Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM



# LIFE




**From left:** The mascot, a rabbit character, and merchandise piece, a shoulder purse, for the 2023 Happy Chinese New Year events, are presented at a news conference in Beijing; Zhao Cong, head of the China National Traditional Orchestra, at the event; internationally renowned pianist Lang Lang displays the mascot. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

# Encouraging a festival atmosphere

A series of global events to celebrate the traditions and culture of Chinese New Year is announced, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.

The 2023 Happy Chinese New Year news conference was held in Beijing on Dec 26, announcing a series of celebratory events that will be guided by the Ministry of Culture and Tourism and hosted by the China International Culture Association.

Gao Zheng, director-general of the Bureau of International Exchanges and Cooperation at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, noted that the Happy Chinese New Year brand has become an important platform to share Chinese culture with a global audience in recent years.

This year's festivities will include various online and offline events taking place both at home and abroad, including temple fairs, screenings, parades and a bicycle decoration competition themed on the animals of the Chinese zodiac.

Major events include a concert titled *Echoes of Ancient Tang Poems* on Jan 6 at Philadelphia's Kimmel Center and Jan 7 at New York's Lincoln Center, performed by 15 young vocalists from 10 countries in collaboration with the Philadelphia Orchestra.

"The performers will sing poems from the Tang Dynasty (618-907) in Chinese, celebrate the resonance of Western music and Chinese literary classics, and present a dialogue of music and poetry," Gao said.

Another key concert, *Harmony*, will be broadcast to a global audience on Jan 14. Produced by the China National Traditional Orchestra and the Suzhou Symphony Orchestra, the concert will present modern and traditional music from both the East and the West.

Zhao Cong, head of the China National Traditional Orchestra, said that the concert is rooted in China's rich musical heritage and threaded by the *Spring Festival Overture*, a well-known orchestral work composed by Li Huanzhi, the first-ever



Gao Zheng, director-general of the Bureau of International Exchanges and Cooperation at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism, presents Lang Lang with a certificate of the cultural ambassadorship of the events. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> We will continue to uphold a cultural viewpoint of equality, mutual learning, dialogue and cultural inclusiveness, and share China's major festivities and Chinese cultural symbols with the world."
>
> **Gao Zheng,** director-general of the Bureau of International Exchanges and Cooperation at the Ministry of Culture and Tourism

head of the orchestra.

"Apart from the prelude and the coda, the concert comprises four main sections — 'heaven, earth, humankind and unity'. The 11 pieces celebrate, and present to the world, Chinese civilization in the new era, Eastern aesthetics, the spirit of the Chinese people and the ancient value of harmony and peace," Zhao says.

Digital technology will also be employed, including stage designs using augmented reality and a performance featuring a collaboration between a *pipa* (a four-stringed plucked instrument) player and virtual idol Luo Tianyi.

Internationally renowned pianist Lang Lang was announced as the cultural ambassador of 2023 Happy Chinese New Year.

"From my own observation, I can see that Spring Festival is increasingly popular across the globe and it is an excellent opportunity and time for us to promote our music, culture, art and spirit to the world," Lang says.

"The celebrations often last for nearly two weeks from the Lunar New Year to the 15th day of the first lunar month, which is plenty of time for many activities, including a concert tour, an exhibition or a spring camp. It's such an opportune moment that symbolizes a good start for everything."

In celebration of the upcoming Year of the Rabbit, the event's organizing committee called upon designers for their ideas for this year's mascot and merchandise. More than 1,000 designers from some 60 design colleges and companies submitted 5,918 entries. The winning mascot is a cute rabbit character, and the merchandise piece is a shoulder purse inspired by Spring Festival gift bags. Both were designed by the Central Academy of Fine Arts and aim to merge cultural heritage with modern fashion, and ritual with practicality.

The China International Culture Association also opened up a social media account to present videos about the events and act as an online cultural exchange for global viewers. Social media influencers are invited to promote traditional Spring Festival products and showcase modern Chinese lifestyles, and an online campaign will be launched to collect stories, pictures and videos about the reunion dinner on Lunar New Year's Eve.

"We will continue to uphold a cultural viewpoint of equality, mutual learning, dialogue and cultural inclusiveness, and share China's major festivities and Chinese cultural symbols with the world," Gao said.

"By offering more quality public cultural products to the world, we hope to replace estrangement with exchange, clashes with mutual learning, and superiority with coexistence, as well as continuously contribute to a community with a shared future."

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**Online** Watch the video by scanning the code.

# Arts event provides hope to young Arabs

NANCHANG/CAIRO — For Mahdy Ahmed Saleh, an Egyptian student studying in Jingdezhen Ceramic University in China, an array of Arab art activities held recently reminded him of his faraway home.

The fifth Arabic Arts Festival was launched last month in Jingdezhen, a Chinese city renowned for porcelain-making. During the festival, artists from Arab states showcased hundreds of pieces of fine works of art.

Special products from the Arabian Peninsula, including dates, camel milk products and olive oil, were also displayed in the market on the Taoxichuan ceramic art avenue of Jingdezhen in East China's Jiangxi province.

President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the arts festival. "From the launch of the ancient Silk Road to the joint pursuit of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and Arab states have been working hand in hand, yielding fruitful results in people-to-people exchanges and cooperation," he says in the letter.

Xi expresses the hope that the two sides can take the fifth Arabic Arts Festival as an opportunity to deliver on the outcomes of the first China-Arab States Summit.

For Mahdy, who came to Jingdezhen in 2019 to further his education in cultural heritage and museum studies after graduating from Egypt's Fayoum University, closer exchanges between China and Arab countries mean more opportunities.

"Jingdezhen has a long history of contact with Arab states and that made me feel I belong here," says Mahdy. "For me, friendly China-Arab cooperation means that there will be more opportunities."

For a long period in history, the Silk Road, connecting Arab countries and China, acted as an important bond between civilizations. During China's Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368), smalt, an ingredient for making the Chinese blue-and-white porcelain, was imported from Arab countries.

Learning Chinese and the history of porcelain manufacturing is a rare opportunity Mahdy "had been longing for".

Mahdy's dream has come true, and as exchanges and cooperation between China and Arab countries are set to be further strengthened in the future, young people like Mahdy will enjoy broader prospects.

As cultural exchanges intensify, a greater number of Arab youths are exploring new opportunities by learning Chinese. Passant Sayed Khalil, champion of the 18th "Chinese Bridge" Chinese Proficiency Competition, is one of them.

"I want to help more Egyptian teenagers learn Chinese and understand Chinese culture," says Passant, who became a teacher in the department of Chinese language and literature at Cairo University.

The idea of becoming a teacher came from an unforgettable experience Passant had in Jiangxi province four years ago. At that time, she was an exchange student at Shandong University and had the opportunity to volunteer in Ji'an city, Jiangxi province, where she taught simple Arab songs to children in the mountainous region.

In September, Passant had a conversation with Chinese "taikonauts". She takes Liu Yang, China's first female astronaut, as her idol. "I consider the talk with the space station crew as one of my fondest memories," Passant says.

The young Egyptian woman says she always encouraged her students to learn Chinese and be more adventurous in experiencing other cultures.

According to a report on China-Arab cooperation in the new era, which was issued by the Chinese Foreign Ministry last month, China has trained 25,000 professionals of Arab states and provided about 11,000 government scholarships to Arab nations since 2013.

As of October 2022, four Arab countries have announced that Chinese has been included in their national education system, 15 Arab countries have set up Chinese departments locally, and 13 Arab countries have established 20 Confucius Institute branches and two independent Confucius classrooms.

Ma Jianfei, director-general of the Center for Language Education and Cooperation of China, says that there are 158 primary, secondary and kindergarten-level schools in the United Arab Emirates offering Chinese courses, and a pilot program for teaching Chinese has been launched in 12 public middle schools in Egypt.

During the first China-Arab States Summit held in Saudi Arabia, Xi said that China will work with Arab nations to advance eight major cooperation initiatives in areas, namely development support, food security, public health, green innovation, energy security, intercivilizational dialogue, youth development, and security and stability.

XINHUA



Visitors attend a showcase of intangible cultural heritage during the fifth Arabic Arts Festival in Jingdezhen, Jiangxi province. XINHUA

# Storied past still alive in many corners of Beijing



**James Healy**
Second Thoughts

I got some "postcards" recently from the distant past.

What arrived at my door in Beijing, not by post, but by parcel courier, was a hardbound volume in smart regal red titled *Sidelights on Peking Life* — a faithful reprint by the company Beijing Postcards of the 1927 book by Robert W. Swallow.

Swallow, the son of missionaries, portrays, via colorful descriptions, wonderful photos and fascinating anecdotes, the people and activities that made Beijing tick and buzz in the early days of the 20th century.

The book immediately reminded me of my extensive travels throughout the United States as a child, when my family stopped frequently at points of interest and purchased postcards. These were meant, as their name suggests, to be mailed to relatives or friends so you could share your experience and pen a few descriptive lines intended to make the recipient wish that they, too, had been there.

But rather than mailing them to anyone, I kept the postcards — ranging from those bought at the 1964 New York World's Fair, to those from (former US president Abraham) Lincoln's Tomb. My collection served to remind me, through the mists of passing time, of where I had been and to prompt memories, via the photo or photos on the front, of the moments that joined me forever to these unique places on Earth.

In essence, that is what author Swallow has done in his fine book, through details and photographs. And what is most impressive is how Beijing, a city that continually modernizes while keeping one foot solidly in its ancient past, still exhibits many of the traits conveyed by Swallow's descriptions.

Recently, for instance, I was chatting with a friend near my Beijing apartment when a street vendor, peddling either window screens or a knife-sharpening service, made a distinctive and very loud sound via a handheld clapper of various small steel plates that struck each other as he made rapid motions with his hand.

Swallow describes, nearly 100 years ago, an identical scene.

In Chapter 3, "Street Vendors", the author writes of the clamorous ways that such sellers drew the attention of would-be customers.

"The sharpeners of knives use different methods, according to their individual fancies. Some carry four oblong iron plates, which are fastened one below the other, and their particular noise is made by giving the plates an upward jerk."

Perhaps the vendor I heard that day had inherited his clapper from his grandfather or great-grandfather, who likewise plied this trade.

Rich insights on Chinese customs and culture, and glimpses of life in the city's maze of characteristic residential and commercial alleys known as *hutong*, also are to be found in the 135 pages of *Sidelights*, in such chapters as "Feasts and Restaurants", "Actors and the Theatre", and "Tales of the Spirit World".

"For smoothing over difficulties and clearing away doubts and misunderstandings, there is nothing comparable to a Chinese feast," Swallow writes. "No matter how hard a bargain may have been driven, or how heated the argument may have proved, there is nothing but sunshine as soon as the company gets seated at the round table, ready to do full justice to the good things that are due to come."

In fact, Swallow adds, in Beijing the feast "reigns supreme, for it is the alpha and omega of political intrigue".

Regarding a popular central Beijing attraction known today to Chinese and foreigners alike, Swallow, in a section about street names, writes that "here and there (we) get a glimpse of the changes that time has brought about. For instance, the Chinese name for Morrison Street is Wangfujing (Dajie), the 'big street with the well in the garden of the prince'".

"This at once takes us back to the days when princes were among the great ones in the land," Swallow writes in 1927, "and we can visualize the stately figures strolling round the beautiful garden, while busy hands drew up water from the well, which still remains undisturbed by the vicissitudes of time, though it is neglected and out of use."

I have often marveled, when wandering in Wangfujing, how the marker in the sidewalk where the well once stood is rarely noticed now by the thousands walking past on a given (pre-COVID) summer day.

But for the observant resident or tourist, there is much to remind us that Beijing, a city transformed time and again by history and circumstances, retains to this day a wealth of clues to the wonders of yesteryear.

For those who want to seek out the places in the sprawling capital where past and present intersect, *Sidelights on Peking Life* offers an amusing road map.

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Received by NSD/FARA Registration Unit 03/01/2023 11:54:00 AM