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Returning to normal

Nation weathers hard-hitting outbreak, thanks to efforts by State, medical staff

CHINA, PAGE 5

A-share market shows resilience amid uncertainties

BUSINESS, PAGE 9

WORLD USA

European destinations hail China's eased measures, welcome the return of travelers

PAGE 7

CHINA DAILY

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People-centered philosophy key to Xi's governance

President gathers insights into livelihood issues through inspection tours over past 10 years

By **CAO DESHENG**
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Peng Xiaying, a farmer in Shenshan, a remote mountainous village in Jinggangshan, Jiangxi province, still remembers when President Xi Jinping walked into her house on Feb 2, 2016, during an inspection tour to observe local efforts on poverty alleviation.

"He chatted with me, asking what kind of difficulties I have in everyday life, such as food, clothing, crops and daily necessities. He encouraged me to have confidence in shaking off poverty and living a better life," Peng recalled.

Putting people first has been at the center of Xi's governance philosophy. Every time he has conducted an inspection tour in recent years, he has chatted with locals to learn details about their lives, including their incomes, housing situation, healthcare, children's education and elderly care services. He has also seen how the policies of the Communist Party of China and the government have been carried out to benefit the people.

Since he became general secretary of the CPC Central Committee in 2012, Xi has visited 31 provinces, municipalities and autonomous regions across the country. A book about the interactions between Xi and the people during his domestic inspection tours — the title translates to *Xi Jinping's Visits to Homes of Ordinary People* — was recently published by the China Women Publishing House.

The book, compiled by the All-China Women's Federation, relives the moments when Xi visited people's homes and talked with them about their livelihoods. Xi's visit to Peng's home is one of the stories.

"As President Xi has said, 'Happiness comes out of arduous work.' I believe that through my efforts, ... I will live a better life," Peng said.

Soon after Xi visited Shenshan, Peng, with her family's help, used her savings to open a small restaurant offering bed-and-breakfast services. The business earns her family an annual income of around 120,000 yuan ($17,900).

She and her husband, who is disabled, also run a store in the village selling their homemade products, such as preserved fruit, bacon and dried bamboo shoots. Her business has generated good profits in the past few years.

"Since President Xi visited us, many visitors have had meals in our restaurant. Now we are better off," Peng said.

While upholding a people-centered philosophy, Xi has demonstrated passionate concern for the people. In his New Year address to ring in 2022, Xi said, "The concerns of the people are what I always care about, and the aspirations of the people are what I always strive for."

"Our country, big as it is, also has its list of priorities. The myriad of things we attend to all boil down to matters concerning every household. ... Every time I visit people in their homes, I would ask if they have any more difficulties, and I would remember everything my folks have to share with me," Xi said.

On Feb 13, 2015, a few days before Lunar New Year, Xi returned to Liangjiahe, a mountainous village in Yan'an, Shaanxi province, where he worked about seven years, after arriving there age 15. He visited Liu Jinlian, who provided Xi with somewhere to live, and other villagers. "He treated us as closely and affectionately as he did when he was the Party secretary of the village decades ago. I feel his heart is always with us," Liu said.

In a speech in Seattle, the United States, in September 2015, Xi talked about his work and life in Liangjiahe. "At that time, the villagers and I lived in 'earth caves' and slept on 'earth beds'. Life was very hard. There was no meat in our diet for months. I knew what the villagers wanted the most," Xi said.

"Later I became the village's Party secretary and began to lead the villagers in production. I understood their needs. One thing I wished most at the time was to make it possible for the villagers to have meat and have it often."

During his 2015 visit, Xi saw the drastic changes that had taken place in Liangjiahe. Now living in houses made of bricks and tiles, the villagers also had internet access. Elderly folks had basic old-age care and all villagers had medical care coverage. Children were in school and meat was readily available.

See ***Tours,*** *page 3*

Deadly crash

Search and rescue teams work on Sunday to retrieve bodies at the crash site of an aircraft carrying 72 people in Pokhara, western Nepal. As of press time, the death toll from the air crash had risen to 68, according to the country's civil aviation authority. BIJAY NEUPANE / REUTERS

WORLD WATCH

By Junius Ho Kwan-yiu and Kacee Ting Wong

US must put halt to partisan polarization

The prolonged battle earlier this month for leadership of the United States House of Representatives turned the outflow of frustration with the US political system from a trickle to a torrent.

Kevin McCarthy, a Republican, was eventually elected speaker of the House after making concessions to a group of right-wing hard-liners. The concessions have raised questions about possibly aggravating congressional dysfunction, social cohesion and democratic degradation in the US.

Before the Republican voting, the Freedom Caucus — a Republican voting bloc — issued an array of demands that would fundamentally change House procedures by weakening the power of the speaker and strengthening the power of both the caucus and rank-and-file House Republicans as a whole.

The Freedom Caucus has close political ties with the Tea Party, which was famous for its unwillingness to cooperate with less-conservative Republicans.

Although partisan polarization is a uniquely corrosive and dangerous force in US politics, the convergent forces from both ends of the political spectrum have often offered a path to short-term compromise and reconciliation between Democrats and Republicans in past decades. Putting a temporary end to "vetocracy" could improve the atmosphere for further cooperation. Scholar Michael Burleigh described the convergent forces as "purple path in the middle" in his 2017 book *The Best of Times, The Worst of Times*. It hardly needs to be emphasized that the rise of extremism has limited the wiggle room for convergent forces to maneuver.

See ***Partisan,*** *page 3*

Women's volleyball team aims to revive glory days

By **SHI FUTIAN**
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No longer a dominant force in world competition, the new generation of Chinese women's volleyball players is fighting hard to return the team to the podium at international events and repeat the glories of their predecessors. However, from its performances in 2022, it's clear that the young and developing Chinese women's team still has a long journey ahead.

A pair of sixth-place finishes, at the FIVB Volleyball Nations League in July and the Women's Volleyball World Championship 2022 in September and October, were the best results the team mustered last year.

Currently ranked No 5 in the world, the team is well aware of the gap to the top teams, such as Italy, which defeated Team China 3-1 in a quarterfinal at the world championship, and No 1-ranked world champions Serbia.

However, the young Chinese squad values the experiences it gained through the international games it played in 2022, especially lessons from the defeats.

"It's important that we have more chances to play against strong teams like Italy," Team China head coach Cai Bin told Xinhua News Agency. "To face the world's top teams, or even defeat them, we need to find more effective ways of playing. So, that experience competing against them is valuable."

Cai said that when the team started to rebuild, "team spirit is what we valued the most".

"I think we did well from that perspective, but in terms of the gap in skill we cannot level up overnight, and it will take some time to keep improving," he said.

2022 year in Review

"We need to be more aggressive in the future and find a tactical balance of attack and defense. We must build a good system, otherwise we won't have any advantage when we play against the world's strongest teams."

Fans awaiting the resurgence of Chinese women's volleyball miss the days when Team China was capable of winning Olympic gold and world championships, like they did under former head coach Lang Ping at the Rio 2016 Olympics and the World Cups in 2015 and 2019.

A painful turning point arrived at the Tokyo Olympics in 2021 — the Summer Olympics were delayed due to COVID-19. The team, the defending Olympic champions, failed to emerge from the group stages.

The shock early exit was China's worst Olympic showing in women's volleyball since its debut at the 1984 Los Angeles Games, leading to the resignation of legendary coach Lang.

"We faced unprecedented uncertainty ahead of the Tokyo Olympics due to the pandemic, and no one had experience. It was such a pity. We should have displayed more of what we had prepared, but we did not, and we need to accept that fact," Lang said in an interview.

"But we need to find the solutions. That's how our players can be more mature in the future when they face these problems. I hope the team has more options in the future, but we need to let 2021 go, as the defeat is already history."

Rising star Li

Throughout 2022, the star who shone the brightest on Team China was Li Yingying. Without superstar Zhu Ting and veteran outside hitter Zhang Changning, who were sidelined by injuries, a younger generation spearheaded by Li took more responsibility on the international stage.

The 22-year-old scored 179 points to finish as the team's top scorer in 2022 and was the sixth highest individual scorer at the world championship. During the nation's league tournament in July, Li had totaled 248 points to finish as third highest scorer.

"From 2018 to 2021, I grew from a kid on the national team to a core player," Li said in an interview with China Matters. "I was a youngster whose main job was to cheer for the others, and occasionally earn a chance to play. But, from the world championship this year, I shouldered a lot more responsibility.

See ***Volleyball,*** *page 3*

Festive stamps

Chen Jianghong, a Chinese artist in Paris, France, displays two stamps on Saturday that he designed to mark the Year of the Rabbit. The French post office, La Poste, issued the stamps to celebrate Chinese Lunar New Year, which falls on Jan 22. GAO JING / XINHUA

TOURISTS EAGER TO SPREAD THEIR WINGS AGAIN

Market on track for recovery as COVID-19 restrictions lifted

By **YANG FEIYUE**
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in-depth

Lin Mao, who works for a private outbound tourism agency in Beijing, decided to take a look at WeChat Moments on his phone just before going to bed on Dec 26.

He saw that the National Health Commission had announced that the quarantine requirement for international arrivals would be scrapped starting on Jan 8, when management of COVID-19 cases would be downgraded from Class A to Class B.

"Many celebratory posts suddenly appeared on WeChat. The comments were generally full of hope for new business opportunities," Lin said.

He welcomed the commission's announcement, as his company had struggled to remain in business for the past three years.

See ***Tourism,*** *page 2*

INSIDE
Key plans for climate change, biodiversity set right direction
Global Views, page 13

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PAGE TWO

Left: An Air China passenger plane stands at Frankfurt Airport, Germany, after arriving from Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Jan 5. FRANK RUMPENHORST / PICTURE-ALLIANCE / DPA / AP IMAGES **Center:** Travelers from China arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport, Bangkok, Thailand, on Jan 6. FRANK RUMPENHORST / PICTURE-ALLIANCE / DPA / AP IMAGES **Right:** A cashier at a souvenir shop in Malacca, Malaysia, puts up an Alipay sign on Jan 4 to cater to Chinese tourists. CHEN YUE / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Chinese travelers to the United Kingdom arrive at Heathrow airport, London, on Jan 4. MARK THOMAS / I-IMAGES / POLARIS

Tourism: Flights, hotels back in demand

From page 1

"Now that the market has been allowed to open, it will take some time for us to develop our tourism products. I need to find out where we stand in light of the new situation and also sort out our available overseas travel resources," Lin said.

China's outbound tourism sector is expected to bounce back as a result of the newly adjusted COVID-19 response that lifts restrictions on Chinese citizens' traveling overseas and also promotes cross-border personnel exchanges.

Numerous posts from netizens voicing enthusiasm for overseas travel have appeared on Chinese social media platforms, with people scouring online travel sites to search for destinations and book air tickets.

According to online travel service provider Trip.com Group, the search volume for outbound flights and overseas hotels reached a three-year high just 30 minutes after the health commission's announcement.

Reservations for outbound flights soared by 254 percent on the morning of Dec 27, compared with the same period the previous day, the online agency reported.

Countries elsewhere in Asia are expected to be among the first to benefit from the wave of travelers from China.

The agency said Singapore and Thailand are among the most popular destinations for Chinese tourists.

Fang Zeqian, an analyst at Trip.com Group, said the changed response to COVID-19 will smooth the way for cross-border travel.

Wouter Vermeulen, general manager of China business for Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, is excited about the new measures.

"They came earlier than we expected, and my team members are thrilled," he said.

"The next step for us is to understand the meaning behind these measures, as these are high-level decisions, and we need to work with local and civil aviation authorities to get these policies implemented."

Vermeulen expects the Dutch and French authorities to hold discussions with China about resuming normal flight frequencies, which he hopes to see no later than the summer.

"Our main goal is to hopefully return to pre-pandemic status and open up direct flights from Beijing and Shanghai to Paris and Amsterdam as soon as possible," he said.

Close attention

Li Chunmei, who deals with China operations at Sweden's official website for tourism and travel information, Visit Sweden, was on vacation in Italy when she saw that China had adjusted its response to COVID-19.

She said domestic media outlets contacted the Swedish tourism authority after the announcement to inquire about the prospects for the Chinese market.

"Sweden is paying close attention to the latest Chinese policy and is very much looking forward to welcoming Chinese tourists," Li said.

She believes that more good news will soon be announced, such as flights being increased and the return of tours with Approved Destination Status — an arrangement between the Chinese government and many other nations for Chinese holiday travelers to visit a country as members of a tour group.

Before the pandemic emerged, Chinese travelers spent more than 400,000 nights in Sweden every year, according to Visit Sweden.

Although this figure accounted for just 2 percent of outbound travelers to the Scandinavian country, Visit Sweden went ahead with setting up a China office, which Li said shows just how highly Sweden values Chinese tourists.

She added that the number of such tourists visiting Sweden has risen between two and three times in the past decade.

"We are certain to step up our China marketing efforts in the coming year, including media exposure and staging travel industry events," Li said.

"As there have been a lot of staff changes in the travel industry over the past three years, we need to strengthen our destination knowledge training.

"Our strength has always been in experiencing the outdoors, and judging by the shift in China's domestic travel trends over the past three years, Sweden will now be more attractive to Chinese visitors."

According to the Annual Report on China's Outbound Tourism Development (2022-23) recently released by the China Tourism Academy, the nation's outbound tourism took a hit from 2020 to last year, with 400 million trips lost.

> "Our main goal is to hopefully return to pre-pandemic status and open up direct flights ... as soon as possible."
>
> **Wouter Vermeulen,** general manager of China business for Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines

The report said restarting outbound tourism will effectively restore tourists' confidence and contribute to a quick recovery in this market.

Feng Rao, head of a research institute at Chinese travel service and social networking platform Mafengwo, said the new COVID-19 measures will release three years of pent-up desire for overseas travel.

The upcoming Spring Festival holiday is expected to be a key turning point for China's outbound travel industry, Feng said.

Given the high number of potential Chinese tourists, the outbound travel recovery is expected to play a key role in boosting domestic and global tourism markets.

In 2019, Chinese citizens made 155 million outbound trips, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

That year, Chinese travel agencies' operating revenue from outbound travel services reached 214.56 billion yuan ($30.8 billion), accounting for 41.54 percent of their total tourism revenue, according to the ministry.

The huge potential of China's outbound tourism market has resulted in numerous countries laying down the welcome mat for Chinese arrivals.

Lin Jiaze, director of the Tourism Authority of Thailand's office in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, said business operations at the Thai embassy in Beijing and Thai visa centers elsewhere in China have returned to normal.

He said he is happy to see many Chinese travel agencies already offering deals to Thailand.

Before COVID-19 emerged, Chinese tourists accounted for one-third of inbound tourists to Thailand.

Over the years, China and Thailand have worked to publicize tourism, and six months ago, Thailand stepped up cooperation with airlines and related tourism players.

On Jan 9, Thailand welcomed its first group of Chinese tourists since the pandemic emerged, after local authorities removed the vaccination requirement before entry.

Anutin Charnvirakul, deputy prime minister and minister of public health, said visitors who are not vaccinated will also be granted unrestricted entry.

Thailand is offering visitors a longer period of stay. Effective until March 31, this period is extended from 30 to 45 days for tourists from countries and regions that qualify for visa exemption. For those eligible for a visa on arrival, the period is extended from 15 to 30 days.

The Tourism Authority of Thailand expects 5 million Chinese tourists to visit the country this year.

In Singapore, Cavaliere Giovanni Viterale, general manager of the luxury resort hotel Sofitel Sentosa Resort & Spa, said it has created Lunar New Year deals aimed at Chinese visitors, including a hotpot buffet and romantic packages for couples.

Chinese travelers are urged to check the tourism policy at their destinations before setting out.

The United States, England and Japan are among countries enforcing new travel requirements for arrivals from China, including negative COVID-19 test results.

Industry players said that with the relaunch of outbound travel, Chinese tourists' preferences might change, with friendly entry policies at overseas destinations certain to influence their choices.

Tourism experts said despite the prospects for sound growth momentum, it will take time for China's outbound tourism market to achieve a full recovery.

Zhou Weihong, deputy general manager at Spring Tour, said small, customized and themed tours will become popular following the resumption of outbound tourism, with more attention being paid to safety.

Yang Yanfeng, director of the online tourism research center at the Tourism College of Beijing Union University, told China Tourism News, "Based on the external environment and concerns about the pandemic, Chinese tourists still need a period of adjustment.

"During this period, overseas destinations that have friendly and open entry policies for Chinese tourists are more likely to gain favor among these visitors."

Yang added that destinations in Southeast Asia will be the first to benefit from the return of Chinese tourists.

Feng, from Mafengwo, said prices for outbound flights and overseas hotels are expected to return to pre-pandemic levels as tourism recovers, but due to short-term constraints in the supply of facilities and labor, it will take time for these price declines to reach the public.

Guo Lechun, vice-president of the big data research institute at online travel service provider Qunar, said there will not be a significant rise in the number of international flights in the short term due to existing flight scheduling and approval plans.

Vermeulen, from Air France and KLM Royal Dutch Airlines, is optimistic that direct flights from Beijing and Shanghai to Paris and Amsterdam can return between the end of March and the summer.

"We all need to travel for personal and professional reasons, and this new policy will make our lives easier," he said.

The Dutchman, who has lived in China for six months with his wife and two children, spent the Christmas holiday with his family in Sanya, Hainan province.

"We don't have any travel plans for Spring Festival yet, but we want to see more of China," he said.

A line of passport applicants forms at the Beijing Public Security Bureau immigration service hall on Jan 9. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

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TOP NEWS

Protest for better pay

Tens of thousands of Portuguese teachers and school staff members hit the streets of Lisbon, capital of Portugal, on Saturday to demand higher wages and better working conditions, in one of the country's biggest protests in recent years. PEDRO NUNES / REUTERS

US-Japan pact may increase regional, global tension

By **WANG XU** in Tokyo
and **ZHAO RUINAN** in Beijing

In a historic shift from the post-World War II international order, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida cast off the country's pacifist limitations during a recent meeting with United States President Joe Biden, a move that will increase regional and geopolitical tension, experts said.

Inside
Editorial, **page 11**

"Japan has actually broken out of its six decades of pacifist status," said Wang Qi, a researcher of East Asia at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences in Beijing.

"So the question now is whether the world is ready to accept an aggressive Japan that is committed to growing its military and is less hesitant to use military power as one of its statecraft tools, because we all remember what happened the last time Japan did these things," Wang said.

Meeting with Biden on Friday on the last leg of a G7 tour ahead of the group's summit in Hiroshima in May, Kishida said the US-Japan alliance was "stronger than ever".

Biden said, "The United States is fully, thoroughly, completely committed to the alliance and, more importantly, to the defense of Japan" — showing Washington's support for the country's controversial rearmament plan, which aims to double Japan's defense spending over the next five years.

The two leaders signed a pact to deepen cooperation on security and space, among other areas.

Japan agreed to upgrade the intelligence and surveillance capabilities of US troops stationed in Japan. The US endorsed Japan's decision to develop counterstrike capabilities, which would allow Tokyo to defend itself from incoming missiles and launch strikes against possible aggressors.

"Biden's support for Japan's rearmament, is, in a way, a very selfish act in making Japan a cat's-paw to contain China," said Xu Liping, director of the Center for Southeast Asian Studies of the CASS.

"In fact, the US has reneged on some of the commitments it made after World War II, and (the support) is, to some extent, a kind of disrespect for the sacrifice of the US military during the war. It is very sad that the Biden administration has lost the values that the US holds consistently, just for short-term gains," Xu added.

Da Zhigang, director of the Institute of Northeast Asian Studies at the Heilongjiang Provincial Academy of Social Sciences, said that what Washington and Tokyo are doing will feed a regional arms race, which will increase regional and geopolitical tensions.

"The move can curb or even undermine interregional cooperation on many fronts, including climate change and marine pollution," Da said. "Besides that, the ongoing efforts of the US and Japan to intensify regional groupings have a significant negative impact on the development of the entire Asia-Pacific region."

Friday's meeting also triggered protests in Japan, with some objecting to Biden's pointing his finger at Kishida and others denouncing Japan's military expansion, saying it will disrupt people's lives.

"Pointing the finger is a gesture considered very rude in Japanese culture," said Wang, the CASS researcher, who added that "repeatedly pointing while speaking to another person is considered a sign of extreme disdain or an expression of dissatisfaction".

In Shinjuku, the most bustling area of Tokyo, several worker and student groups protested Kishida's meeting with Biden.

One protester told China Daily, "The Kishida administration has disregarded the national interests and domestic agenda of Japan and tied itself to the US chariot. It is a strategy heading all the way to war. Under this trend, Japan will inevitably be part of war in the future."

Contact the writers at wangxu@chinadaily.com.cn

Partisan: US must undertake reforms to defuse risks

From page 1

Democrats, meanwhile, are worried that the concessions that McCarthy agreed to could lead to sharp cuts in social programs. Even the controversial Affordable Care Act, a healthcare project introduced by the administration of former president Barack Obama, is at risk of fresh challenges from the empowered hard-line Republicans.

Entrenched racial injustice, wide socioeconomic gaps and attempts by unscrupulous politicians to exploit these gaps have strengthened, to the maximum extent possible, polarization in the US. Far from being a melting pot, the US is an artificially amalgamated nation of great diversity. Partisan polarization and the rise of extremism have reinforced religious-secular, urban-rural and racial-ethnic cleavages. Supporters of each camp perceive the opposing camp in negative terms.

To make matters worse, the US has been experiencing a demographic shift that poses a threat to the white population, which has historically been the dominant group in all areas of power. It is worth noting that some white militant groups participated in the Capitol Hill riot of January 2021.

Externally, the election of McCarthy will add new complexity to the already complicated Sino-US relations. McCarthy has characterized the Communist Party of China as the "greatest geopolitical threat of our lifetime" and called for a whole-of-government approach to ensure that the US is prepared to tackle the economic and security challenges that he sees as posed by the CPC. Adding a heavyweight China-basher to the Sino-US chessboard, US policymakers will inevitably reduce the scope for flexibility within the limits of strategic realism, just as there are likely to be fewer opportunities for cooperation between the two giants in areas of common concern.

As Jennifer McCoy, a US political science professor, has pointed out, some countries have experienced chronically pernicious levels of polarization for some time without undergoing democratic downgrading. To arrest the backsliding of US democracy and resume the delivery of good governance, the US must launch necessary reforms to reduce partisan and group polarization before they become dangerous. The Congress should give top priority to these reforms and break the habit of wrongfully targeting China as a geopolitical threat to the US.

Junius Ho Kwan-yiu is a Legislative Council member of the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region and a solicitor. Kacee Ting Wong is a barrister and a part-time researcher at Shenzhen University's Hong Kong and Macao Basic Law Research Center. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Volleyball: Ace player expected to lead team back to podium

From page 1

"That meant I had more pressure, which influenced my performances to some degree. Winning and losing are a part of competitive sport. What's important, though, is the Chinese volleyball spirit, which is to never give up in the face of adversity, no matter how difficult the challenge is."

Li agreed with her coach, Cai, that the players had to improve their skills to match other teams, but added that they had never lost their spirit. "Each time, my goal is to win the key point in the key match for my team. I'm only 22 years old, and I believe I can always do better in the next game. This is just a start to a new chapter. I will work hard for my next Olympics in Paris," she said.

In a separate interview with Xinhua, Li said another of her goals is to become a leading international player.

"I'm now more confident on the court and I'm closing the gap with the world's top players. The distance is not that big. I believe I get better with every game. Becoming a true world-class player is my next goal. I will certainly keep working hard and fighting for it," Li said.

'Zhuper' returns

From the setbacks at the Tokyo Olympics to the expectations placed on Team China throughout 2022, most of the fans' mixed feelings toward the team can be linked to the fortunes of Chinese superstar Zhu. The 28-year-old has returned to the court after a long hiatus due to injuries, and fans now have high hopes that she will once again lead Team China to glory.

Zhu is one of the most high-profile women's volleyball players in the world. Nicknamed "Zhuper", she is the first player to win two consecutive FIVB World Cup titles, and was also named most valuable player at both the tournaments. Zhu was also the MVP at the Rio Olympics in 2016, when she helped the national team win gold.

However an injury to her right wrist, which she sustained in 2017, brought a halt to the accolades and trophies. The injury flared again in 2019, causing extra concern this time as it began to severely affect her performances.

Rather than undergoing surgery, she chose a treatment program that would allow her to prepare for the Tokyo Olympics.

However, the treatment was not enough for Zhu to maintain peak performance at the Tokyo Games. Although Zhu displayed her famous fighting spirit and played through the pain, Team China failed to make it beyond the group stage.

Zhu eventually underwent surgery earlier last year in Spain, and rested for several months in Europe. In July, Zhu announced she was signing for Italian Women's Volleyball League side Pallavolo Scandicci, the second foreign club she has joined.

From 2016-19, Zhu enjoyed a successful stint at Vakifbank Istanbul in Turkiye. Now expectations are high that she can put her injury troubles behind her and bounce back in style.

Cai, the head coach, said in a recent interview that Zhu is very likely to return to the national team in 2023. Her first priority is to help Team China secure a spot at the 2024 Paris Games through qualifying.

Recovery of China's economy set to accelerate

Consumption, services, emerging industries to boost growth momentum, observers say

By **XIN ZHIMING, MA SI**
and **JIANG XUEQING**

China's economy is set to continue its recovery — and at a faster pace — this year, as consumption, services and emerging industries, such as new energy vehicles, are expected to regain strong growth momentum, according to economists and analysts.

With continued and faster recovery, China, the world's second-largest economy, can be a major contributor to the global economy, which has been held back by struggling developed economies, they said.

After announcing the optimization of COVID-19 control measures on Dec 7, China has seen major international organizations, investment banks and consultancies raise their forecasts for its GDP growth to about 5 percent this year, citing stronger economic activity as the country's economic fundamentals remain sound and resilient.

"In the medium term, the resilient fundamentals of the Chinese economy will provide strong potential for the recovery," said Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger.

"With relaxation of COVID measures, sectors that have been most disrupted by COVID have much room to recover, such as the services industry, food, catering and retail, tourism, entertainment and so on. China has 1.4 billion people, and per capita GDP now exceeds $10,000, which makes it the world's biggest consumer market, with the greatest potential," he told China Daily.

China will focus on expanding domestic demand and give priority to restoring and expanding consumption this year, according to the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference, which was held in mid-December.

Goldman Sachs analysts have forecast that the country's consumption will grow about 7 percent year-on-year in 2023, while the unemployment rate is expected to decline and average incomes are likely to improve this year — both contributing to the rebound of consumption.

Emerging sectors including, new energy vehicles, are expected to continue to prosper. China's sales of new energy vehicles saw explosive growth last year, with 6.89 million electric cars and plug-in hybrids sold, a 93 percent year-on-year increase, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers. This year's sales could reach 8.8 million, according to UBS analyst Paul Gong.

China's recovery is important for international corporations and the world economy.

Jens Hildebrandt, chief representative of the Delegation of German Industry & Commerce Beijing, said: "The Chinese market is of paramount importance to many German companies. ... German companies expect growth in most industries — especially in the fields of decarbonization, e-mobility and connected driving."

Jenny Huang, senior director of China corporate research at Fitch Ratings, said, "China as the world's largest manufacturing center has set up a very robust ecosystem, including a very comprehensive supply chain and also a very efficient infrastructural network."

Chen Dong, head of Asia macroeconomic research at Swiss financial company Pictet Wealth Management, said the improving Chinese economy will help stabilize global supply chains. "This is a favorable development," Chen said, adding that given the current development of the COVID-19 situation, the economy could start to rebound strongly at the end of March.

Apart from stabilizing global supply chains, Chen said, the recovery of the Chinese economy, especially consumption, including outbound tourism, will also benefit economy of other countries, especially its neighboring countries, such as Southeast Asia.

Zhong Nan and Zhou Lanxu contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at xinzhiming@chinadaily.com.cn

Employees pack green onions on Sunday at an agricultural products processing company in Zibo, Shandong province. The company will guarantee the steady supply of vegetables for many supermarkets in Beijing during the Spring Festival holiday. SHI WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

Tours: 'Chinese dream' is that of the people

From page 1

"This made me keenly aware that the Chinese dream is after all a dream of the people. We can fulfill the Chinese dream only when we link it with our people's yearning for a better life," Xi said in his speech.

Despite China being the world's second-largest economy, it still faces unbalanced and inadequate development and the people's ever-growing needs for a better life.

On his nationwide inspection tours, Xi often asked residents whether they use pit latrines or flush toilets, and he stressed the importance of clean toilets. "A small toilet has big significance to people's quality of life," he said.

Toilets in poorer rural areas were often little more than makeshift shelters surrounded by trees and shrubs, while others were open pits next to pigsties, which can potentially pose health risks to villagers.

When he visited Guangdong village in the Yanbian Korean autonomous prefecture, Jilin province, in July 2015, villager Li Longzhi invited Xi to his home.

"When the general secretary heard many villagers still use pit latrines, he said to officials accompanying him that efforts should be made to advance the construction of a new countryside. 'Toilet revolution' should be promoted in rural areas," Li recalled.

Thanks to Xi's attention to the issue, all villagers' homes are now equipped with indoor flushing toilets, Li said.

In his report to the 20th CPC National Congress in October, Xi urged efforts to improve the people's well-being and raise the quality of life. "Working for the people's well-being is an essential part of the Party's commitment to serving the public good and exercising governance for the people. We must ensure and improve the people's well-being in the course of pursuing development and encourage everyone to work hard together to meet the people's aspirations for a better life."

Li Hongyang contributed to this story.

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CHINA

From left: A high-speed train travels along a line from Zhengzhou, Henan province, to Chongqing, which began operations in June last year. LI YANG / XINHUA Passengers take a picture in front of a bullet train from Beijing to the Xiong'an New Area, Hebei province, in December 2020, when the line started operations. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY People from the Yi ethnic group sing during a train journey from Chengdu, Sichuan province, to Kunming, Yunnan province, last month. JIANG HONGJING / XINHUA Passengers prepare to board a train at the Chengdu South Railway Station last month. LIU ZHONGJUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Transportation sector growth picks up speed

Higher investment and a detailed plan of action aim to provide greater convenience and greener travel. **Luo Wangshu** reports.

A Fuxing model high-speed train enters the Xiong'an Railway Station, Hebei, in December 2020. SUN LIJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

2022 year in Review

Last year, China's transportation sector saw more investment and extended itself on all fronts to promote high-quality growth, meet people's travel needs, improve lives and boost socioeconomic development.

Despite downward pressure on the economy and external challenges, the sector has driven domestic demand and expanded investment to stabilize economic growth and create new space for funding, according to Hou Zhenxing, deputy director of the general planning department at the Ministry of Transport.

"Transportation is the pulse of the economy and provides the connections of civilization," he said.

The ministry said investment in transportation fixed assets saw a 6.3 percent rise in the first three quarters of last year from the same period in 2021, maintaining a high growth rate.

The country has also accelerated the construction of a comprehensive transportation network. In October, a detailed plan was released for the construction of the system's backbone network, with the scale expected to reach 260,000 kilometers by 2025.

A project was also launched to improve the transportation and logistics network to boost the carriage of freight in urban areas, with 15 cities selected as the first group to be built into national cargo transport hubs.

Major transport construction projects — such as the Sichuan-Tibet Railway, the expansion of the Beijing-Shanghai Expressway and the third phase of the Changsha Huanghua International Airport in central China's Hunan province — proceeded smoothly.

Roads, railways and other transportation facilities were built and opened, and more money was invested in building highways in order to maintain and increase investment and stabilize the economy.

From January to August last year, investment in transportation-related fixed assets amounted to 2.34 trillion yuan ($345.4 billion), a rise of 6.6 percent from the same period in 2021, the ministry said. Of that, 1.77 trillion yuan was invested in highway construction, a rise of 9.5 percent.

From January to September last year, construction began on 299 new expressway and national and provincial highway projects. The total length will be 9,645 km, which will cost 882 billion yuan, said Gu Zhifeng, a deputy head of the ministry's highway bureau.

The projects include an underwater tunnel in Jiangsu province and expressways in Sichuan and Yunnan provinces.

In the first three quarters of last year, 9,756 km of expressways and national and provincial highways were built at a total cost of 557 billion yuan. "The ministry will continue to expand investment in road construction with the key aim of improving the connectivity of the road network," Gu said. He noted that the implementation of major highway projects will facilitate economic stability, boost construction of the modern transportation system and provide more support for high-quality development.

Zhou Rongfeng, another deputy head of the highway bureau, said that to facilitate construction, the ministry has strengthened coordination protocols to better understand the progress of key projects and help solve problems faced during construction.

The measures include: establishing working groups; conducting on-site surveys; implementing online systems to track progress; and setting up project journals that will provide up-to-date information on the progress made.

Meanwhile, more railway lines were built and put into operation last year. A total of 4,100 km of new lines opened to traffic, with high-speed railways accounting for 2,082 km of the figure, said Liu Zhenfang, president of China State Railway Group.

That brought China's railway network to 155,000 km. High-speed railways accounted for 42,000 km, the longest such network in the world.

Meanwhile, the railway sector saw a fixed asset investment of 710.9 billion yuan last year.

Integrated development

On Dec 31, the latest section of a smart freeway linking Beijing and Xiong'an New Area in neighboring Hebei province opened to traffic.

It cuts the journey time from Beijing to about 50 minutes and plays a strategic role in boosting the integrated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei cluster, the ministry said.

The section — roughly 12 km, running from the capital's South Sixth Ring Road to the city boundary — is part of the Beijing-Xiong'an freeway, the most convenient road corridor from the capital to the new area.

When completed, the freeway will extend more than 100 km, with about 27 km in Beijing and 75 km in Hebei.

The Beijing section, which cost 12.21 billion yuan, has four lanes in each direction, which will cut the journey time by up to 30 minutes.

"It is the most convenient fast road link between Beijing and Xiong'an. It is only 82 km from the South Sixth Ring Road to the new area, which greatly improves efficiency," said Wang Jianhui, an official with the Beijing Municipal Commission of Transport. The section also links with a freeway that runs to the Beijing Daxing International Airport, making it easier to travel to the hub from Xiong'an, he added.

Driving on the newly opened freeway, bullet trains can often be seen running parallel with the vehicles.

Nearly half the freeway's Beijing section — about 13 km — runs alongside a high-speed railway linking Beijing and Shijiazhuang, Hebei's capital, which reduces the impact of the transportation network on the environment, said Cui Genqun, president of China Railway Jingxiong (Beijing) Expressway Development, the company in charge of construction and operation.

"Being green is one of many such features of the advanced expressway," he said.

Construction involved about 22 hectares of a park filled with pear trees, 126 of them more than 50 years old. However, instead of digging up the 126 old trees, the construction team transplanted them to stand outside the core construction area.

"It protects the old trees and also provides a beautiful landscape for the freeway," Cui said.

The smart expressway is one of several in China that use advanced technology. The 5G network fully covers the route, and the adoption of the Beidou navigation system means a smart monitoring network has been established to reduce accidents. Moreover, safety warning lights have been placed at 30-meter intervals.

"The lights turn on automatically and flash when bad weather causes low visibility, such as in heavy fog, rainfall or snow," said Chen Yang, general manager of China Railway Jingxiong. Moreover, when a vehicle is too close to the car in front, the lights turn red to warn the driver to slow down, he added.

The operating company has cooperated with major navigation service providers to deliver real-time information for drivers, according to Chen.

"They can get up-to-date information when they use their navigation systems. We call it a 'housekeeping service'," he said.

As Zhang Wei lined up at a toll booth to leave Beijing on Dec 31, the PE teacher said the expressway will save time when he visits friends and relatives in Hebei.

Though the high-speed railway is convenient for travel between Beijing and Xiong'an, Zhang prefers to drive.

"I feel safer and more assured driving, especially during the epidemic in the past three years. It is also more convenient to carry luggage, especially large gifts," he said.

The expressway's remaining section — from the South Fifth Ring Road to the Sixth Ring Road in Beijing — is under construction and is expected to open this year.

When that happens, the road will be fully opened to traffic, as its Hebei section became operational in 2021.

Backbone blueprint

The road is part of China's comprehensive transport network in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei cluster.

In October last year, a detailed plan was released to build the backbone of the network of the country's comprehensive transportation system, with the scale expected to reach 260,000 km by 2025.

According to a guideline released by the Ministry of Transport, the National Railway Administration, the Civil Aviation Administration of China and the State Post Bureau, the scale of the backbone will improve operational efficiency and service quality.

By 2025, the main network of the high-speed rail system and the expressway system will mostly be completed, and the quality of the regular railway network and national highway system will be improved.

By 2030, the backbone network will reach about 280,000 km, rising to 290,000 km by 2035. It will include: about 56,000 km of high-speed railways; 71,000 km of regular railways; 61,000 km of expressways; 72,000 km of highways; and 25,000 km of high-grade waterways.

The backbone network will include the most important passages and corridors linking major areas of the country.

By the end of 2021, it stretched 251,000 km, about 86 percent of its planned length, according to the guideline. That reduced journey times between regions, cities and provinces to support socioeconomic development.

The backbone is an important part of the nation's comprehensive transportation network, according to a high-profile blueprint guiding the development of the sector to 2035.

Released in 2021 by the State Council, China's Cabinet, the blueprint is the country's first mid- to long-term comprehensive transportation plan and maps out related prospects, according to Li Xiaopeng, minister of transport.

The guideline set the goal of building a more convenient, high-quality transportation network that will allow most travelers to access a national highway within 15 minutes of leaving their departure point, an expressway in 30 minutes and a railway in 60 minutes.

"The network — which will connect all county-level administrative regions, borders, major facilities and tourism spots — will comprise roads, railways, air routes and waterways," Li told a news conference in 2021.

According to the blueprint, the network will not only be convenient, but also cost-effective, green, intelligent and safe.

Contact the writer at luowangshu@chinadaily.com.cn

High-speed rail surge showcases nation's abilities

By **LUO WANGSHU**

Staff members and passengers have witnessed the rapid development of China's high-speed rail network, enjoying faster, safer and more comfortable travel experiences, they said.

Tian Sa served as chief conductor of the first bullet train on its maiden journey on the high-speed railway. The trip was made on Dec 26, 2012, from Beijing to the economic hub of Guangzhou, capital of the southern province of Guangdong.

She remembers the "remarkable experience" clearly.

"It was extremely cold in Beijing, but as the train headed south, the temperature climbed, so we attendants took off our scarves, down jackets and sweaters one by one. When we arrived in Guangzhou, I was only wearing a suit," Tian recalled.

"I could feel the change in temperature from –10 C in Beijing to more than 20 C in Guangzhou. I understood how the speed cut the journey time and distance, and how the high-speed railway brought people closer."

In the decade since it opened, the world's longest high-speed railway line, running 2,298 kilometers, has recorded 1.69 billion passenger trips, according to China State Railway Group, the national railway operator.

The vertical line linking northern and southern China is one of the country's main high-speed rail corridors, passing through six provincial-level regions.

With a designed speed of 300 to 350 kilometers per hour, the line slashed the rail journey between Beijing and Guangzhou from more than 40 hours to about eight.

As the backbone of China's high-speed rail network, it now links with 12 other such lines, making travel to a number of cities more convenient.

Over the course of the decade, it has become one of the country's busiest high-speed lines.

Tian is now deputy head of the passenger transport department at China Railway Beijing Group.

As a veteran observer of the country's high-speed rail development, she has seen great changes in the passengers' understanding.

"When the line was initially put into operation, most passengers were unfamiliar with the facilities, such as the location of the bathrooms and the business coach. Now, at least 60 to 70 percent of passengers know the services on the bullet trains and they know what to do," she said.

On Dec 26, business traveler Qi Tie took the 60-minute ride from Beijing to Shijiazhuang, capital of Hebei province. In the past decade, he has made many trips along the route and enjoyed the experience.

"The service is better and the speed is faster, which is very convenient and friendly for business passengers like myself," he said, adding that he hoped transfer services could be improved in the future.

Wang Guanwei, the train's onboard technician, said the upgrading of the bullet trains makes the trip safer, greener and more comfortable, and also showcases China's development in bullet train design and manufacturing.

When the line opened, Harmony CRH 380 model bullet trains were in operation. Now, Fuxing smart bullet trains, domestically designed and built, also ply the line.

Wang said the Fuxing smart trains have a mobile terminal that shows the real-time status of the pantograph, the device mounted on electric trains that collects current from overhead lines.

"I can carry the terminal to conduct inspections in compartments, so it's not limited to the monitoring room," he said. "Even if I take a nap, the terminal will vibrate if it discovers a malfunction."

For example, if a large plastic bag is found hanging on the contact wire and may cause a safety hazard for the train's operation, Wang can view a real-time image on the screen and deal with it accordingly, such as by lowering the pantograph to avoid the object or even climbing on top of the train to remove it once the train has stopped.

The design of the front of the train has also been optimized, incorporating a better curve to reduce air resistance, he said.

He noted that an upgraded air-conditioning system has been installed on the Fuxing trains, offering more accurate temperature adjustment and lower noise levels, and reducing energy consumption by 10 percent.

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CHINA

Visitors watch the national flag-raising ceremony in Tian'anmen Square in Beijing on the morning of Oct 1. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

RIDING OUT THE STORM

From left: Hundreds of delivered items, spread out at the entrance of Lize Xiyuan residential community in Beijing's Chaoyang district, await collection on March 1, 2020. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY Students at the Southwest University of Political Science & Law dine in one of the college's canteens on May 22, 2021. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Visitors view an exhibition on Wuhan's battle against the COVID-19 epidemic earlier in the year in the capital of Hubei province on Oct 15, 2020. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Thanks to State, medical staff efforts, China weathers hard-hitting epidemic

By CHINA DAILY

As it fought to contain COVID-19 for the past three years, China's focus has always been on protecting lives and keeping people healthy.

Thanks to the determination of medical workers and the government's unwavering resolve, China has so far managed to minimize the impact of COVID-19 on its population, as well as on its socioeconomic development.

In this series of photos, China Daily photographers capture images of the profound effect epidemic prevention and control measures have had on the public, and how people across the country have worked hard to maintain a sense of normalcy over the past three years.

Passengers stand in line at the Beijing Railway Station on Jan 21, 2020. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Visitors wear Peking Opera costumes during the 2022 China International Fair for Trade in Services in Shougang Park in Beijing's Shijingshan district on Aug 31. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

Visitors watch robots on display on Aug 18 during the 2022 World Robot Conference in Beijing. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

From left: Residents exercise in a park in Beijing on Dec 3. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY Students attend their graduation ceremony at the University of Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing on July 2, 2020. ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

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WORLD

"They (ASPI) did not do real research, but they pin the blame on the victims."

Liu Zheng,
a student affected by Presidential Proclamation 10043 signed in 2020

"If we write a favorable story about China it gets put on page 26 of the newspaper ... But if I talk about Chinese dissidents or Chinese human rights abuses, then I get front-page coverage."

Stapleton Roy,
former US ambassador to China

"When someone tells me something is true, I'll go off to find out whether or not it is true ... But when it relates to China, it's almost 100 percent untrue."

Jerry Grey,
a Briton who has lived and worked in China for nearly 20 years

"They (the US) believe that technology will determine whether the US can maintain the military and economic advantage, vis-a-vis China."

Wu Xinbo,
dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University

"In 2021 the US flew over 1,200 spy plane sorties over the region and held 95 US-led military exercises. The frequency and intensity increase year by year."

Wu Shicun,
founding president of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies

Editor's note: *What exactly does the "China threat" mean? China Daily reviews the historical bonds between China and the US by inviting experts, entrepreneurs and influencers to discuss the current status of relations in terms of cultural exchanges, economic connections and military confrontation. The internet documentary series* The Myth of the China Threat *offers a timely review of the China-US relationship and what it means for the world.*

A bogeyman born and bred in the USA

When it comes to running the economy and foreign policy, Washington's politicians often look for someone to blame, and most often it is China

By **KE RONGYI**, **XU-PAN YIRU** and **MENG ZHE**

After receiving an offer to study computer science from Vanderbilt University in Nashville, Tennessee, Liu Zheng planned to pursue a doctorate there in 2020. However, Presidential Proclamation 10043 signed by Donald Trump in May of that year left him no choice but to start looking for a job in Beijing instead, he said.

An estimated 3,000 to 5,000 Chinese students who specialize in STEM (science, technology, engineering and math) studies have been denied visas to enter the US because of the proclamation.

PP10043 prohibits students who have graduated from universities it alleges support what it calls China's "military-civil fusion program" from obtaining certain US visas on the grounds that they could engage in espionage. The students say they find the reasoning unconvincing.

The list was compiled by the think tank the Australian Strategic Policy Institute, or ASPI, Liu said. "They did not do real research, but they pin the blame on the victims."

Liu's undergraduate studies, the internet of things engineering, involves operating home appliances using an Android device. Seeing some kind of connection between his studies and China's military is preposterous, he said.

ASPI is known for its ties with the Pentagon, foreign governments and weapons manufacturers, and it has published a series of reports that target Chinese universities based on unverified assumptions.

PP10043 involves a series of moves by the US government that aim at countering the "China threat", with a narrative of a malevolent China and Chinese people acting as government agents controlling the country's foreign policy and popular culture.

China as a looming threat to the US has long become the primary driver of Western media coverage of China. "If we write a favorable story about China it gets put on page 26 of the newspaper, or it's not covered at all," said Stapleton Roy, former US ambassador to China. "But if I talk about Chinese dissidents or Chinese human rights abuses, then I get front-page coverage."

When anyone talks of their experience in China that does not align with the narrative coming from overseas, they are criticized and summarily dismissed as being shills for the Communist Party of China.

"I'm not paid by anybody to say the things that I say," said Jerry Grey, a Briton who has lived and worked in China for nearly 20 years.

"When someone tells me something is true, I'll go off to find out whether or not it is true. Sometimes it is true, sometimes it isn't, but when it relates to China, it's almost 100 percent untrue."

As a direct witness to China's huge development over the past 20 years, he has seen advances across every measurable metric, including health, education, environment, crime and the economy.

For Western audiences constantly bombarded with anti-China misinformation and disinformation, it is easy enough to end up being suspicious of a country most know little about.

Yan Xuetong, a scholar in international relations at Tsinghua University in Beijing, laments the growing divide between China and the public in many other countries.

"The awful thing is that it is not only conflict between governments that is increasing but resentment between people as well."

Some Chinese who have had student visa applications rejected, including Liu, have responded by taking legal action against US government officials, including the secretary of state and the secretary of defense.

At the World Peace Forum in Beijing in July, the US Ambassador to China, Nicholas Burns, when asked whether he was aware of the consequences of PP10043, did not directly address the concern. Chinese students were welcome in the US, he said, and only those who broke laws would be subjected to visa restrictions. The students responded that Burns' response was inadequate and hypocritical.

"That's a very American way to put things," Liu said. "They say one thing and do another. I hope the lawsuit will bring us justice."

Vehicle maker's complaint

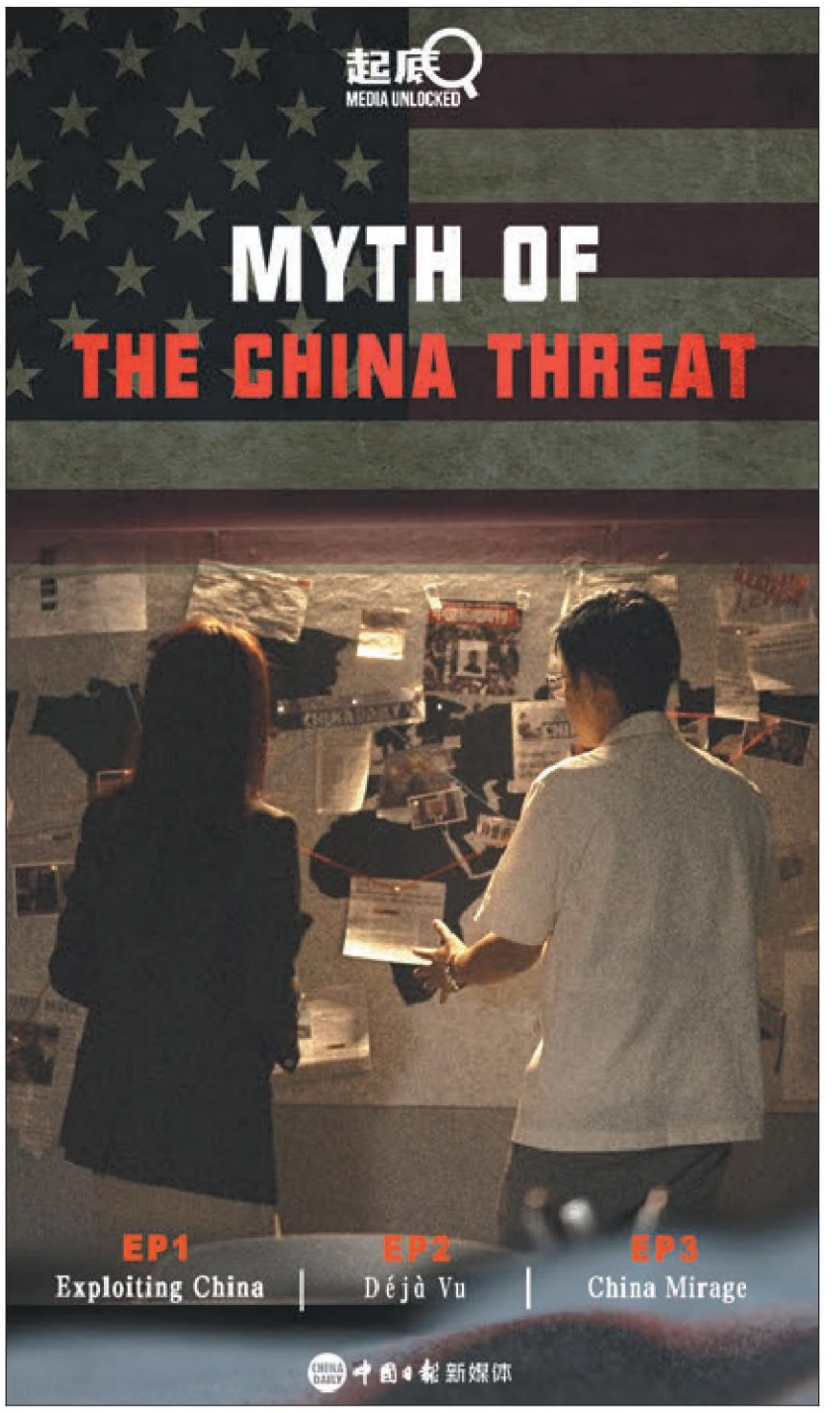
Students are not the only ones who feel aggrieved by the way the US government is treating them. Another group is motor vehicle manufacturers.

"We hope some day when we go to California the Californian government can treat us the way the Shanghai government did to Tesla," said Freeman Shen, founder and chief executive of WM Motor, one of the top makers of electric vehicles in China.

Electrical vehicle manufacturing has been one of the major fields of competition in China-US relations. The US has accused China of subsidizing the industry, giving Chinese companies an unfair advantage over their US counterparts.

When WM Motor was founded in 2015 it received debt investment and low-interest loans worth 3 billion yuan ($438 million) from the local government.

"But US companies like Tesla received much more support from the government than we did," Shen said.



Above: A poster for *The Myth of the China Threat*. PHOTOS BY MEDIA UNLOCKED STUDIO
Left: A factory tour at WM Motor.

Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Tesla has also received billions of dollars from the US Department of Energy, he said, calling the US accusations groundless.

In 2018 Trump instigated a trade war with China, imposing billions of dollars in tariffs on Chinese products, complaining that for years China had been taking economic advantage of the US. Three years into the presidency of Joe Biden, the tariffs, which many economists in both countries say should be removed, remain in place.

Experts say the tariffs are not only harmful to the global economy but have led the US away from free trade and toward protectionism.

"The US is no longer a free-trade country," Roy said. To support that contention he points to "the launching of a trade war with China by president Trump, the putting on of the China tariffs, the fact that President Biden has left those tariffs in place, the fact that we pulled out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership".

China's growing presence in high-tech has become a top concern for US policymakers. In August US lawmakers passed the CHIPS and Science Act, which gives $52 billion for US companies over five years to grow their semiconductor manufacturing. In October the US imposed sweeping restrictions on China, the intention being clear: to cripple its semiconductor industry and stifle its technological development.

The Biden administration has launched the so-called smart competition with China and has shifted its focus to technology.

"They believe that technology will determine whether the US can maintain the military and economic advantage, vis-a-vis China," said Wu Xinbo, dean of the Institute of International Studies at Fudan University in Shanghai. With growing tensions between the two countries, experts have called for proper management of all the issues.

Daniel Russel, former US assistant secretary of state for East Asian and Pacific Affairs, said: "There is a real urgency for the US and China working to heal their bilateral relations overall, and to ensure that the competition between us, which is inevitable, is the kind of constructive competition that makes both sides better, better competitors, and not the destructive rivalry in which each side is seeking to harm and undermine the other."

Military bases trigger concern

After being stationed on the Japanese island of Okinawa for two years, Brian Berletic, a former US marine, said he began to understand that the US military presence was not about bolstering regional stability but about undermining it.

"It was a source of constant tension," Berletic said.

Every year the US pours billions of dollars into building and maintaining its overseas military bases. But the US military presence at such bases has triggered protests rather than gratitude.

"We're talking rape, murder, assaults, things like that," said Robert Kajiwara, an activist and writer in Okinawa. "US soldiers are infamous for doing this. They particularly target Okinawan women and children, as well as the elderly."

More than 30 US military installations have been built in Okinawa, just a fraction of the hundreds of US military bases that encircle China. Every year the US military flies thousands of spy planes over the South China Sea, and naval ships frequent the region with growing intensity.

The US argues that its military buildup is needed to counter China's alleged threat to the region.

"No country will believe that the United States may use its military power to seize territory," Russel said.

"The United States is using its military power to maintain international security and stability, especially in Asia."

The number of US surveillance sorties in the South China Sea is likely to increase compared with 2021, said Wu Shicun, founding president of the National Institute for South China Sea Studies.

Increased US military activity in the Western Pacific is because it is concerned about losing its dominance, he said. "In 2021 the US flew over 1,200 spy plane sorties over the region and held 95 US-led military exercises. The frequency and intensity increase year by year."

In a world atlas published by Rand McNally in 1992, the Nansha Islands were described as "Nansha Island (China)", Wu Shicun said. In addition, the South China Sea islands were described as being part of Guangdong province, he said.

China's GDP is about 70 percent that of the US despite having the largest population in the world. However, China's national defense budget was 1.4 trillion yuan ($204 billion) last year, less than one-third of the US defense budget.

Wu Xinbo of Fudan University said the US military has already targeted the Chinese military as a major imaginary enemy.

US military spending in 2021 reached $801 billion, and it is expected to continue to increase this year and in the years ahead. Wu Shicun said: "Who would think of buying weapons from the US if it does not hype tensions?"

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WORLD US

Europe's tourism awaits big rush

Eased measures promise to bring numbers back to 2019 levels

By **WANG MINGJIE** in London
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The newly opened King Noodle Bar, which expects more tourists on Thursday, is located in the Jungfrau ski region of Switzerland. LIAN YI / XINHUA

European destinations and tourism experts have hailed China's move to relax the country's COVID-19 control measures on international arrivals and say the new measures will be of great significance to the recovery of international tourism.

At the end of last month the Chinese government announced that it would remove certain COVID-19 restrictions on international passenger flights from Jan 8, paving the way for many Chinese to plan overseas trips this year.

In a quick response to the announcement, embassies and tourism boards worldwide have posted messages on China's social media platform Weibo welcoming Chinese tourists again after a long hiatus.

"I think this is a very natural reaction," said Emanuel Lehner-Telic, head of markets Asia-Pacific at the Austrian National Tourist Office. "If you have not seen someone for a long while and missed them, you want to welcome them back.

"China was one of the largest tourism outbound markets until the end of 2019. A comeback of such a big player has of course an impact on the global tourism industry."

The tourism industry sees the announcement as a positive signal, he said, and it is a message the industry has awaited for almost three years.

"Many countries, especially in Asia, had a huge Chinese share in their number of guests. Their tourism industry is very much looking forward to the re-arrival of Chinese guests. We think there will certainly be a boost (for outbound Chinese travel this year). It will be interesting to see how strong the boost will be."

David Boyce, head of Asia, Middle East and Emerging Markets at Tourism Ireland, said: "This is probably one of the best and the most exciting pieces of news we have heard for a long time. ... I know our industry, including hotels and attractions, just cannot wait to have Chinese people back."

Chinese outbound tourism was stalled over the past three years, but Boyce said: "When things start to build up it will be floodgates opening."

In two years Ireland will be welcoming double the number of Chinese visitors the country received in 2019, he said.

Daniela Chiani, Greater China director at Switzerland Tourism, said: "The latest measures issued by the Chinese government optimizing the COVID-19 prevention policy are inspiring. China has paved the way for a full recovery of the inbound and outbound tourism markets by adjusting its measures of epidemic prevention and control, in line with public expectations."

The number of overnight stays in Switzerland by Chinese guests in 2019 reached 1.8 million, the country's national tourism agency said.

Important market

"China is an important foreign source market for the Swiss tourism industry," Chiani said.

Chinese tourists made about 170 million international trips in 2019, the China Outbound Tourism Research Institute says. They were not only the biggest source market, but also the biggest spenders in international tourism.

Wolfgang Arlt, the institute's director, said: "The Chinese had three years to remember their own trips, and read and see videos about destinations on social media and other sources. Many Chinese will have developed plans to do specific things during their next trip and go to new destinations, offering good opportunities for destinations off the beaten track, if they prepare well for the market."

He forecast that the number of Chinese trips abroad this year will reach about two-thirds of what they were in 2019, possibly a bit less for Europe, and by next year, if no new problems arise, the 2019 level should be reached again.

Oliver Sedlinger, an international tourism consultant in Beijing for Sedlinger and Associates, said: "There definitely is a huge pent-up demand for outbound travel in China, and I think that during 2023 this demand will become increasingly visible. Once the final hurdles and bottlenecks are overcome, e.g. regulations, visa handling and flight capacity, I expect a very strong rebound."

Asian student assaulted in Indiana college town

By **HENG WEILI** in New York
hengweili@chinadailyusa.com

An 18-year-old Asian American student at Indiana University was stabbed while getting off a bus by a woman who said she did it because the victim is Chinese, according to court documents.

According to an affidavit, Billie Davis, 56, a resident of Bloomington, Indiana, where the university is located, stated she stabbed the female victim in the head with a folding knife.

Davis mentioned targeting the woman, who is from Carmel, a suburb of Indianapolis, "due to [her] being Chinese" and "made statements that race was a factor in why she stabbed her", the affidavit said.

Davis also told a detective that she attacked the young woman because it would be "one less person to blow up our country".

The victim "said that as she was standing and waiting for the bus doors to open, another passenger on the bus began to strike her repeatedly in the head, which resulted in immediate pain", said a news release from the Bloomington police.

The young woman was alert and able to tell police what happened when they spoke to her at a local hospital; her condition wasn't available Thursday.

Surveillance footage shows Davis stabbing or attempting to stab the victim several times on top of head.

Davis then put the knife in her pocket and went back to her seat on the Bloomington Transit bus. A witness who also was onboard followed Davis and contacted police. She was arrested by Bloomington police officers when she got off the bus.

Davis was booked into the Monroe County Jail on charges of attempted murder, aggravated battery and battery by means of a deadly weapon, where she was held without bond on Thursday.

"We are outraged and heartbroken by this unprovoked act of violence, but we also worry for the well-being of our community," said an email from the Asian Culture Center said, reported the Indiana Daily Student. "We should not be fearing for our lives on public transportation. Taking the bus should not feel dangerous."

On Friday, IU students gathered at the center to voice their concerns.

"After Wednesday, I immediately feel unsafe taking the bus," said IU student Zheng Zhou.

IU seniors Audrey Lee and Tvisha Chatterjea, who grew up in Bloomington, say they've been dealing with anti-Asian sentiments their entire lives, according to WRTV, the ABC affiliate in Indianapolis.

"Growing up my parents here told me, 'Oh keep your head down, if you come across any trouble don't engage.' Just run."

"Yeah exactly. If we keep running away, keep avoiding people in the community, then they will have more reason to dehumanize us, and it'll be easier to commit these acts of anti-Asian violence," Lee said.

In a statement posted on the city website, Bloomington Mayor John Hamilton said: "Following the brutal attack of a member of our community, I want to state categorically that here in the city of Bloomington we deplore any form of racism and discrimination, especially hate-based violence."

James C. Wimbush, the university's vice-president for diversity, equity and multicultural affairs, said on Facebook, "This week, Bloomington was sadly reminded that anti-Asian hate is real."

A total of 10,905 hate incidents against Asian Americans and Pacific Islanders were reported between March 19, 2020 — at the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic —and Dec 31, 2021, according to Stop AAPI Hate, an advocacy group.

HK Ballet delights with *Romeo and Juliet* tale

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**
in New York
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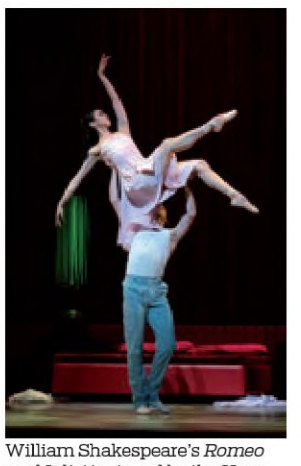

William Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet* is staged by the Hong Kong Ballet in New York on Friday. CHRISTOPHER DUGGAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

An elegant retelling of William Shakespeare's ancient tale *Romeo and Juliet* was performed by dancers from the Hong Kong Ballet (HKB) in New York this weekend.

The US premiere about the tragic star-crossed lovers took place at the iconic New York City Center in Manhattan on Jan 13 and 14 to a full house. The US tour will move on to North Carolina next on Jan 20 and 21.

Susan Liebell, an audience member from New Jersey, praised the performance. "I loved the sets ... especially the red ones; the men's dancing was super compelling," she told China Daily. "It was perfect in this theater."

The story was set in Hong Kong in the turbulent 1960s, HKB provided a fresh take on Shakespeare's story, transporting audiences back in time by featuring an intricately designed set that kept changing, along with costumes that captured the fashions of the era.

Septime Webre, HKB's artistic director since 2017, told China Daily: "It's inspired by the special vibrancy and dynamic energy of Hong Kong in the early 1960s. It was a pretty fascinating time of great change. The production is inspired by the nostalgia that Hong Kong people have with that era."

In the retelling, Juliet's father is an unrelenting Shanghainese tycoon who is determined to marry his only daughter off to a wealthy Caucasian man. But things go awry when she has eyes for another man.

The ballet was set to Sergei Prokofiev's dramatic score, bringing retro Hong Kong alive for the audience, as dancers fused dance and drama to showcase a society in flux in a visually stunning performance.

Webre's original choreography seamlessly incorporated intense street battles rendered in traditional Hong Kong-style kung fu.

Established in 1979, HKB is one of Asia's premier ballet companies. The vibrant performing arts organization has nearly 50 dancers, hailing from international locations including Australia, New Zealand, Europe and throughout North America.

Candy Nip, director of the Hong Kong Economic and Trade Office in New York, told China Daily: "Hong Kong ballet is one of the most refined and international ballet companies in Asia, and we are very proud to showcase our talents, creativity and diversity and represent Hong Kong."

The HKB dancers have performed 50 tours in 11 countries worldwide in Europe, China and the US.

Qian Jin, deputy consul general at the Chinese Consulate General in New York, told China Daily: "The ballet was wonderful because it's a cultural exchange that we can share and know we have something in common.

"By using art and cultural activities, we know that no matter your race or country that you're from, we're all the same. That's important now, as the world faces global challenges."

Heidi Lee, executive director of HKB told China Daily: "This performance is very meaningful to us as it's being done after COVID and is our biggest tour from Hong Kong in post-COVID time."

Along with performances at home and abroad, HKB is engaged with the community in Hong Kong, ensuring that ballet is accessible to all. It's online channel HKBALLET@HOME, has been watched by over 2 million people worldwide.

New House committee's focus on China draws skepticism

By **HENG WEILI** in New York
and **YIFAN XU** in Washington

With the creation of a committee that has wide bipartisan support, the new US House of Representatives seems determined to increase political pressure on Beijing, an approach that has raised concerns from some policy experts and politicians.

The House voted 365 to 65 on Tuesday in favor of a resolution establishing the "Select Committee on the Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party", which will make policy recommendations.

"I don't think it'll change US policy per se with regard to China. I think what will come out of part of the committee will be a lot of hot air," Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-America Studies, told China Daily. "But some of that air could also be a lot of radioactive dangerous air because that ... can frame the contours of the presidential election campaign in 2024.

"You know, the Republican Party, as we've seen, is very disunited at this point of time. And so it looks for elements that are in common, and one of the common areas, areas where there is a common view in the Republican Party, is on China," he said. "And that's why they were able to kick off the select committee so quickly."

All 65 of the "no" votes came from Democrats, some of whom said they were concerned the Republican-led panel would be too partisan.

But 146 other Democrats, including new House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries of New York, a state with a large Chinese population, voted in favor.

"When the Republicans tried to do this two years back, the Democrats backed out of it," Gupta said. "And it's not that the Democrats and the Biden administration have been soft on China.

"The Biden administration has taken the extreme competition to the extreme limit in technology embargoes, et cetera, et cetera. And so we have to see, but my view is that this will not lead to any shift in US policy whatsoever," he said.

But Daniel Larison, a columnist for antiwar.com, wrote that the two main US political parties tend to coalesce around an aggressive posture.

"To the extent that there are differences between the major parties, it is a difference in rhetoric and emphasis and not a fundamental disagreement over the substance of the policy itself," he said.

"Unfortunately, this gives the advantage to more hawkish elements as they constantly push for more military spending, more deployments, and more coercive measures. Less aggressive adherents of the consensus feel compelled to go along with most or all of it in order to be taken 'seriously,' and even critics often feel the need to frame their arguments using the language of the hardliners.

"Whenever the US sets out on some new global struggle, it empowers ideological zealots and causes previously sensible people to adopt that zealotry as a way of remaining 'relevant.'

"Zealotry is a poor guide for statecraft, and before you know it the US is on the road to another reckless war in a country that has little or nothing to do with our security," Larison wrote.

Judah Grunstein wrote on Jan 6 in World Politics Review, where he is editor-in-chief, that the result of American policy "is that competition and even potential conflict are now considered the default position for relations with China; those who suggest that cooperation — even on existential challenges like the climate crisis — is still valuable and at times necessary are seen as either naïve or, worse still, useful idiots".

House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a California Republican, insisted the panel would not be partisan.

"You have my word and my commitment. This is not a partisan committee. This will be a bipartisan committee," McCarthy said in remarks urging the House to back the bill.

He said the committee would address issues such as bringing jobs back from China to the United States, securing intellectual property and bringing supply chains back to the country.

The panel will be chaired by Republican Representative Mike Gallagher of Wisconsin, known for his anti-Beijing stance, who has suggested he'd take an aggressive approach by installing "elements of hard power".

California Democrat Ro Khanna, who said he represents the only Asian-majority district in the continental US, said he would not support a committee "that I thought would engage in xenophobia or attacks on the Chinese people".

Representative Ayanna Collins, a Massachusetts Democrat, said in a CNN interview that the select committee was "another sham effort".

"It's really clear that this is just a committee that would further embolden anti-Asian rhetoric and hate and put lives at risk," she said.

Pressley and other House progressives released a statement on their opposition to the committee.

While they said that China posed policy challenges to the US, they contended that "America can and must work towards our economic and strategic competitiveness goals without 'a new Cold War,'" which they said would lead to "repression, discrimination, hate, fear, degeneration of our political institutions, and violations of civil rights".

"A Select Committee on China under Republican control will inevitably be racialized," Representative Rashida Tlaib, a Michigan Democrat, wrote on Twitter on Wednesday.

Judy Chou, a California Democrat and chair of the Asian Pacific American Caucus, said, "This committee cannot be used to promote policies that result in the racial profiling of Asian Americans but should directly focus on specific concerns related to the government of the People's Republic of China."

Reuters contributed to this story.

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BUSINESS

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Start of a profit and valuation recovery?

Foreign financial institutions place big bets on Chinese stocks as various policies create hopes of economic rebound

By **SHI JING** in Shanghai
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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Despite that China's benchmark Shanghai Composite Index of the Shanghai Stock Exchange fell more than 15 percent last year due to various market uncertainties, foreign financial institutions remain sanguine about their 2023 prospects in the Chinese capital market. Their confidence, market mavens said, stems from signs that China's economy will stabilize even more going forward, on the back of continual optimization of the COVID-19 control measures.

Other factors brightening investor sentiment toward Chinese securities are GDP growth hopes, improved business confidence levels, and expectations that the unemployment rate, inflation and debt default risks will all remain manageable, while supportive policies will help the troubled property industry and other struggling sectors like travel, tourism, hospitality and catering to see a turnaround.

Goldman Sachs, for one, has gone ahead and told its clients they should consider increasing their exposure to Chinese stocks this year as they are expected to outshine those in the rest of the world.

Goldman analysts reasoned that China's GDP growth rate this year will come in at an estimated 4.5 percent, up from an estimated 3.3 percent in 2022 (8.4 percent in 2021, 2.2 percent in 2020, the first year of the pandemic, and 6 percent in 2019, the last pre-pandemic figure). The US investment bank has stamped an overweight rating on A shares for this year, and estimated the 2023 return of the CSI 300 index, a benchmark of 300 A-share large-caps, will come in at around 16 percent.

Wendy Liu, JPMorgan's chief China equity strategist, estimated that the A-share market's average earnings per share will surge 14 percent this year, which will be on a par with the level seen in August 2022.

"Northbound capital" that overseas investors pump into A shares via the stock connect mechanism linking the Shanghai, Shenzhen and Hong Kong bourses will report a net inflow of $30 billion this year, up from $13 billion in 2022 but still behind the $63 billion seen in 2021, Goldman experts said.

They further said China's unemployment rate will likely decline this year, while consumer confidence will recover as incomes improve. So, travel, restaurants, entertainment and airlines will likely see large room for recovery in profitability this year.

Kinger Lau, Goldman's chief China equity strategist, said: "Chinese stocks listed in both the A-share market and overseas markets will improve their performance relative to their peers this year, given the relatively relaxed macroeconomic policies and rising GDP growth rate."

> "Chinese stocks listed in both the A-share market and overseas markets will improve their performance relative to their peers this year, given the relatively relaxed macroeconomic policies and rising GDP growth rate."
>
> **Kinger Lau,** Goldman's chief China equity strategist

Many more foreign institutional investors have a similar bullish stance on Chinese stocks. In a Dec 8 report, Morgan Stanley experts said the Chinese stock market will likely stand out among those of the emerging economies and even overtake those of the rest of the world this year. The swift actions that the Chinese government has taken to optimize the COVID-19 control measures will continue to boost the market sentiment, they said.

The positive forecast emerged less than a week after the New York-headquartered investment bank upgraded its China stocks outlook from equal-weight to overweight. The A-share market is at the beginning of a profit and valuation recovery that may last for many quarters to come, said Morgan Stanley analysts.

Such optimism started to brighten after the tone-setting Central Economic Work Conference in mid-December said China will implement the optimized COVID-19 control measures in a well-calibrated manner, to ensure pandemic control work is better reconciled with socioeconomic development. From Jan 8, China scrapped the quarantine requirement for international arrivals. It also downgraded the management of COVID-19 cases from Class A to Class B.

Luo Di, director of asset allocation for UBS Asset Management in China, said the Swiss financial services behemoth has taken note of a noticeable northbound capital inflow at the end of 2022 that showed a sharp slope, in terms of inflow speed.

The major markets in the world are all confronting their own problems at present, said Luo. The US stock market is still undergoing much volatility against the backdrop of unclear expectations of interest rate hikes. Europe is showing stabilizing signs, but is not firmly grounded. But the certainty of China's policies is stronger than that of other markets, which is conducive to foreign capital inflows into the A-share market, he said.

China's economic recovery, which will be further consolidated by relatively bigger fiscal expenditure and a stronger stimulus for property, consumption and investment, is likely to generate bigger active returns, which should not be overlooked by international investors, said Luo.

In a report released in late December, experts from Pictet Wealth Management, a Swiss firm, described their outlook for the global stock market performance as lukewarm. But China, they said, will show better performance than the rest of the world as it optimizes pandemic containment policies.

The country's economic recovery, which will not be an easy process, is unquestionable. The lower prices of A shares indicate much investment value in the Chinese equities, they said.

Data from market tracker Wind Info showed the average price-to-earnings ratio of the CSI 300 index is 11.3 times, approaching the historic lows of 2016 and 2018.

The expected rebound in the Chinese market will likely exert a spillover effect on emerging markets, Pictet experts said, explaining their generally positive outlook for the stock markets in emerging economies this year.

The US stock market, which showed soaring valuations in 2021, did not sustain that bright streak in 2022. Its current valuations do not truly reflect US economic picture, said analysts from US-based Vanguard Investment Strategy Group. Against that backdrop, emerging economies, including China, will be important to international investors as they are keen to diversify their investment portfolios.

Agreed experts from Neuberger Berman. There will be a lot of glad tidings in the A-share market that investors can look forward to this year. For one, the average valuation of the A-share market is within a reasonable range after the adjustment the previous year. China's economic recovery has much impetus, especially in the airline and tourism businesses, they said.

Macroeconomic indicators like the consumer price index and the producer price index are also at a reasonable level. Inflation this year will likely have only a limited impact on economic growth, while raw material prices are not expected to surge. Benefiting from rising demand and stable costs, midstream industries in China are likely to perform relatively better, NB analysts said.

As China is undergoing a transition from old to new economic drivers, investors should keep a close eye on technology growth enterprises, which are best represented by those listed on the STAR Market in Shanghai. New energy and high-end manufacturing industries may present the most opportunities for profitable investments. The Chinese internet industry may have bottomed out, as the Hang Seng Tech Index has rebounded more than 50 percent from the previous low of 2720.38 points touched in late October, NB said.

Hyomi Jie, a portfolio manager at Fidelity International, agreed the A-share market packs in a lot of appeal this year, in terms of diversifying risks. China's supportive policies will also lead to healthier economic growth figures.

The property industry, which influences consumer confidence and behavior quite significantly in China, may surprise the market with upward momentum this year, if the Chinese government continues to ease certain rules and regulations, said Jie.

The property market will be further stabilized, pushing up home purchase demand nationwide, leading to a positive trickle-down effect at the consumption end. Meanwhile, the accelerated localization in the supply chain will facilitate the rise of Chinese domestic brands, the development of high-end manufacturing industry and growth in consumption-related services. Although the economic recovery may be bumpy, China's efforts to move up the value chain have helped build its economic resilience. Structural growth opportunities are thus generated for investors, said Jie.

Where investors may reap decent returns this year

REPORTER'S LOG
By Shi Jing

Well, am I not glad that we have all stepped into a promising 2023 after enduring what many have described as the *annus horribilis* of 2022, a year filled with too much hardship for investors, whether professional or amateur.

In the year that was, the protracted geopolitical tensions in Europe had pushed up energy prices and caused a global food shortage. The US Federal Reserve adopted seven rounds of aggressive interest rate hikes last year to curb soaring inflation, which forced many other economies to follow suit. The stock market, which is negatively correlated to interest rates, slumped. The COVID-19 pandemic turned 3, casting a long and dark shadow on the global economy. Even the cryptocurrency prices continue to head south in the wake of the FTX meltdown.

Given all that, investors have high hopes for this year as there have been some positive signals in recent weeks. The Chinese regulators have optimized the country's COVID-19 prevention and containment policies in a major way, with significant implications for both inbound and outbound travelers. This is expected to boost tourism, consumption, trade and investment, and form a strong support for the macroeconomic fundamentals of China.

The US Fed appeared to have taken a softer monetary stance by raising interest rates by 50 basis points in mid-December, down from the stunningly high 75 bp hikes earlier in 2022.

But that doesn't mean everything will be hunky dory this year. China's growth, which is forecast by economists to be more consolidated this year, will still hit a bumpy path. The country is still facing pressure in the form of consumers' reluctance to spend, the troubled property sector, tardy employment and the hardy COVID-19. The sluggish or stunted development pace in most developed countries will likely stifle demand there, which isn't good news for China's exports.

On the other hand, although the US Fed is slowing its interest rate hikes, it's still nowhere near announcing an end to its monetary tightening. So, there's still short-term pressure on the interest rate difference between China and the US, which will continue to translate into pressure on the Chinese stock market. The high fiscal deficit in the US hangs over the already troubled economic growth there.

So, A-share investors would do well to expect market volatility. To be frank, they should have developed this ability in 2022. Very high returns won't be easy. Value or long-term investment should be embraced as the market matures further. Investors should closely watch the industries whose development path is in line with the national goals. Only companies with true value and growth potential will be able to withstand market fluctuations.

The US stock market may continue to be lukewarm. Unreasonably high rate of returns may have already become a thing of the past when monetary easing was the norm. The high interest rates in the country will push down the valuations of stocks. Will there be another economic hard landing in the US? Will it lead to an overall economic regression among developed economies? Time will tell.

The Chinese and US bond markets may be worth considering given the former's foreseeable stability and the latter's higher returns.

The energy sector may also be worth looking at, as energy prices are expected to remain high in 2023. In this sense, experienced investors can seek help from asset managers specializing in commodity trading advisory strategy. Other defensive investments, such as gold, can also be considered, given the possible uncertainties on the global front.

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BUSINESS

Tourists from a Xiamen Airlines flight are greeted by a Thai government official as they arrive at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok on Jan 9, after China removed COVID-19 travel restrictions. YANG WANLI / CHINA DAILY

Asia-Pacific countries eager to welcome back Chinese tourists

Nation's optimized COVID-19 policies inject impetus to regional tourism

BANGKOK — China's recent optimization of its COVID-19 response and the gradual return of Chinese citizens' overseas travel have encouraged those working in the tourism sectors of Asia-Pacific countries.

In the eyes of a Thai *tuk-tuk* driver who gave his name as Mak, the return of Chinese tourists means the revival of Thailand's economy. He hopes the hustle and bustle of foreign tourists on Bangkok's streets before the pandemic hit three years ago will soon come back.

Government expectations

In 2019, Thailand welcomed about 40 million foreign tourists, nearly 30 percent of whom were Chinese.

Thai Finance Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith said that China's gradual restoration of its citizens' overseas travel and other favorable factors will boost Thailand's tourism sector — Thailand's key economic growth contributor — pushing the Thai economy to grow 3.8 percent in 2023.

Philippine President Ferdinand Romualdez Marcos Jr invited Chinese to visit his country as tourists, students and investors. "I shall push for the resumption of tourism and cultural cooperation between our two countries," he said.

Indonesian Tourism and Creative Economy Minister Sandiaga Uno said the COVID-19 pandemic has had a huge negative impact on many sectors of Indonesia, including tourism.

"We lost almost 1 million-plus jobs," he said, adding that cooperation with China is very important for the recovery of Indonesia's tourism sector.

Cambodian Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen said he was very pleased to welcome back Chinese tourists, saying that their presence is vital to the country's tourism and economic growth.

"When China reopens its borders, flights will increase exponentially, so we hope to welcome about 2 million Chinese tourists again (in 2023)," Hun Sen said.

Preparations ready

The tourism sectors of Asia-Pacific countries have been gearing up for the return of Chinese tourists in the new year.

In New Zealand, some travel agencies have been communicating with their Chinese counterparts and customizing the latest tour itineraries for incoming Chinese tourists.

Li Ruiqin, managing director of China Travel Service (NZ) Ltd, said Chinese tourists spend an average of NZ$4,900 ($3,124.73) per person when staying in New Zealand.

The orderly resumption of outbound travel for Chinese tourists will be "a major boon to New Zealand's tourism industry", she said.

Travel specialist He Qingyuan in Australia said as the Chinese Lunar New Year holiday is around the corner, He, along with his peers, is customizing exclusive tours for Chinese visitors.

Yuthasak Supasorn, governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand, said the tourism sector is gearing up for the return of Chinese tourists. Besides their favorite activities of visiting beaches and enjoying the food, "we would like to promote exclusive tour packages in the northeast region, the lesser visited corner of Thailand filled with natural beauty and authentic Thai culture", he said.

On the world-famous Boracay island in central Philippines, the once-closed Chinese restaurants have been reopening one by one and some local travel agencies have produced tour packages themed around the Chinese Lunar New Year, hoping to lure the first batch of Chinese tourists after the border reopens.

Indonesia's "paradise on Earth", Bali, is no exception. Azril Azahari, chairman of the Indonesia Tourism Intellectual Association, said he expects an early arrival of Chinese tourists to Bali to enjoy the upgraded and diversified travel services.

Rational approach needed

China's recent announcement that it would downgrade the management of COVID-19 from Class A to Class B from Jan 8 has been warmly welcomed by many countries, which have also called for rational pandemic prevention measures.

Welcoming Chinese visitors, Hun Sen said China's reopening of its borders will revitalize Cambodia's economy and tourism, adding his country will not impose restrictions on Chinese tourists.

In a statement on Jan 4, Thai Deputy Prime Minister and Public Health Minister Anutin Charnvirakul said Thailand has considered COVID-19 as a communicable disease under surveillance.

Foreign visitors entering Thailand from all parts of the world will be treated equally and no special public health measures will be implemented to discourage travelers from any particular country.

Teo Yik Ying, dean of the Saw Swee Hoch School of Public Health at the National University of Singapore, said Singapore has a high vaccination rate and it is unnecessary for it to impose additional travel regulations on Chinese tourists.

XINHUA

A-share market shows resilience amid uncertainties

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

While initial public offering activity was lackluster globally in 2022 due to geopolitical tensions and multiple market uncertainties hindering economic growth, the IPO market remained buoyant in the A-share market last year as the country's technology-focused boards have started to show more vitality.

As calculated by leading consulting firm KPMG, the number of IPO cases and total funding raised globally plunged 50 percent and 60 percent, respectively, year-on-year in 2022. IPO financing realized on the two major bourses in the United States, the New York Stock Exchange and Nasdaq, plummeted more than 90 percent yearly.

But the A-share market demonstrated its resilience amid global gloom. Although the number of IPO cases contracted 15 percent year-on-year to 416 in 2022, total financing increased 9 percent to 584.9 billion yuan ($87.03 billion), refreshing the record reached in 2021, according to professional services provider EY.

Deepened capital market reforms, promotion of the registration-based IPO mechanism and the establishment of a multilayered capital market had contributed to the record-high proceeds in the A-share market in 2022 when the world economy was confronted with various challenges, said Zhao Haizhou, the eastern region A-share offering leader for the capital market services group at Deloitte.

It should be noted that IPO proceeds made at the STAR Market on the Shanghai Stock Exchange — the board aiming to nurture "hard technology" companies, such as chipmakers, biopharmaceutical companies and artificial technology firms, accounted for 40 percent of the whole-year IPO fundraising in the A-share market in 2022, according to EY's calculation. It is the first time for the STAR Market to overtake the A-share main board where large-caps are listed in terms of IPO financing.

On top of that, among the 10 largest IPOs recorded on the A-share market last year, measured by proceeds, seven are listed on the STAR Market.

Meanwhile, the number of IPO cases recorded on the ChiNext in Shenzhen, Guangdong province — the board to boost integration between traditional industries and new technologies and novel business models — came in at 150 by the end of 2022, according to latest data from market tracker Wind Info, overtaking all the other boards in the A-share market.

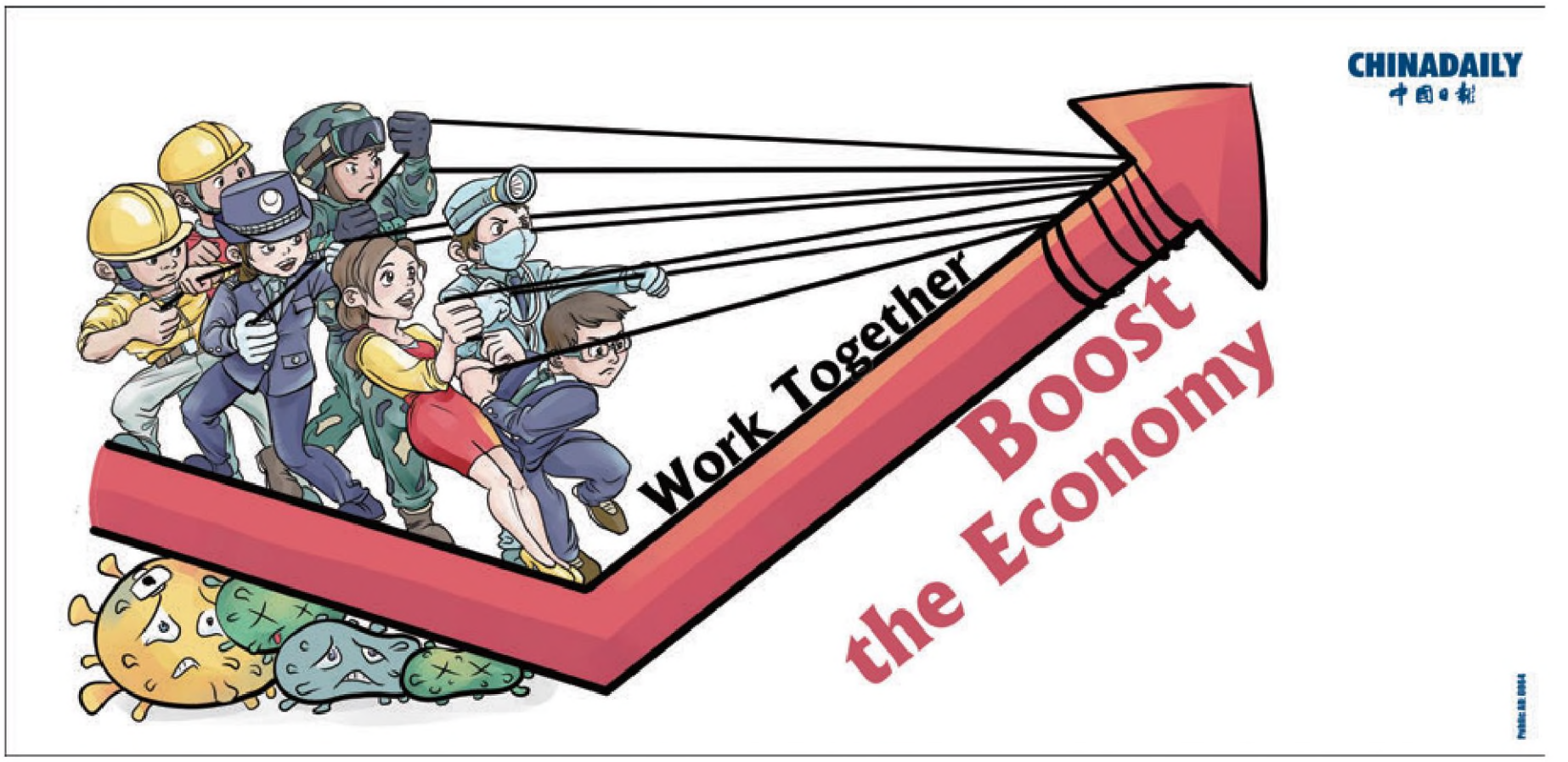
As understood by Felix Fei, EY Assurance partner, the development of "hard technology", which has become a major national strategy in China, has nurtured structural changes in the A-share market in recent years. While financial service providers used to top the list of IPO proceeds, their leading position has been dislodged by technology, media, telecom, biopharmaceutical companies and healthcare firms. Industrial companies with core technologies have also caught up in terms of IPO financing.

Advanced manufacturing, which is expected to highlight China's economic growth in 2023, will see more IPOs successfully announced this year, said Fei. Companies that use special and sophisticated technologies to produce novel and unique products, which are also in line with the country's strategic development path, will also drive IPO activity on the one-year-old Beijing Stock Exchange, which was launched to nurture technologically advanced small and medium-sized enterprises.

While the BSE saw 75 new companies achieve successful flotation in 2022, with the total financing coming in at 14.9 billion yuan, Deloitte estimates that up to 120 companies will announce their IPO on the BSE in 2023, with the total proceeds reaching 24 billion yuan.

The STAR Market in Shanghai is expected to see 120 to 140 new listings in 2023, with total fundraising estimated between 305 billion yuan and 340 billion yuan. The ChiNext is likely to accommodate 150 to 170 IPOs in 2023, with proceeds estimated to top 210 billion yuan, according to Deloitte.

Representatives of China Railway Harbin Group of Technology Corp beat a gong at its IPO ceremony on Oct 12. The company is listed on the Shanghai Stock Exchange STAR Market. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



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BUSINESSINSIGHT

Time for US to rethink role in global trade

EAGLE EYE
By Ji Wenhua

On Dec 14 and 16, the World Trade Organization conducted a review of the trade policy of the United States in Geneva. This was the fifteenth review of the US policy under the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade and WTO multilateral trading system since the introduction of the Trade Policy Review Mechanism (TPRM) into GATT in 1989.

The previous review of the US trade policy was conducted in 2018. At that time, the Trump administration was in power, and the US was bellicose on the trade front. In its policy statement to the WTO, it proclaimed that "the US is committed to reforming the global trading system in ways that lead to fairer outcomes for US workers and businesses, and more efficient markets for countries around the world", and continued that "US trade policy is driven by a pragmatic determination to use the leverage available to the world's largest economy to secure these objectives", a typical US tone which was not well received by other WTO members during the review process.

Now, several years later, the Biden administration is in power. In the face of a turbulent international political situation, grim global economic situation and battered multilateral trading system, what will the US, as the most important member of the WTO, say this time? What will other members say about the country?

As a routine practice, the US submitted its policy statement report in advance of the TPRM meeting. It is said that the overall tone in this report was much more low-key compared with the one in 2018. It emphasized the important role of the WTO, was in line with the Biden administration's return to a multilateral system, had much less explicit criticism of China by name, and included no proclamation for further US market opening. In the statement, the US asserted, "We remain committed to upholding a fair and open global trading system — one that follows through on our partners' long-standing commitment to conduct economic relations with a view to raising standards of living, ensuring full employment and promoting sustainable development." To achieve this, it is necessary to "identify and rethink aspects of the existing trading system that incentivize or enable unfair competition", because "too often our existing global trade rules have rewarded advantages that are not based on fair competition".

However, the US' deliberate low-key statement cannot hide and dismiss the problems existing in its current trade policy, nor can it avoid the questions and accusations of other members. While the US avoids mentioning areas for improvement in its trade policy in its statement, other WTO members will not limit themselves to listening to US "self-praise".

Instead, their attention has focused on some discriminatory trade practices with significant global implications taken by the US, of which the most controversial is the Inflation Reduction Act. The IRA addresses broad areas such as combating climate change, reducing prescription drug costs and reducing fiscal deficits. But what concerns WTO members most is that the act authorizes the US government to provide about $369 billion for climate and clean energy projects, including encouraging the purchase of electric vehicles and hydrogen fuel cell-powered vehicles and deploying charging stations, with as many as nine tax incentive programs conditional on production and sale in the US or North America. In the name of addressing climate change, those incentive programs differentiate foreign products based on their origins, and use domestic products as a preferential condition, which constitute a blatant violation of the basic principles of its most favored nation status and national treatment in terms of WTO rules. It is a deep betrayal to the appeal that "trade and environmental policies should be mutually supportive in line with WTO rules, and serve the sustainable development goals" of the G20 Bali Summit Declaration. Therefore, the IRA has been strongly castigated by other WTO members since its introduction, and the European Union has already threatened to take countermeasures and file a lawsuit against the US at the WTO.

In addition to the temporary disruption of supply chains caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, international trade and the global economy have been frequently confronted with US-made trade distortions and supply disruptions in recent years, especially so-called "decoupling" measures against China. To illustrate two recent examples: the US Chip and Science Act subsidizes domestic enterprises and covertly restricts chip companies' advanced technology investments in China; and the US Department of Commerce utilized export control measures in an unprecedented and abusive manner to restrict a great deal of global trade

CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

global semiconductor supply chains, offer US companies unfair competitive advantages, undermine the predictability of the global trade system and seriously damage the legitimate interests of enterprises in many countries.

To a certain extent, the introduction of the IRA and the "CHIPS and Science Act 2022" and semiconductor export controls in 2022 can be regarded as the commencement of a US "industrial policy" and "industrial subsidy" era, and the transformation of the US into a "non-market economy", a label that the US uses to describe other members. This also exemplifies the double standards implemented by the US on many international economic and trade issues under the banner of addressing climate change, promoting fair competition, maintaining supply chain stability and safeguarding security interests. The G20 Bali Summit Declaration stated: "We are committed to reinforcing international trade and investment cooperation to address supply chain issues and avoid trade disruptions. We believe that trade, climate and environmental policies should be mutually supportive and WTO-consistent and contribute to the objectives of sustainable development. We also recognize the importance of inclusive international cooperation on digital trade." Before the ink of this declaration is dry, these demands seem to have been forgotten by the US.

For these reasons, China's Ambassador to the WTO Li Chenggang pointed out at the US trade policy review meeting that "since the last review, not only have some practices of the US not been corrected, but they have gone further", and what we see is "a destroyer of the multilateral trading system, a unilateralist and bullying hegemonic power, a double standards manipulator and a disturber of the global supply chain". These titles are appropriate since the US has "earned" them with its strength and actions.

No matter how well its governmental statement is written, the US trade policy review examines US policy, discusses US issues and requests corrections to US measures. The US needs to put aside the mentality of overweening pride and listen carefully to the concerns of other WTO members because the US measures not only cause trade disruptions and market turmoil, but also fundamentally damage the stability and authority of the multilateral trading system in which all members have common interests.

It is time for the US to seriously rethink its role in the multilateral trading system. Only by implementing the spirit of the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia, and the essence of the WTO rules can the US regain the recognition and respect of the international community.

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The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

'New golden age' for China's investment sector

MAIN STREET
By Senan Yuen

China's fast-growing investment and wealth management industry is embracing a golden age. The onshore markets are simply too big to ignore and will remain an attractive long-term investment destination for the rest of the world.

"Is China still investable?" is a question we have often heard in the market over the past two years, and indeed, rising geopolitical tensions and slowing headline growth — exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic — have raised doubts over prospects for China's markets. We are aware of these concerns and adjust allocations accordingly across asset classes and at the level of individual securities, as we do in any market.

But when it comes to especially more pessimistic investors, we think there is a risk of missing one of the most significant evolutions taking place in the global finance industry in years — the liberalization of China's fast-growing investment and wealth management industry. You can call it a "new golden age".

Consider a few data points. While the COVID-19 pandemic has disrupted many aspects of China's economy in recent years, it has not stopped the country's mutual funds sector from growing. Total assets invested in mutual funds have risen by 71 percent since January 2020, said the Asset Management Association of China. As of the end of October, the sector's total assets under management stood at 26.5 trillion yuan ($3.94 trillion).

The expansion is mainly driven by the rapid accumulation of household assets. China's gross domestic product exceeded $10,000 on a per capita basis for a third consecutive year in 2021. A key report delivered in October at the opening session of the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China said that efforts will be made to substantially grow per capita GDP to be on a par with that of a "mid-level developed country" by 2035.

As a result, Chinese citizens have strong and growing demand for professional asset management services, including mutual funds.

This demand is supported by a long-term structural shift. Demographic trends like the aging population and shrinking labor force are adding downward pressure to China's neutral interest rate. In response, savers are more likely to shift more of their assets from bank savings to asset management products in search of better returns.

At the same time, as awareness for the need to save for retirement grows in China, providing new investment options for pension pools are proving a growth area for mutual funds. This is likely to gain momentum as China launches individual retirement accounts. Policymakers unveiled a new private pension scheme last year to offer supplementary retirement funding options for the aging population, alongside traditional pension programs from the government or offered by companies. We believe the new private or individual pension savings plans will prompt continuous innovation in asset management products.

Too big to ignore

From an allocation perspective, for global investors, China's onshore markets are simply too big to ignore. The equity and bond markets are both the second-largest in the world. They are playing increasingly important roles in the global economy.

Historically, it was difficult for investors outside China to access the full range of onshore assets. But this has been changing as policymakers make market access easier for foreign investors.

With programs including Stock Connect and Bond Connect, international investors can buy and sell onshore securities via Hong Kong. As China's markets have matured and liberalized, global index providers have included more onshore bonds and equities within their benchmarks, which helps attract more foreign capital into the country.

The country's domestic markets also provide attractive risk-adjusted returns. Present valuations of Chinese equities are near historic lows. The economic slowdown and COVID-19-related restrictions have weighed on local companies' financial fundamentals, but there are still opportunities for investors to seek excess returns if they dig deeper.

Diversification benefits

China's bonds and equities have historically provided good diversification benefits for global portfolios because they present a low correlation with other asset classes. The difference between China's interest rate cycle and the policy cycles of the world's other major economies also boosts the case of Chinese assets as a diversification strategy.

China has continued to broaden its markets by increasing the supply of high-quality and diversified financial assets. Examples in recent years include introducing a registration-based initial public offering system and launching the Nasdaq-style Shanghai Stock Exchange STAR Market. Capital market reforms in China are likely to further improve market dynamics and transparency, bringing more high-quality investment options.

Rolling out stimulus

While geopolitics may dominate the headlines, we think economic growth remains a key domestic priority for the Chinese government. We expect China to continue to roll out monetary, fiscal and regulatory stimulus measures to support the real economy. Foreign asset managers seeking to align with these efforts can leverage their experience and best practices from overseas, including in pension product offerings, sustainable investment practices and outbound investment strategies.

We have seen a lot of remarkable changes in the onshore capital markets since we opened our first Chinese mainland representative office in Shanghai in 2004. Today, as the country optimizes its COVID-19 containment, new opportunities may emerge. "Is China investable?" We think the answer is clear.

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The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Regaining their lost trade momentum in interests of both Australia and China

The latest remarks from Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese on boosting relations with China are a welcome signal that Canberra is willing to join hands with Beijing to continuously inject positive energy into bilateral ties so that Sino-Australian cooperation can regain steam and bring greater benefits to both sides.

In an interview with the Australian media on Saturday, Albanese said China is a major trading partner of Australia and "We believe that it is in both our countries' interests to continue to develop more positive relations".

Indeed, trade between the two countries, buttressed by a free trade agreement in 2015, was developing on a fast track before 2020. In the past three years bilateral trade has regrettably nosedived after encountering some severe difficulties, largely stemming from the previous Australian government's anti-China policies.

Since Albanese's Labor government took power in May, it has abandoned its predecessor's China-bashing stance and opted for a more pragmatic approach toward ties with Beijing. A series of high-ranking interactions, including Chinese President Xi Jinping's meeting with Albanese on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in Bali, Indonesia, and Australian Foreign Minister Penny Wong's visit to Beijing in December, have built rapport and stabilized bilateral ties.

Prior to Albanese's well-intended remarks on promoting bilateral trade, Chinese Ambassador to Australia Xiao Qian has also struck an upbeat tone, saying that "the relationship between China and Australia is at a critical stage of turnaround", and that "we will be sending more positive messages to build up more confidence for people in both countries to come back to normal trade relations".

There are signs that Beijing and Canberra are translating their messages of goodwill into real action as media reports said four Chinese companies have been granted approval to buy Australian coal, with the first batch expected to arrive in late February. Though he stopped short of confirming it, Ambassador Xiao said he welcomed moves in that direction.

Latest statistics show China-Australia trade reached $220.91 billion in 2022, down 3.9 percent year-on-year, with Australian exports to China reaching $142.09 billion, a drop of 13.1 percent year-on-year. But the rapidly thawing relations between Beijing and Canberra foretell that such a gloomy picture for bilateral trade will not continue this year.

As two countries with different social and political backgrounds, it is natural that Beijing and Canberra may not see eye to eye with each other on some issues. But farsighted politicians will find ways to bridge the gaps and navigate the differences, rather than choose to harm the mutual interests of the two countries.

However, it needs more wisdom for Canberra to put Australia-China ties fully back on the right trajectory again, given the arduous task of balancing its relations with China and the US.

Telling data of country's essential contributions

With the global industrial and supply chains going into shock as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, China has made crucial contributions over the past three years to promote the stability and recovery of the world economy.

Those essential contributions have not only exposed the failure of the trade war the United States has been waging against China, but also highlighted the irreplaceability of China's important position and role in the global industry and supply chains.

In 2022, the total value of China's imports and exports exceeded 40 trillion yuan ($5.97 trillion) for the first time, hitting 42.07 trillion yuan. That means the world's second-largest economy has maintained steady growth in foreign trade, up 7.7 percent year-on-year, despite the difficulties it has faced. It has not been easy for China to overcome the adverse impacts of not only the US' trade attacks, but also the Ukraine crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic.

That its foreign trade was able to realize such strong growth momentum last year is due to its high-level opening-up. And the pillars for this have been the institutional reforms that have been implemented to improve the domestic business environment, China's active participation in multilateral and bilateral trade agreements, the fast development of domestic free trade areas and responsive and effective pro-trade and pro-business policies that have been introduced to support enterprises, as well as the country's painstaking efforts to make innovation, efficiency and services its new comparative advantages in global trade.

Most importantly, its foreign trade structure continues to be upgraded.

For instance, electromechanical products with high added value account for an increasingly larger share of China's exports. In the past year, China's mobile phones, computers, integrated circuits and so on accounted for nearly 60 percent of its total annual exports.

In particular, new energy vehicles have become a leading export. China exported more than 3.11 million automobiles last year, a year-on-year growth of 54.4 percent. Among them, exports of new energy vehicles increased 1.2 times year-on-year, reaching 679,000 units.

In effect, the US' high-tech blockade has only spurred Chinese enterprises to bid farewell to their comfort zone and attach greater significance to foreign cooperation and self-reliance at the same time. It has also prompted the country to ensure supplies of energy and food in order to safeguard national security.

So the robust increase of foreign trade has given a strong boost to China's economic growth and will make positive contributions to consolidating the foundation for its economic recovery and keeping the economy operating within a proper range.

Increasingly militarized Japan a real threat

In the joint statement of the United States and Japan released on Friday, China was mentioned as a country posing challenges with "actions inconsistent with the rules-based international order". With this statement, Japan has further affirmed its status as a hired gun of the US' geopolitical strategy.

The statement reads "the leaders also instructed their ministers to reinforce cooperation on the development and effective employment of Japan's counterstrike and other capabilities".

The tone of the statement strongly suggests that the US has given the nod to Japan's expansion of its military capability as described in the three security and defense documents released by the Japanese government in December, which goes far beyond the bounds of its so-called pacifist Constitution.

Japan is cunningly seizing the chance of changing its role as a shield of the US geopolitical game to that of a spear, even a spearhead, as the excuse to remilitarize. Which will send a chill down the spine of countries in East Asia. An increasingly militarized Japan cannot but remind them of what it did to them that necessitated the constraints imposed by its Constitution.

The irony is that Japan's military expansion with the help of the US is an action inconsistent with the rules-based order in the Asia-Pacific, which both countries claim to uphold.

It has long been the consensus of the entire world that Japan should not be allowed to develop into a military power again. This has been an important foundation for peace in East Asia and the world at large.

Yet right-wing political forces in Japan have long been trying to do this. Behind Japan's willingness to act as a pawn of the US is its ambition of restoring its status as a regional military power. Such ambition coincides with the US' need to find a regional proxy to act on its behalf.

US President Joe Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida declared in the joint statement "the importance of maintaining peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait as an indispensable element of security and prosperity in the international community", which speaks volumes about what role the US hopes Japan can play in its strategy to contain China.

The Taiwan question is China's internal affair, and it is none of the business of any other country how China will realize its national reunification.

Washington should realize that the ambitions of Japan's right-wing forces go far beyond what it wants Japan to do. That is where the source of instability is for East Asia and the world at large.

What East Asian countries and Japanese people need to be reminded of is the danger the rise of Japanese militarism poses to regional and global peace and stability.

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Cai Meng

Opinion Line

Once upon a time in the US, infrastructure had pride of place

On Wednesday, the US Federal Aviation Administration announced that the reason for the nationwide suspension of flights was the pilot alert system failed overnight, prompting a nationwide halt to departures. It said that a corrupted database file made it impossible to update the system that sends messages to pilots. It stressed that it was not a cyberattack.

But it should be noted that the challenge is no less grave than a cyberattack, as even without the latter, with the corrupt data fed to both the primary and backup systems, it paralyzed the US' aviation management system, until it had been completely rebooted.

The FAA controls over 5 million square kilometers of airspace, coordinates connections among over 19,000 airports nationwide, yet a damaged database file is enough to put it down. There are hundreds of millions of database files in its aviation system and many more in other sectors such as railways, shipping and the mail systems.

Having been the world's No 1 power for more than 70 years, the US ranked first in many sectors and took the lead in its infrastructure construction. Yet with the passing of time and progress of technologies, the past advantages have become not only disadvantages, but also hindrances to improvement. The US had large numbers of airports in the decades before computers became almost ubiquitous, but even today some airlines still use handwritten records; some airlines have to cancel large numbers of flights in blizzards because the airport infrastructure is unable to cope. Even US President Joe Biden said that LaGuardia Airport in New York was like a "third world" one.

These are all reasons prompting the US to improve its dated infrastructure. The last round of US aviation infrastructure upgrading was done in the 1960s, and it was not until 2021 that the Biden administration introduced an investment plan of $25 billion for aviation infrastructure.

But it should be stressed, too, that aviation infrastructure means more than bricks and cement as CNN said in quoting an anonymous information source. The database system as software and the computers as hardware all need upgrading to ensure flight safety.

– ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

Washington should disclose epidemic info

The XBB.1.5 subvariant of Omicron strain of the novel coronavirus has been spreading so quickly in the United States that infections caused by it now account for 43 percent of the fatal infections nationwide.

According to the statistics of the Global Influenza Shared Database (GISAID), a publicly accessible database designed to improve the sharing of influenza data, almost all the variants of the virus have been prevalent in the US. Why is the US so attractive to the virus variants? How could XBB.1.5 spread so quickly? The US needs to share information and data about its epidemic situation timely and transparently with the world.

It takes global efforts to fight the pandemic and every nation is responsible for sharing the information of any new variant they find. According to GISAID, the first reported XBB.1.5 infections can be traced back to New York and Connecticut in October, and now it has spread to at least 74 countries and regions. CNN quoted experts as saying that the variant highly possibly originated in the US.

For three years, there have been countless blames against the US for its lack of transparency, even data fabrication. As early as July 2020, the British Medical Journal published an essay that said the novel coronavirus infections in the US neared 4 million, higher than the 2.67 million in the US government report. In March 2021, former director of the US Centers for Disease Control Tom Friedan said that lack of timely, accurate information is one of the US' biggest failures in coping with the pandemic. In May 2022, the NBC said that the number of COVID-19 infections might have been underestimated in the US.

For three years, the US has always been insincere, irresponsible in publishing its pandemic information. For which, not only has it paid a huge price, but also the rest of the world.

The World Health Organization has confirmed XBB.1.5 as being the most infectious among all Omicron subvariants and has warned about the danger of more people being infected. The US should stop concealing information and make everything transparent. The world has the right to know the truth.

– CHINA MEDIA GROUP

What They Say

Interest rates decided by events, not just the Fed

The latest inflation data released by the US Department of Labor on Thursday showed that the United States consumer price index rose 7.7 percent year-on-year in October 2022, the lowest since January 2022. With inflation down, the question for the Federal Reserve is whether to increase interest rates or not. There are various predictions of whether it will or won't.

But the Fed is expected to raise interest rates several times in 2023, and the range depends on which events will or will not happen this year.

The first is whether and to what extent the economic growth of the world, especially the US itself, will decline. In its Global Economic Prospects published in January, the World Bank sharply lowered its global GDP growth forecast to 1.7 percent for 2023, and warned of the risk of recession. It predicted that the GDP of the United States will grow by only 0.5 percent in 2023, which will be its weakest performance since the recession of 1970. In case the US economy faces a recession, the Fed might slow the pace or even suspend interest hikes.

The second is whether natural disasters or man-made incidents might cause a shortage of supplies. In its 2023 Global Risk Report, the World Economic Forum listed the rising cost of living, natural disasters and geopolitical conflicts as the top three global short-term risks.

If the shortage of energy and the food supply crisis continue, and the cost of living and debt servicing rise sharply, it is hard to imagine the US being able to exit from the interest rate hike cycle. Thus, interest rates will remain at a high level.

The third is the pandemic. After the early highly pathogenic strains, the relatively weak Omicron variant has become the main strain, but the virus continues to mutate. So there are still uncertainties that might restrain consumption, investment activities and market confidence. So although the rise and fall of the US benchmark interest might seem to be decided by the Federal Reserve, it actually depends on a series of events. The predictions of different institutions or people reflect nothing more than their expectations of how these events will unfold.

Only when countries join hands to address the risks and challenges will the world economy return to a benign state of low transaction costs.

– 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

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COMMENT

China and the World Roundtable | China's Spring Festival

Editor's note: *Chinese Spring Festival also called Lunar New Year is the most important festival in China. There are lots of traditions and celebrations associated with the festival, and the 2023 Chinese New Year is the year of the Rabbit. It is expected that billions of passenger trips will be made across China during the Spring Festival travel rush this year. Four experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.*

Liu Dongchao

Ban on firecrackers should continue

The Chinese people have been setting off fireworks and firecrackers to mark celebrations and even solemn occasions for the past 2,000 years. The earliest record of fireworks is from the Han Dynasty (202 BC-AD 202) when people threw bamboo stems into a fire to produce an explosion with a loud sound, in order to ward off evil spirits. As for gunpowder, it was first used to make firecrackers and fireworks during the Song Dynasty (960-1279).

This Chinese folk custom has influenced neighboring countries, too. As a result, people in Japan, the Republic of Korea, Myanmar and Singapore also set off fireworks and firecrackers to mark special occasions.

But opinions in China today are divided on whether to relax the restrictions on setting off firecrackers and fireworks.

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Those in favor of fireworks even claim that fireworks and firecrackers can eliminate the novel coronavirus while others say firecrackers should be burst to "celebrate" special occasions including the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Some have even compared fireworks with "faith", saying setting off fireworks is the ideal way of promoting group activity to strengthen national unity. Still others say that bursting firecrackers is a way of continuing the cultural tradition of Spring Festival, while others argue that since some countries are trying to get fireworks included in tangible and intangible world heritage lists, China should lift the ban on fireworks and firecrackers.

First, there are strong grounds, both environmentally and legally, for banning firecrackers and fireworks in certain areas. Since the 1990s, firecrackers and fireworks have been banned in some places in order to prevent environmental pollution, ensure people's safety, protect property, and maintain a harmonious social order. The decision was taken by local legislatures and governments based on local conditions and in line with the wishes of the general public.

The Beijing municipal government, for instance, has banned fireworks and firecrackers in urban areas, although it was not the first to do so. The capital promulgated the Regulations of Beijing Municipality on the Prohibition of Fireworks and Firecrackers in October 1993. It further made clear the regulations in the Beijing Fireworks and Firecrackers Safety Management Regulations issued in September 2005, stipulating that bursting of firecrackers and fireworks within and including the Fifth Ring Road is prohibited.

The Regulations on Fireworks and Firecrackers Safety Management, which was introduced by the State Council, China's Cabinet, in January 2006, says local governments at or above the county level can fix the time, place and type of restrictions or prohibitions on fireworks according to the real local conditions.

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Second, from the perspective of environmental protection, the ban on setting off fireworks and firecrackers is fully justified, because the main components of fireworks are carbon, nitrate and sulfur, which produce sulfur dioxide on being set off.

Sulfur dioxide is not only one of the main air pollutants, but also a typical carcinogen. It could also damage the human respiratory tract and cardiovascular system, and induce acute attacks of coughing and asthma in some allergic children. In addition, firecrackers also produce nitrogen dioxide and various metal oxides. Even adults can feel discomfort in the smoke emitted by fireworks and firecrackers.

Besides, firecrackers cause noise pollution, which could irritate and scare the sick, aged people and infants. So completely lifting the ban on fireworks will harm the health of many apart from inconveniencing people.

Third, in terms of people's safety and property protection, the ban on fireworks and firecrackers is valid. From ancient times to the present, loss of life and property in fires triggered by fireworks and firecrackers has been a recurring tragedy. For instance, the Meridian Gate Tower caught fire while Yongle Emperor Zhu Di was watching the display of fireworks in 1415, killing many people on the spot. Governor Ma Wang who led the army to bring the fire under control, too, became a victim of the fire. There are similar examples from the ancient to modern times.

The harm caused by firecrackers and fireworks is often directly proportional to the density of buildings and population in a given area. Yet the reverse is not true, because in the vast rural areas with relatively shorter buildings and low population density, the damage to people's lives and properties is not necessarily small. This is because people in rural areas have relatively poor awareness of protection, protective measures are often not in place, and some risk groups (mainly children and adolescents) receive relatively little education on how to handle fireworks.

Fourth, economically speaking, the ban on fireworks and firecrackers will result in losses for some people and companies, but there is another side to the issue. The national output value of this industry is 60-70 billion yuan ($8.9-10.4 billion), and the entire industrial chain employs 3-4 million people.

But controlling the air pollution caused by fireworks and firecrackers, putting out fires caused by fireworks or firecrackers, and addressing the health hazards created by fireworks and firecrackers will cost a lot of money, social resources and time. Thus it is not advisable to completely lift the ban on firecrackers and fireworks.

Furthermore, nationwide, the areas where setting off firecrackers and fireworks is banned are densely populated which need to be specially protected (such as archaeological sites). Also, it is necessary to study how fires caused by fireworks or firecrackers in China's vast countryside can be prevented. On the whole, the ban on firecrackers and fireworks should not be lifted.

The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Jia Yuanhua and Li Jian

Ensuring a safe Spring Festival travel rush

Thanks to the easing of COVID-19 prevention and control measures, this year's Spring Festival travel rush (Jan 7-Feb 15) will be the most special since the outbreak of the novel coronavirus three years ago.

To begin with, the flow of people across China during Spring Festival is expected to significantly increase and the spatial distribution of passenger flow is likely to become more complex, increasing the uncertainties and difficulties for the transportation sector.

The scale and intensity of traffic in cities and urban agglomerations will be markedly higher than in the previous couple of years, and cross-provincial and cross-border tourist flows may see a rebound, increasing the challenges and pressure for both passengers and transport operators. It can be safely said that this year will see the first Spring Festival travel rush in the true sense of the term since the pandemic broke out.

All this mean China's transportation industry faces a tough test during Spring Festival. No wonder the government has made the orderly flow of passengers and flights, trains, buses and cars its top priority, followed by pandemic prevention and control, disaster prevention and management. Achieving the above goals is an arduous task by any standard and requires careful organization, efficient operation and coordinated action.

Based on the analysis of the Spring Festival travel season in the past and the special characteristics of this year, "safe Spring Festival travel" is subject to two factors. One is weather, because facilitating the smooth flow of road, rail and air transport, and responding to emergencies depend on the whims of the weather. The second is the impact of rising infections due to the lifting of the strict anti-pandemic restrictions.

Although it is necessary to take measures to prevent infections on buses, trains and flights during Spring Festival for a different, specific reason, given the changed situation this year, there are some common unfavorable factors. For example, how to scientifically control large-scale infections at bus and train stations, airports and other places of passenger concentration? Or, how to quickly provide medical aid for a person who has contracted the novel coronavirus while he or she is traveling?

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These are some of the new challenges for the authorities during the Spring Festival travel rush this year, but they will provide valuable experience for the transportation industry to establish an effective epidemic prevention and control mechanism.

To cope with these problems, the authorities have to first improve the basics of safe travel and strengthen traffic rules in order to realize the goal of safe Spring Festival travel.

There is also a need to minimize and mitigate the impacts of natural disasters on transportation and prevent secondary disasters, for which the authorities have to strengthen the linkage between transportation, meteorology (especially weather forecast), emergency support and other departments, and improve the overall traffic emergency plans, by paying special attention to key areas such as mountainous roads, long bridges and tunnels.

Besides, if there is a sudden and massive spike in infections during the Spring Festival travel season, it could affect social stability. Therefore, the transportation department should cooperate with the National Health Commission to deploy more personnel and fully stock emergency medicines and medical equipment to prevent infections in long-distance buses, trains, ships, aircraft, and transport hubs, and make detailed emergency plans to deal with sudden infection outbreaks, including providing proper medical treatment for infected persons, especially the critically ill.

Also, it is necessary to establish multiple-departmental coordination to ensure the smooth supply of commodities and medicines, quickly respond to emergencies including natural disasters, and better share travel service information with the public.

Better sharing transport information means not only sharing with the public the layout, passenger capacity, availability of tickets and facilities in expressway service areas, but also informing people about road conditions, accidents, area-wise epidemic situation, cross-regional and cross-modal transportation situation, and accurate weather forecasts.

Further strengthening multi-modal coordination, and different ministries and commissions making joint efforts to optimize transportation services to guarantee unhindered supply of commodities are also necessary.

Using the modern transportation network, which is an efficient integration of various modes of transportation, the authorities should make efforts to create a special Spring Festival transportation network so as to provide smooth and convenient transportation services for the public during the Chinese Lunar New Year travel season.

There will be many uncertainties in terms of passenger and cargo flow this year. While the spatial distribution of cross-provincial passenger flow will likely be more complex, the transportation demand in cities is expected to be high.

Therefore, it is necessary to balance supply and demand in the transportation sector, especially during the Spring Festival travel rush when freight, too, is expected to peak. So transportation departments at all levels should make all the necessary arrangements to meet the passengers' demand for high-quality travel experience, and ensure the supply of materials to prevent price rises. They should also strengthen overall coordination with the public security, emergency, and health departments.

That expressways are toll-free during the Spring Festival travel rush means heavy traffic and congestion, and crowded inter-provincial checkpoints, which will increase the risk of epidemics.

So the transportation department should work with other departments to prevent secondary public health crises and derivative disasters, and the authorities should attach greater importance to improving overall sanitation to prevent infections and be prepared to deal with medical emergencies, quickly launch rescue and relief operations in case of disasters, and build a professional collaboration platform comprising the transportation department and the epidemic prevention and emergency support authorities.

The transportation department also needs to establish an emergency command and dispatch mechanism that can meet the demands of the post-epidemic era, and further strengthen the emergency support capability of all modes of transportation.

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

Berlin Fang

Let 2023 pull rabbit of hopes out of the hat

We have just witnessed the end of 2022, a year that brought hardships on many due to a lingering pandemic, a deteriorating economy and a disastrous conflict with far-reaching consequences. Every time we thought we had turned a corner, life threw another curveball at us. For a summary of 2022, I can only think of the powerful ending from William Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*: They endured.

The coming lunar year is the Year of the Rabbit. I do not know what rabbit this coming year will pull out of the hat, but let me just say "rabbit, rabbit", a phrase people say at the start of the month for good luck.

At the start of a new year, it is customary for us to make good wishes. I do not know if wishing someone good luck or good fortune can help, but I have noticed that sending prayers and thoughts can work miracles. Among other things, it creates good vibes of care and attention to lift the spirits of those on their most difficult days.

Before the turn of the year, most of my relatives in China, including my 93-year-old mom, got COVID. My family and friends prayed, sent support and lifted each other in spirit. My mom overcame the illness, and so did other relatives. I appreciate having a large family to support one another, which made it possible to struggle together with hope, instead of sinking one by one in desperation.

Speaking of having a large family, I remember that in Western culture, rabbits are associated with fertility and renewal of life. They multiply fast, which can also symbolize new life and abundance. We celebrate the Year of the Rabbit every 12 years, but each year, on Easter Day, one sees Easter bunnies, which signify new birth and new life.

The author is a columnist based in Texas.

Birth rates are falling in many countries around the world, including China. May the new year bring hope, so that people would want to have children to embody and embrace that hope.

In the past year, many families struggled financially; it is only appropriate that we strive for economic recovery and growth. Rabbits are associated with fortune and luck. We can certainly use some of that after a year of bad stock performances and rising consumer prices.

Interestingly, the Chinese resort to some rabbit wisdom when it comes to financial investment, as shown in the proverb: "A shrewd rabbit has three caves." This proverb can mean — in terms of another proverb — that you should not put your eggs in one basket, or: "The rabbit that has but one hole is quickly taken" (English proverb). As a side note, a rabbit cave is also called a "burrow". A group of burrows is called a "warren", as in "Warren Buffett" (no relation).

Rabbits are also symbols of quickness and agility, which result from having good health. At the start of the new year, we make new year resolutions that involve gyms and diets. There are many types of diets, including the Paleo diet, which avoids sugar, and the Mediterranean diet, which includes unprocessed cereals, fruits, vegetables, some fish, dairy products and meat products. The ketogenic diet includes high-fat, sufficient protein and low-carb consumption. While other elements vary, the common denominator of all healthy diets is "rabbit food", a common expression about leafy vegetables and other plant-based food.

Across cultures, the rabbit symbolizes innocence and simplicity; it is also associated with childhood. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* features the White Rabbit as a central character who guides Alice as she travels through Wonderland. Rabbit can also represent kindness and love: Margery William's *The Velveteen Rabbit* tells the story of a toy rabbit who becomes real through a child's love, a powerful story of transformation through kindness. May we remember these qualities. At the very least, do no harm, or be "harmless as a pet rabbit", especially to rabbit-like people who are known for their endurance. "Even a rabbit bites when cornered" (Chinese proverb).

To sum up, I hope I can borrow from some of the titles in John Updike's tetralogy (Rabbit, Run; Rabbit Redux; Rabbit Is Rich and Rabbit Is Remembered): In the Year of the Rabbit, run for good health, get richer if not rich and do not pass an opportunity for kindness worth remembering in your later years.

Happy New Year! I hope that by the end of the Year of the Rabbit, the keywords to come to our mind will no longer be: They endured. Instead: They enjoyed!

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GLOBAL VIEWS

WIL DE JONG

Measure for measure

Some important climate change and biodiversity plans were made in 2022

LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

The end of 2022 saw two major events to solve the problems of global climate change and biodiversity loss threatening our planet and the lives of people on it. In November signatory countries to the United Nation's Climate Change Convention met in Sharm El-Sheikh, Egypt, for the annual Climate Conference. A month later in December, signatories of the UN's Biodiversity Convention met in Montreal, Canada.

Both meetings had the same tone. Climate change and biodiversity loss and ecosystems degradation continue to worsen. The use of fossil fuels remains the primary cause of climate change, and their use has increased, not declined, since the last Climate Conference in Glasgow, Scotland, in 2021. Until 2030, the target year in many climate change proposals and policies, fossil fuel use needs to reduce by 45 percent to limit global temperature increase to less than 1.5 C, or by 30 percent to stay below a 2 C increase, according to the report prepared for the meeting. A switch to using clean energy or natural gas rather than oil and coal is necessary to avoid a climate disaster.

The situation with biodiversity and ecosystems, and the multiple benefits they provide, are equally worrisome. The expanding use of land for agriculture or other purposes harms biodiversity and ecosystems. And so does the over-harvesting of plants and animals on land, in rivers, lakes and oceans. Global deforestation was decreasing since 2000 but has picked up again in recent years. Other threats include climate change, pollution, and the introduction of foreign species. The increasing amounts of plastic in seas threaten 267 marine species. Alien plants and animals that arrive in regions where they do not naturally occur push out local species contributing to biodiversity loss.

The two meetings had important positive outcomes that are hopeful for both the climate and for those who are already experiencing negative consequences of climate change, and for the world's biodiversity and ecosystems. At the November Climate Conference, country representatives agreed to become more serious about measures already adopted at previous meetings and in the Climate Change Convention's Paris Agreement in 2015.

Participants pledged to provide $4-6 trillion annually until 2030 to reduce the use of fossil fuels. This is considered necessary to achieve global climate neutrality by 2050. Some $230 million was pledged to the Adaptation Fund that supports initiatives to prepare vulnerable countries and communities for negative impacts of climate change. The fund now has more than $850 million for such purposes.

Many considered the most important achievement at the November meeting was the new Loss and Damage Fund. Contributors to the fund are expected to be countries with the largest responsibility for causing climate change. Countries can turn to that fund to seek compensation for their climate change-related damage. Pakistan, for instance, experienced severe climate change-related floods last year, in which 1,739 people perished and property worth $15 billion was damaged. Once the Loss and Damage Fund is operational, Pakistan can claim compensation for those losses.

The implementation of the Loss and Damage Fund is to be planned at the upcoming climate conferences, and the devil will be in the details. Negotiations will define which countries will contribute to the fund, and how it will be allocated. Those advocating for the fund point at wealthy countries in the north for contributions, as they are considered responsible for historical greenhouse gases emissions. But what will the contributions of China and India be? Both still hold the official status of developing nations but rank third and fifth as historical greenhouse gas emitters. The United States and the European Union are first and second and Russia is fourth.

Many people in various public media platforms have suggested that China's contribution to the Loss and Damage Fund might be treated as a non-financial contribution. This will surely be a contentious issue in future negotiations.

The Montreal Biodiversity Conference in December produced a powerful new Global Biodiversity Framework. It replaces the Aichi Targets from 2011 which had defined international biodiversity and ecosystem conservation but expired in 2020. The framework renews biodiversity and ecosystem conservation and how harming factors can be reduced or avoided. It also defines how to finance these actions.

The impact of climate change was more evident in 2022 than ever before, with floods in Pakistan and China, heat waves in Europe, droughts in Africa and the accelerated melting of polar ice. The year's international economic, energy and security predicaments were not conducive to solving the world's environmental problems. That in such a year important decisions were taken in international forums to solve climate change, biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation may be a good sign.

The establishment of the Loss and Damage Fund is an important step to achieving environmental justice. But it also politicizes climate change negotiations more than they already were, and there are worries that the fund may diminish efforts to reduce climate change itself. Climate change negatively impacts biodiversity and ecosystems. Biodiversity loss and ecosystem degradation reduce nature's capacity to absorb significant amounts of the greenhouse gasses emitted annually. This is now recognized more than ever, and it is maybe the best hope that the targets of the new Global Biodiversity Framework can be achieved, as many of those of its predecessor, the Aichi Targets, were not.

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MAO SHIYUE

Global warming from human cooling

Mobile air conditioning is a non-negligible source of climate change, but by using natural refrigerants, direct emissions can be reduced by 99 percent

SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

China has been one of the world's leading vehicle markets for years now, with the number of vehicles on its roads reaching more than 408 million in August 2022. China is proactively curbing tailpipe emissions from vehicles and has progressively increased the stringency of emissions limits in recent decades. There is also a big push to transition to battery electric vehicles. However, the mobile air conditioning (MAC) systems in vehicles have not yet been subject to much public or regulatory attention and they should be, because they have the potential to exacerbate global warming throughout their life cycle.

Indeed, the International Energy Agency estimated that greenhouse gas emissions from MAC systems globally were around 420 million metric tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent in 2015. That was about 1 percent of global energy-related CO2 emissions that year. However, if not improved, MAC systems will become a larger share of the climate impacts of vehicles in the years ahead, as we decarbonize the fuels they run on and other components.

As of 2020, almost every passenger car and bus in China, and more than 90 percent of trucks, were equipped with MAC systems. In recent decades, hydrofluorocarbon (HFC) refrigerants have been widely applied in vehicles because they offer good performance in terms of heat exchange and come at an affordable cost. However, pressure is mounting to move away from HFC refrigerants because their global warming potentials are higher than 1,000, meaning that they are more than 1,000 times more powerful than CO2 in their climate warming impacts.

The impacts come in two forms. Refrigerants leak into the atmosphere during assembly, vehicle maintenance, operation, and scrapping and recycling. Leakage of refrigerants is also referred to as direct emissions, and the IEA estimated that these account for about 30 percent of total GHG emissions from MAC systems. The remaining 70 percent are indirect emissions that come from the increased energy consumed to run MAC systems. While several studies have found that MAC systems account for 3 percent to 7 percent of total fuel consumption in passenger cars, that can go up to 20 percent in humid and hot climates. For heavier vehicles, the impact is even more severe. A report from the International Council on Clean Transportation found that in buses, about 30 percent of total energy is consumed by their MAC systems.

As China does not test the energy consumption of MAC systems to inform customers about how they perform in different circumstances, drivers' lack of awareness of MAC energy consumption can also make MAC systems more energy-intensive in daily operations.

International efforts to phase down the use of harmful refrigerants go back to the 1980s and the Montreal Protocol. HFCs were once the preferred replacement for more hazardous and harmful compounds, which not only had an extremely high global warming potential, but also threatened the planet's ozone layer. However, the Kigali Amendment to the Montreal Protocol, which became effective in 2019, calls for gradual reduction in production and consumption of HFCs. The European Union is leading the way and has banned refrigerants with global warming potential greater than 150 for all vehicles since 2017.

The United States will ban the use of HFCs for transport beginning in 2025 and Canada banned refrigerants with a global warming potential higher than 150 in 2019. China ratified the Kigali Amendment in 2021 and the mandate will begin in 2024.

However, China is facing challenges. There exists an advanced refrigerant for MAC systems offering great cooling performance with global warming potential less than 1, which implies it's less damaging to the climate than CO2. However, in China the refrigerant is still under the patent umbrella of international chemical giants. Chinese suppliers have to pay high premiums and that hinders its large-scale application in new vehicles. Second, natural refrigerants such as CO2 come with extra costs to renovate the MAC systems currently in use. Third, China has not yet issued a specific road map requiring the automobile industry to phase down HFC refrigerants and automakers thus show little willingness to make the transition. International experience shows that the substitution of refrigerants is mostly driven by policy, and we can expect fewer replacements of the prevailing refrigerants in the absence of government ambition to push the whole industry forward with direct guidance.

It's important to overcome any challenges because the potential benefits of GHG reduction from MAC systems are substantial. A recent study by the ICCT found that improving MAC systems by adopting natural refrigerants would reduce direct emissions by 99 percent. Combining both direct and indirect emissions, the study found that cities with cool and warm climates can expect 60 percent and 45 percent less GHG emissions, respectively, from CO2-based MAC systems. Given that electric vehicles are increasingly popular, with millions of new vehicles sold in China each year, the potential benefits of decarbonizing MAC systems can also be leveraged. Electric vehicles are considered more energy efficient than conventional internal combustion engine vehicles because they only lose about 15 percent to 20 percent of the energy they get from the grid when powering the vehicle; in contrast, conventional gasoline vehicles generally see a 70 percent loss from fuel to wheels. By applying a series of technologies that improve energy efficiency, MAC systems in electric vehicles can save more energy and therefore show greater GHG reduction benefits.

On the way to China's goal of carbon neutrality, any effort to reduce the global warming effects of MAC systems is valuable. Improvements in MAC systems should be included in the country's decarbonization efforts when policymakers are considering how to turn the transport sector greener.

The author is an associate researcher at the International Council on Clean Transportation. 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.

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LIFE

Top: The written language of the Sui ethnic group, Shuishu.
Middle: Only Shuishu masters can read and decode old scripts copied by hand from generation to generation.
Above: Shuishu master Yang Shengzhao (second from left) discusses the written language with others.

A man of his word sees time for change

Sui language expert helps reform it, report **Xu Lin** and **Yang Jun** in Guiyang.

Yang Shengzhao, 67, has a mysterious and respectable position as master of Shuishu, the written language of the Sui ethnic group.

He's often invited by elderly villagers to choose an auspicious day for weddings, funerals, spring plowing or the building of a new house, and host ceremonies on such occasions.

He carefully carries an old handwritten Shuishu script with him, thumbs through it to look for hints and explains the details with a pithy formula in measured tones.

As a "living fossil" of hieroglyphic language, Shuishu is written in pictographs and symbols and deeply rooted in religious and folk traditions.

Experts have sorted only 766 Shuishu characters so far. It's a language of polyphony and polysemy to present various meanings in different contexts.

Only Shuishu masters such as Yang can read and decode old scripts copied by hand from generation to generation, combined with the oral accounts taught by their teachers. The precious books record encyclopedic knowledge about the ancient Sui ethnic group, ranging from astronomy, geography, religion to philosophy.

"Shuishu contains the Sui people's origin story, migration history and understanding of almost everything. I've been trying my best to preserve our precious culture," says Yang, from Sandu Sui autonomous county in Qiannan Bouyei and Miao autonomous prefecture, Guizhou province.

In November, the Shuishu character documents from Guizhou were added to the UNESCO Memory of the World Asia and the Pacific Regional Register. Yang did much work for the application process.

He's the fourth-generation Shuishu master in his family. Imperceptibly influenced by what he saw and heard in the family, he became interested in the ancient characters and made up his mind secretly as a child, yearning to be a master successor. His uncle told him that only a kindhearted person would be chosen as the Shuishu inheritor of the family.

At age 13, Yang started to study Shuishu characters with his uncle at night during slack farming seasons and learned by rote at first because there were too many things to remember.

"You need to do good deeds and be ready to suffer losses, with a spirit of dedication. I'm proud that I made it as the chosen one. The more I learned about the language, the more I became interested in it," Yang says.

According to Sui tradition, the learning of Shuishu should be passed on to only men within a master's family. The elderly in his family were careful to observe it. However, Yang decided to teach Shuishu to others outside his family, and in 2015, he started to teach women as well. There was opposition from some elderly Shuishu masters.

Top: Shuishu masters are frequently invited to choose an auspicious day for major life events like weddings and funerals, and often host ceremonies on such occasions.
Above: Shuishu is deeply rooted in religious and folk traditions.
PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Similar to some other national intangible cultural heritage items, there are fewer potential inheritors for Shuishu, because many youngsters are leaving their hometowns to work in big cities.

The strict rules of Shuishu made it more difficult to find a suitable successor. Yang says he feels deep regret that when Shuishu masters passed away due to old age, a lot of the oral accounts and phrases were also lost.

Yang says it had been hard to pass on Shuishu because there was a tradition of burning worn-out books, so only a few well-preserved Shuishu books have survived.

"If we all followed a stereotypical routine, Shuishu would die out gradually, leaving no successors at all. That's why I broke the rule to teach it to those who're willing to learn, so as to preserve the ethnic group culture," he says.

Now, Yang has over a dozen disciples of different ages.

Besides the handwritten scripts, there are also oral accounts of Shuishu passed from masters of one generation to another.

Yang says the most difficult part of learning the language is memorizing oral accounts of Shuishu and this is subject to one's memory. He has mastered about 80 percent of his uncle's knowledge passed on through such oral accounts.

Yang was a teacher at a local primary school and started to teach students Shuishu characters in class in the 1990s, as a way to impart knowledge of the Sui people's language. After retirement in 2015, he was asked by the prefecture's research institute on Shuishu culture to guide others in translating the ancient Shuishu scripts into Chinese.

Yang plans to work with others to record the oral accounts of Shuishu via audios and videos and transcribe them via markings with phonetic symbols.

Ge Mingyi, head of the prefecture archives of Qiannan, says the prefecture has been striving to preserve Shuishu and promote the culture at home and abroad. The prefecture has 466 registered Shuishu masters and about 19,000 original Shuishu books in its archives and museums. The collected books are being digitized and academic seminars on Shuishu are being organized. The prefecture has also made a law to protect Shuishu.

In 2018, the prefecture published Shuishu textbooks for use in primary and middle schools in areas inhabited by the Sui people.

Experts have discovered that 22 Shuishu symbols are similar to those found on pottery pieces unearthed from Erlitou in today's Henan province, considered the site of the capital of the Xia Dynasty (c. 21st century-16th century BC). They also found similarity between 36 Shuishu symbols and those on the cultural relics that were unearthed from an archaeological site dated back 7,300 years at Shuangdun village, Anhui province.

"Such close relations have drawn the attention of academic circles. It needs further research," Ge says, adding that the cultural treasure of Shuishu remains significant in modern society.

"It strengthens the cultural identity of the Sui people and regulates their behavior and moral codes, and the value system of the Sui people is similar to core socialist values.

"Shuishu masters play a key role in helping local authorities in social governance because they engage in many aspects of social life," he says.

Zhao Yandi contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at xulin@chinadaily.com.cn

What's on

Returned treasure

A 3,000-year-old bronze vessel was added to the collection of the National Museum of China and displayed to the public in 2018. The object is a fine example of the casting of ceremonial bronze in ancient China and related rituals and hierarchy of the time. Called *Hu Ying* ("tiger vessel") because of the shape of its lid, it used to be at the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) royal court until it was looted, among other items, when foreign forces raided and set fire to the Old Summer Palace in Beijing in 1860. Decades later it appeared at a London auction, and through negotiations, was returned to China. It is now on show in Harbin, Heilongjiang province, at *Hu Ying: New Age, Different Fate*, an exhibition that runs through to April 1. Also on display are dozens of bronze items of the time when this vessel was made, between the late Western Zhou Dynasty (c.11th century-771 BC) and the early Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC), giving a broader perspective of the artistic and technical features of such wares. Many photos, drawings and documents display the history of the Old Summer Palace and focus on the importance of the return of looted artifacts. Harbin Museum is the first stop of a national tour of the exhibits.

9 am-4 pm, closed on Mondays. 1296 Jingjiang West Road, Daoli district, Harbin, Heilongjiang province.

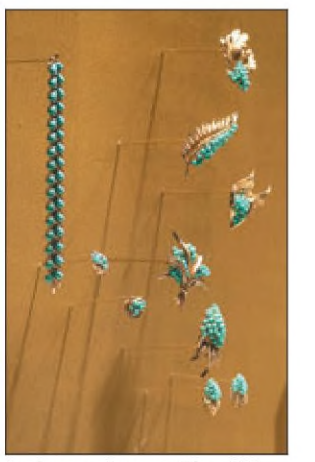
Lower Yangtze

The Yangtze River nurtured Chinese civilization. Running some 6,300 kilometers, the country's longest river has provided for an area of more than 1,800,000 sq km. The lower reaches of the Yangtze, covering Jiangxi, Anhui and Jiangsu provinces and Shanghai, have developed due to the mild and humid climate and an abundance of resources. Nanjing Museum, in Jiangsu, has teamed up with several cultural institutions in the region to mount an exhibition, titled *Long-standing and Prosperous*, which traces the birth and evolution of cultures along the Yangtze's lower reaches, and how developments in those areas contributed to the country's economy. Objects on show reflect the material and cultural lives of people in the region through the ages, ranging from a Neolithic nephrite disk that sparkles with the glories of Liangzhu culture, in Zhejiang province, to a wood case layered with red lacquer and painted with floral decorations and women figures on its exterior, which exhibits the artistry of the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279). The exhibition looks at the region's landscapes, history and culture, and tells the audience of the importance of the river's conservation. The exhibition runs through to March 31.

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

Vintage jewelry

Coco Chanel once said: "Slavish followers of inner beauty, who completely ignore dressing up, are also superficial." Jewelry pieces have been lighting up people's lives, as statements of their taste and thoughts. The advancement of manufacturing and the invention of new materials since the 19th century have greatly prompted the design and production of jewelry. Compound metals and artificial gems replaced the precious and natural ones, and thanks to that, new waves shaped jewelry design and more people could afford glittering ornaments. These changes can be seen at *Imprint*, an ongoing exhibition at the Tsinghua University Art Museum, which reviews the evolution of jewelry and aesthetics throughout the 20th century. On show are largely brooches and other types of jewelry, made between the 1930s and '80s, featuring Trifari, Coro and Boucher, among other brands, of which the vintage pieces are sought after by collectors today. The exhibits are from Zheng Yingyan, who has accumulated a collection of vintage jewelry over the years. The exhibition runs through to March 26.



9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. Tsinghua University, Haidian district, Beijing. 010-6278-5903.

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LIFE

A packed cinema enjoys *Home Coming* in Shanghai during the National Day holiday last year. The patriotic action film became the fifth top earner in China in 2022.
CHEN YUYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Box office shows signs of recovery

Domestic films prove a popular attraction thanks to enhanced quality and diversification, **Zhang Yunlong** reports.

People queue to enter a cinema in Lanzhou, Gansu province, to watch *Avatar: The Way of Water*, which is one of the two foreign titles that made it into the top 10 box-office rankings last year.
LI YALONG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

The third year since the start of the COVID-19 pandemic, 2022 saw China's box office striving to cope with the impact of sporadic outbreaks, and in the process managing to generate a total annual revenue of around 30 billion yuan ($4.31 billion).

Though much less than the previous year's 47 billion yuan, the amount still shows the advances made by domestic films in terms of improved quality and genre diversification in 2022 — all this despite the pandemic's influence, say industry observers.

Domestic titles lead the yearly box-office chart, according to box-office tracker Maoyan and other platforms.

Similar to the previous two years, the three top-grossing films screened in China in 2022 were all domestic movies. Moreover, Chinese films account for eight of the top 10 earners at China's 2022 box office.

Patriotic hit *The Battle at Lake Changjin II* is the year's top earner, raking in 4.07 billion yuan.

This achievement, in addition to a whopping 5.77 billion yuan revenue from the 2021 war blockbuster *The Battle at Lake Changjin*, saw the "Changjin" films become China's top-grossing film series ever, replacing the Detective Chinatown comedy movie franchise.

Set during the War to Resist US Aggression and Aid Korea (1950-53), the Changjin films have been hailed as a milestone of what experts are labeling "new mainstream films". They not only convey the prevalent values of Chinese society, like many previous patriotic movies, but also achieve impressive box-office results.

The year's fifth top earner, with nearly 1.6 billion yuan, the patriotic action film *Home Coming* has received acclaim from critics and moviegoers alike. Many say they are moved by the hero — an ordinary Chinese diplomat played by Zhang Yi — as he tries to evacuate Chinese nationals from a war-torn nation.

Rao Shuguang, president of the China Film Critics Association, commends the movie, which is adapted from real-life events, for its exploration of the film genre and providing new prospects for mainstream films.

Speaking highly of the domestic drama *Lighting up the Stars* as a highlight among the year's Chinese films, Rao calls it "a realistic film" with its heartwarming reflection of everyday life.

It stars Zhu Yilong as a former inmate-turned-funeral director who accidentally crosses paths with a girl who triggers an unexpected change in his attitude toward life. The film generated 1.71 billion yuan, ranking fourth in the yearly chart.

The highly-anticipated *Avatar: The Way of Water* ranks ninth in the chart, being one of the only two foreign titles to make it to the top 10, along with the adventure flick *Jurassic World: Dominion*.

Despite mixed reviews, since Dec 16, the sequel to the 2009 American sci-fi hit *Avatar* has provided a much-needed boost to China's box office during the year-end moviegoing period in the five weeks up to Dec 31. But the film's impetus is seemingly less than previously expected.

Garnering cumulative earnings of 853 million yuan by Dec 30, it currently tops China's year-end box office chart that tracks ticket revenue from Nov 25 through to the end of 2022, accounting for around 60 percent of the total, according to movie data platforms.

The American fantasy film is considered a spectacle of visual effects by many moviegoers, though its storyline has been labeled by some as simple. Still, its release helped draw many people back to cinemas, with the nationwide cinema opening ratio soaring to above 80 percent on the day of the film's debut.

Maoyan currently forecasts *Avatar: The Way of Water* to complete its run in China with a box office of about 1.25 billion yuan, much lower than the previously estimated 2 billion-plus yuan.

In China, *Avatar* was released in January 2010 and rereleased in March 2021, generating a total box-office revenue of 1.7 billion yuan.

With China adjusting its COVID-19 response policy, its box office is expected to see the announcement of more releases of major titles in the coming weeks and months.

Zhang Yimou's suspense film *Full River Red* is set for release on Jan 22, joining the competitive Spring Festival holiday movie period, along with *The Wandering Earth II*, a much-anticipated prequel to the 2019 sci-fi blockbuster.

At the same time, there have been calls from critics for more quality films to draw more moviegoers back to cinemas, citing its significance to the overall recovery of the film industry.

Rao urged Chinese movies to take a realistic and worldly approach, suggesting films that shed light on the people's real lives are a great way to win the hearts of the audiences.

XINHUA

Turkish town gives a warm welcome to Chinese guests

ISTANBUL — A resort town along the western Mediterranean coast of Turkiye is all geared up for the return of Chinese tourists as China eased its travel restrictions on Jan 8.

"That's excellent news, and we are thrilled," says Celal Yildiz, owner of a travel agency in Fethiye, a district of the Mugla province famed for its valleys, beaches and extreme sports.

The region became a top-rated and eye-catching destination for Chinese travelers after a number of Chinese influencers visited Fethiye in 2015 and shared their paragliding experiences with the Chinese audience.

Touted as one of the best spots for paragliding, the 2,000-meter-high Babadag mountain stands perpendicular to the sea and provides perfect weather conditions to fly all year round. Adventurers can take off from the mountain and glide to the sandy beach of Fethiye's small town of Oludeniz.

Lots of Chinese people, especially younger travelers, came here to experience the sport over the breathtaking view of the Oludeniz lagoon.

"I have friends from China, and we always chat on WeChat," says Yildiz, emphasizing the good friendships he and Chinese visitors have established.

"If everything stays on track, we will have a big increase (in the number of Chinese guests visiting Fethiye in 2023)."

Ozgen Uysal, head of the Western Mediterranean Regional Representatives Board at the Turkish Travel Agencies Association, says that, before the pandemic started, in 2019, the paragliding companies in Fethiye carried out approximately 166,000 flights, among which, 40 percent were undertaken by Chinese guests.

"That is a very high figure for us," Uysal says.

Recently, the area has started to receive an increasing number of Chinese travelers. Among the approximate 100 flights per day, 15-20 of them were carrying Chinese guests, according to Uysal, who is optimistic for this year.

Mustafa Argin, the owner of three boutique hotels in Fethiye, says that the entire region, incredibly keen to welcome Chinese tourists, is eagerly preparing for their arrival.

"We are very familiar with the preferences of our Chinese guests," Argin says, explaining that they serve breakfasts with food items suitable for Chinese tastes and about 70 percent of his staff have an intermediate understanding of the Chinese language.

"Fethiye loves China, while the Chinese also love Fethiye, and the region is harmonious with them," Argin says.

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One of the Lycian rock tombs, which date back to the 4th century BC, overlooks the town of Fethiye in Turkiye. The tombs are the symbol of the town. RON WATTS / GETTY IMAGES

Egyptian actor is audience favorite

TIANJIN — Amro Zaghloul, a 34-year-old Egyptian actor, has gained 600,000 followers on his social media account in China after a film, in which he portrays a villain, became one of the top-grossing films screened in the country in 2022.

The Chinese patriotic action film *Home Coming* was rated as the fifth top earner in China's 2022 box office, grossing nearly 1.6 billion yuan ($236 million).

In the film, based on a story of the evacuation of Chinese nationals from a war-torn nation, Zaghloul played the character Saleh, a villain in the local armed forces.

"Some movie viewers even got 'angry' when discussing the character and the plot in the comments on my social media account, which I took as the audience's acknowledgment of my acting," Zaghloul says.

Living in China for more than 10 years, Zaghloul regards the country as his second home. He has also gotten used to sharing his views and experiences in acting and daily life with his followers.

> "Some movie viewers even got 'angry' when discussing the character and the plot ... which I took as the audience's acknowledgment of my acting."
>
> **Amro Zaghloul,** Egyptian actor

"In 2011, I came to China for travel and planned to stay for one month, but it lasted for over 10 years," he recalls.

That year, Zaghloul and his friends met an enthusiastic Chinese teacher who recommended they study the Chinese language. Zaghloul then succeeded in applying for graduate study in Chinese language and literature at Zhejiang Normal University in East China's Zhejiang province.

The school is near the world's largest outdoor studio, Hengdian World Studios, known as "China's Hollywood".

Zaghloul says he has dreamed of becoming an actor since childhood, so he decided to try some auditions at the studio while pursuing his master's degree.

He has been registered among more than 100,000 extras in Hengdian World Studios, where dozens, or even hundreds, of film projects happen simultaneously.

Before the blockbuster film, Zaghloul had accumulated experience and improved his acting skills through many auditions for Chinese films and TV dramas for five years.

"As a foreign actor here, I need to practice acting skills and learn Chinese well. Many production teams recruit quickly, and you have to grab the opportunities fast or miss them," he says.

On his social media account, Zaghloul shared *Home Coming* director Rao Xiaozhi's affirmation of his acting and the latter's willingness for future collaboration. He says that Chinese social media helped him become popular. He wishes to use his influence to do something meaningful. In 2020, he initiated a program to match Chinese volunteers with foreigners via his social media account to "help 1,000 foreigners learn Chinese".

"Having been in China for so long, I have felt the warmth of the Chinese people and wishes to spread the culture by teaching the language to foreign newcomers," he says.

Once they can master the Chinese language, they can seize many opportunities and start a new life in China, he says.

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SPORTS

SOCCER

Man United flying high after City win

Erik ten Hag's men close the gap with crosstown rival in controversial derby comeback

MANCHESTER, England — It was a very good day for Manchester United in the English Premier League, whose revival under Erik ten Hag is really taking shape.

As if victory against Manchester City in the 189th Manchester derby wasn't enough for fans rejoicing at Old Trafford on Saturday, there was bonus news a few hours later when Liverpool was stunned by three unanswered Brighton goals.

Beating City 2-1 strengthened the rising belief that Ten Hag is turning the fortunes around for the 20-time English champion.

It might be too soon for the Dutchman to mount a genuine league title challenge this season, but the improvement at United to record nine straight wins across all competitions is evident.

United moves up to third in the table — a point behind City and six off leader Arsenal, which plays Tottenham on Sunday.

"We improved, that's obvious," Ten Hag said. "But there is still a long way to go . . . there are a lot of aspects in our game we have to improve, but we're progressing."

City took the lead in the second half through substitute Jack Grealish, but Bruno Fernandes and Marcus Rashford secured a come-from-behind win for the home team.

United is now 10 points clear of its cross-Pennines rival Liverpool, which suffered a sixth league loss at Brighton, its first there since 1961.

Rashford scored his 16th goal of the season and his eighth in his last seven games, but Ten Hag preferred to praise his physical durability over his finishing after the win against City.

"He knows that in football you have to suffer and sacrifice and have painful moments, especially a player like he is," Ten Hag said. "He is unstoppable, and opponents will go tough against him, but he keeps going and he got rewarded and the team got a reward."

Manchester City's Kyle Walker wins a header against Manchester United's Alejandro Garnacho during an English Premier League match at Old Trafford in Manchester, England, on Saturday. United won 2-1. AP

VAR 'a joke'

With just 12 minutes left at Old Trafford, United was trailing to Jack Grealish's 60th minute header in the season's second Manchester derby.

But City's title defense suffered a damaging blow as Portugal midfielder Fernandes equalized in hugely debatable fashion before Rashford bagged United's 82nd minute winner.

Fernandes' goal was the turning point and City boss Pep Guardiola and his players were seething after the flag went up for offside when Rashford ran on to Casemiro's pass.

Rashford did not touch the ball and was deemed by VAR not to have interfered with play, but City were adamant the England forward clearly distracted the defenders and goalkeeper Ederson.

> "He knows that in football you have to suffer and sacrifice and have painful moments, especially a player like he is. He is unstoppable, and opponents will go tough against him, but he keeps going and he got rewarded and the team got a reward."
>
> **Erik ten Hag,** on Rashford scoring his 16th goal of the season

"It is a joke that the first goal can be allowed," City defender Manuel Akanji told BBC Sport.

"He runs for 30 meters, he's chasing the ball. I played him (Rashford) offside. I understand he doesn't touch the ball, but for me it is clearly offside."

Guardiola insisted there was no doubt Rashford's run impacted the reactions of Akanji and Ederson.

"The decision is the referee's and the VAR, but our defenders make a line for Rashford," he said.

"If we know it's Fernandes we don't make the line, we follow the action."

Liverpool 'really bad'

Jurgen Klopp labeled Liverpool's dismal 3-0 defeat at Brighton on Saturday as the worst he has seen during his Anfield reign.

Klopp's troubled side was blown away in the second half by Solly March's double and a late strike from Danny Welbeck.

Liverpool's wretched performance came hot on the heels of a 3-1 loss at Brentford and an FA Cup draw against Wolves, in which they were saved from defeat by a controversial VAR decision.

The Reds are languishing in eighth place in the Premier League with their hopes of a top-four finish fading by the week.

Klopp could not believe what he was seeing as Brighton ran his team ragged in a fashion he has never experienced since taking charge in 2015.

"Bad. Really bad. I can't remember a worse game. It was a very organized team against a not very organized team," Klopp said. "Massively frustrating. We gave the ball away, the spaces were too big and we couldn't push up. That is obviously not good, especially against a super well-drilled side like Brighton. They got more confident and we did the opposite."

Klopp said he had tried to switch Liverpool's tactics in a bid to halt their poor run, but conceded the players did not handle the changes well.

"I had an idea to change the formation which was to try to help the team. That was the idea. But we never did it properly," he said.

"We need to be creative with the options we have. What I saw today from my team was that they were not really convinced by it. That's it."

Two-goal Solly March credited Brighton manager Roberto de Zerbi for his performance in the brilliant result against Liverpool.

"I love playing for Roberto de Zerbi. He's great. He puts his arm around you and tells you you're a good player, and maybe that's what I needed," March said.

At the other end of the Merseyside, on a day when Everton's board of directors was instructed not to attend its home match with Southampton because of a "real and credible threat to their safety and security," the team's hopes of league survival took another blow after a 2-1 loss.

"We have to take responsibility, myself first. We have to do better," Everton manager Frank Lampard said.

AGENCIES

AMERICAN FOOTBALL

San Francisco 49ers quarterback Brock Purdy celebrates after an NFL wild-card playoff game against the Seattle Seahawks in Santa Clara, California on Saturday. The 49ers won 41-23. AP

Purdy's 4 TDs lead 49ers past Seahawks in playoffs

SANTA CLARA, California — Brock Purdy got flushed out of the pocket, spun back in the other direction and found a wide-open Elijah Mitchell for the score that put San Francisco in control of an NFL wild-card game on Saturday.

Purdy answered another test and delivered another sterling performance in a remarkable rookie season that began as the final pick in the NFL draft.

Purdy threw three touchdown passes and ran for a fourth score in his playoff debut, leading the 49ers to a 41-23 victory over the Seattle Seahawks.

"Once the game started, it was just 11 on 11, I have to do my job, get it to the guys in space and go from there," Purdy said. "We didn't make it more than what it was. ... It wasn't, 'Oh my gosh it's the playoffs and we've got to get all tense.' We just had to play our game."

Purdy picked up where he left off in the regular season for the 49ers (14-4) and showed few signs of playoff jitters by winning his sixth straight start since replacing an injured Jimmy Garoppolo early in a Week 13 win over Miami.

The Niners advanced to the divisional round where they will host either Minnesota, Tampa Bay or Dallas next weekend.

Purdy connected on a 3-yard pass to Christian McCaffrey in the first quarter, converted a 1-yard sneak in the third quarter and a 7-yard TD pass to Mitchell early in the fourth to make it 31-17.

The Niners broke it open when Deebo Samuel took a short pass from Purdy and raced in for a 74-yard score with help from a downfield block by Brandon Aiyuk.

Purdy threw for 332 yards — the second most ever for a rookie in the playoffs against Russell Wilson's 385 in a loss to Atlanta 10 years ago — and he became the first rookie QB ever to account for four TDs in a playoff game.

Purdy has lived up to the confidence his coaches and teammates have shown in him ever since he took over.

"I felt that way from the beginning once he got in that game against Miami," coach Kyle Shanahan said. "We didn't have the luxury to sit there and worry about stuff the way the game was going. We just had to win the game and he's done a hell of a job. He's done it every time since. I have a lot of confidence in him."

The Seahawks (9-9) kept it close for most of three quarters before a strip sack by Charles Omenihu late in the third quarter spoiled a red zone drive.

Purdy then hit Jauan Jennings on a 33-yard pass to set up the TD pass to Mitchell that broke the game open. With his seventh straight multiple TD pass game, Purdy tied the NFL record for rookies set by Justin Herbert.

"He has showed us over and over again who he is and the type of player he is," linebacker Fred Warner said. "So I'm not surprised."

San Francisco piled on from there.

The loss brought a disappointing end to a surprising season for the Seahawks, who got into the playoffs on the final weekend in their first season after trading away Wilson.

Geno Smith stepped in admirably, throwing 30 TD passes in the regular season and keeping it close for a while in the playoff game, thanks to a 50-yard TD pass to DK Metcalf in the first half.

Smith finished 25 for 35 for 253 yards, two TDs and one interception.

"I'm not at all satisfied," Smith said. "I don't feel good about what happened today. I feel like we could have kept going. So for me, man, I've just got to be better and I take this one personally."

The Niners raced out to a 10-0 lead after two possessions getting a field goal on the opening drive and then a 3-yard pass from Purdy to McCaffrey, following McCaffrey's 68-yard run on the second possession.

But, Seattle battled back with a 14-play drive capped by Kenneth Walker's 7-yard run and the deep pass to Metcalf.

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

ICE HOCKEY

Flyers spoil Ovechkin's 30th goal milestone

WASHINGTON — Scott Laughton had a goal and an assist as the Philadelphia Flyers beat the Washington Capitals 3-1 on Saturday night, as Capitals star Alex Ovechkin tied Mike Gardner's NHL record for 30-goal seasons.

He also tied the game at 1-1 with 2:04 left in the first period. However, Philadelphia tilted the ice back in its favor with two goals in 49 seconds during the second period. James van Riemsdyk and Wade Allison both capitalized on miscues from Darcy Kuemper and poor coverage by Washington, which has been outscored 11-7 over the last four games.

Ovechkin's goal also marked his 400th home goal, and he has scored at least 30 goals in all but one season in his career.

He is the second player in NHL history, after Wayne Gretzky, to score 400 goals at home and 400 goals on the road.

The Flyers have won three straight games, including both games of their home-and-home series with the Capitals, and eight of their last 11 overall.

"I think we feel good about ourselves. I think guys have loosened up offensively, it certainly has helped that we're scoring some goals during this period, not every mistake is a fatal one," Flyers coach John Tortorella said. "We're just cohesive right now. ... We're gonna have some bumps, and it's remembering how we're playing now when we're in those situations."

Carter Hart finished with 39 saves for his third win in four starts and made a couple of tenbell saves to shut down Washington's three power play opportunities.

Alex Ovechkin

The Capitals have gone four straight games without a power-play goal and are 0-for-9 over that span.

"Hartsy played a hell of a game for us," Laughton said.

"He found pucks through traffic, swallowed them up when we needed him to, when we were stuck out in the zone for long periods of time. I thought he was the biggest part of why we were successful tonight."

Kuemper stopped 22 for the Capitals, who continued to experiment with different line combinations as Nicklas Backstrom and Tom Wilson continue to get comfortable.

"The last two games, we haven't been ourselves," Backstrom said. "So I mean, that's something we have to change. You talk about today, we had the puck a lot, we had good possession, but it's about scoring goals. We've got to create more, we've got to score more goals. But, you've got to give them credit ... at the same time, if we want to win hockey games, we have to be better."

AGENCIES VIA XINHUA

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