

**Deeper integration**

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# CHINA DAILY

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## Deadly school shooting in Tennessee



Students from the Covenant School hold hands after getting off a bus to meet their parents at a reunification site following a mass shooting at the school in Nashville, Tennessee, on Monday. A female shooter killed three children and three adults at the Christian school and was later shot and killed by police. MARK ZALESKI / USA TODAY NETWORK VIA REUTERS See story, page 7

## Five women to operate heavy-duty fighter jets

By ZHAO LEI  
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The People's Liberation Army Air Force now has its first female pilots who can operate heavy-duty fighter jets, according to the Air Force.

The Air Force said the five female flight students, who are currently in the middle of training for heavy-duty combat aircraft, recently carried out their first solo flights in the J-11 fighter jet.

During the flights, the female aviators conducted some difficult maneuvers and received high scores from their instructors.

The students, with an average age of 23, will next start training in aerial-battle maneuvers and tactics, as well as land-attack skills, according to academy commanders.

"We wanted to show people that we, as Chinese women, can also fly heavy-duty fighter jets. Now we have become able to operate the J-11, and in the near future we will also be able to fly the J-20 stealth combat jet," Yan Zhongyue, one of the pilots, told China Central Television in a recent interview.

Before them, all female fighter pilots in China flew light-duty combat planes such as the J-7 and J-10.

Wang Yanan, editor-in-chief of Aerospace Knowledge magazine, said on Monday that operating a heavy-duty, air-superiority fighter jet is basically not different to flying a light-duty jet with regard to requirements such as physical strength.

"Advanced combat planes have a fly-by-wire flight control system, which means it is now much easier to steer the heavy machine and physical strength is no longer an obstacle for women to fly fighter jets," he explained.

"However, sitting in a heavy-duty fighter jet in combat means you are likely to engage your enemy in a more complicated situation or face more challenges. You will be ordered to fly a much longer distance to hit targets in an airspace you may not be familiar with. You will use a wider range of equipment and munitions such as large anti-ship cruise missiles. All of this requires more training, skills and experience."

“We wanted to show people that we, as Chinese women, can also fly heavy-duty fighter jets. Now we have become able to operate the J-11, and in the near future we will also be able to fly the J-20 stealth combat jet.”

Yan Zhongyue, fighter jet pilot

Wang added that female pilots will definitely fly the J-20 in the future. "This is only a matter of time."

China enrolled its first female pilots in 1951. Since then, the Air Force has recruited and trained nearly 700 women at its flight schools. About 360 out of the female trainees passed all exams and flight tests and joined the Air Force.

However, flying a combat plane was never an option for female aviators in China until 2005, because before that year, all female pilots in the Air Force were trained only to fly transport aircraft.

When the Air Force started to recruit women to fly fighter jets in 2005, more than 200,000 young women from across China applied. Thirty-five were selected and sent to the PLA Air Force No.3 Flight Academy. Sixteen finally graduated after four years of stringent training, becoming the country's first female fighter pilots in 2009.

In addition to the Air Force, the PLA Navy announced in February that it would recruit its first female pilots this year. The first female naval aviators will be from university graduates of the class of 2023 and will be deployed on aircraft carriers, according to the Navy.

## Li promises higher-quality growth

Premier: Economy to become more efficient, strive for new drivers

By XU WEI  
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Premier Li Qiang reaffirmed on Monday China's commitment to maintaining a proper rate of economic growth while striving for better quality, and more efficient and robust drivers of economic growth through reforms, to achieve higher-quality development.

Speaking at a meeting with foreign representatives at the China Development Forum 2023 in Beijing, Li pledged unwavering efforts to expand the country's opening-up, despite changes in the international landscape. The Chinese economy is deeply integrated into the global division of labor, he added.

Beijing will align itself with high-standard international economic and trade rules, steadily expand institutional opening-up and foster a world-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and internationalized, the premier said.

China has set a target for economic growth of 5 percent this year, while the International Monetary Fund upgraded its growth projection for China in 2023 to 5.2 percent, up from its October forecast of 4.4 percent.

Major economic indicators in the first two months of this year show that China's economy is stabilizing and picking up pace with a marked improvement in retail sales, fixed-asset investment and industrial output.

Noting that the world economy is undergoing a period of complexity and volatility, the premier stressed that it is imperative to firm up confidence and stabilize expectations to respond to the risks and challenges.

He said it is necessary to take a broader and long-term perspective. Li compared the economy to taking a journey on a rainy day, when a traveler can only see muddy roads if his or her eyes focus solely on their footsteps. If he or she looks up to the horizon, a rainbow will come into view, he said.

Li called on all sides to build consensus, bolster cooperation and jointly promote global economic recovery.

The Chinese economy, after steady growth over the past decade, has served as both a ballast and propeller of the global economy, and injected more certainty to world peace and development, the premier said.

China is striving for higher-quality development and to enable the people to live better lives, which will also provide fresh engines for global economic growth and a broader space for the development of businesses from various nations, he said.

The CDF2023, held at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse, opened on Saturday and concluded on Monday. It was the first time delegates attended the forum in person since the start of COVID-19. The forum attracted over 100 foreign representatives, including executives from Fortune Global 500 enterprises, leaders of interna-

tional organizations and scholars.

Among the foreign representatives who spoke at the meeting with the premier were Oliver Baete, chairman and CEO of Allianz SE and co-chair of the CDF 2023, and Tim Cook, CEO of tech giant Apple Inc.

Baete said in a letter to the forum that China's modernization is centered on sustainability, including the transformation to net-zero emissions to foster a greener, more stable ecological environment and manage the devastating impact of climate change.

"We applaud China's continued endeavor to improve the business environment and embrace international investments. Envisioning the future, we welcome China's pragmatic approach to further collaborate with the global society, as well as to play a critical role in cultivating a global community of resilience, mutual trust and sustainability."

"As a global organization, it has always been our firm belief that the Chinese market has great potential to achieve even more prosperity," he said.

## TikTok should not give in to US coercion

WORLD WATCH  
By Tom Fowdy

demonstrate their lack of reason, honesty and integrity in representing the best interests of America.

As Eva Galperin, cybersecurity director of the nonprofit digital rights group Electronic Frontier Foundation, tweeted, "If you think the US needs a TikTok ban and not a comprehensive privacy law regulating data brokers, you don't care about privacy, you just hate that a Chinese company has built a dominant social media platform."

When did the US ever care about data privacy or the protection of users? The US, after all, has laws mandating that all major internet companies comply with surveillance on behalf of the National Security Agency, not just at home but abroad, too. Entire multinational programs, such as ECHELON, PRISM and XKeyscore, have not just targeted the internet, but all communications comprehensively in coordination with, besides the US, the other Five Eyes countries — Australia, Canada, New Zealand and the United Kingdom.

See *TikTok*, page 3

## OUTDOOR BUSINESSES PROSPER IN BEIJING

Customers attracted to a range of well-regulated new ventures

By XIN WEN  
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For the past five months, Lyu Fang has served customers coffee from a cart stationed in a sunken plaza at the trendy Solana Shopping Mall in Beijing's Chaoyang district.

The small cart has a deep-blue metallic exterior and a white table made from recycled plastic, where customers order their drinks, which are quick to arrive in attractive paper cups with black lids.

"Customers expect their coffee to be served promptly in comfortable surroundings," said Lyu, 32, who works from 10 am to 10 pm.

He once thought he should

in-depth

have worked for a coffee shop chain, but Kuuzy Home attracted him with its special business concept.

"The cart is enclosed, so I don't feel cold even in the depths of winter. Moreover, I love working in the coffee business," Lyu said.

The Kuuzy Home coffee cart, which occupies 3.5 square meters and started operating at the mall in October, stands out from other businesses at the location with its stylish fittings.

See *Ventures*, page 2



Pilot Ke Ao is ready for a solo flight in a fighter jet in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Feb 24. She is one of the first Chinese female pilots who has qualified to operate heavy-duty fighter jets of the People's Liberation Army Air Force. CUI BAOJIANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

INSIDE  
Closer rice cooperation boosts food security  
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## PAGE TWO

# Ventures: Economic development pursued

Outdoor business ventures around Beijing are offering customers more leisure opportunities.

PHOTOS BY WANG JING AND WU XIAOHUI  
ART BY LU PING / CHINA DAILY



## From page 1

The cart is among the outdoor business ventures promoted recently by the Beijing municipal government as part of a new pilot project to meet increased demand for high-quality leisure products in the Chinese capital.

Unlike the street hawkers who randomly operate along the city's roadsides, these outdoor business ventures are regulated. They are situated in certain locations and have specified business hours.

On Jan 30, the Beijing Municipal Commission of Development and Reform announced policies to optimize the city's business environment to enable consumption to recover and expand after the COVID-19 epidemic. These policies also specify management rules and registration methods for outdoor ventures.

Media reports questioned whether these businesses are part of plans to upgrade the street vendor economy promoted by some provincial governments in 2020, when street stalls were allowed to operate at night to spur economic growth during the epidemic.

Early last month, Beijing municipal authorities clarified that outdoor business ventures are not the same as street stalls, as they don't occupy green areas, sidewalks for the blind, or parking lots. Neither do they hinder public access.

In addition to these ventures meeting increased demand for high-quality consumption and leisure products, the local authorities and business owners have taken the initiative to pursue economic development in response to the epidemic's impact on the economy.

Li Li, CEO of Kuuzy Home, said: "We launched our coffee cart to respond to customers' needs. Due to the epidemic, I'd been looking at ways to operate the coffee business. Such carts have been popular in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, and Chengdu, Sichuan province, but I didn't expect the Beijing municipal government to take a closer look at this new type of business."

### Popular attraction

Kuuzy Home is not the only outdoor business at the Solana Shopping Mall. There are five more operating in the sunken plaza.

One of the most popular ventures is Ice Planet, a 200-square-meter ice rink that is particularly popular with children. The entrance fee is 129 yuan (\$18.50).

Other areas of the city also have outdoor businesses, with 12 of them, including Xueji Food, located in Wangjing Walk, east of the Wangjing commercial area in Chaoyang.

Rapidly growing demand from consumers has spurred the introduction of these new outdoor businesses.

According to the Beijing Municipal Commission of Development and Reform, spending on consumption in the capital contributes more than 60 percent of its economic growth, making consumption the main driving force of the local economy.

Per capita consumption expenditure in the capital rose to 42,683 yuan last year, up 14 percent from 2017, while sales of retail consumer products in the city last year reached 1.38 trillion yuan, according to the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Statistics.

However, despite their success, the definition of an outdoor business venture is still not that clear.

A report published in 2020 by Xinmin Weekly, which is based in Shanghai, said outdoor businesses are public places by nature. They are not included in the leases that apply to commercial tenants at a shopping mall, but they are run by the property management company at the mall.

The report said property companies should inspect these ventures annually, and if they don't meet certain specifications, they will no longer be allowed to operate.

Tao Xidong, a professor at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Sociology, said, "To enable the effective and efficient use of public space, the government needs to implement management rules for outdoor businesses, such as specifying their operating hours, preventing noise pollution, and ensuring that these ventures are clean, tidy, orderly and safe."

"But I suggest the government should administrate these businesses without undue intervention to give full play to their advantages. It should also adopt legitimate means to create more high-quality, refined and comfortable outdoor shopping areas. As a result, these businesses will play a bigger role in commercial districts."

Tao added that high-quality outdoor businesses can help establish more distinctive and attractive consumption areas and promote development of Beijing's urban culture.

"Standardized development of outdoor businesses can raise awareness among companies

and residents of the need to promote high-quality development of the city's commerce," Tao said.

"For the government, these businesses can create more job opportunities and increase tax revenue to promote urban economic development. Under certain conditions, those operating these businesses can enlarge their commercial space, increase profits and take on social responsibility for the city."

Wang Heshun, 70, a regular visitor to Wangjing Walk, who was photographing an outdoor coffee booth shaped like a post office, said: "I like the artistic atmosphere of this place, which prompted me to take the photo. It doesn't feel like a street stall at all to me, and I can tell that a great deal of thought has gone into the booth's appearance."

Huang Sha, 40, who had just bought snacks from Xueji Food with her daughter before they went to watch a movie at a theater near Wangjing Walk, said: "I bought some food at this booth, which is very convenient, but I didn't notice it was a new type of business. I just thought it was part of the mall behind it, as it was so easy for me to get everything I wanted."

### Finding a balance

While consumers are optimistic about the emergence of more outdoor businesses, experts said a balance needs to be struck if these ventures are to operate in the long run, instead of merely being a temporary proposition.

Yang Hongshan, professor and deputy dean of Renmin University of China's School of Public Administration and Policy, said, "The Beijing municipal govern-

ment's timely adjustments to the regulations have made our policies more resilient, and also show that those managing the city are striving for a better balance in urban governance."

As an interactive and vibrant place, Beijing is characterized by the flow of people, Yang said. Outdoor businesses in particular, as direct contact points with residents, provide an important way to promote products through window displays or from shopping carts, in addition to traditional department store sales, he added.

"People's requirements for leisure and entertainment should be taken into account, while it is also important to maintain law and order in the city," Yang said.

"If these outdoor businesses are to operate in the long run, a balance has to be struck on both sides, rather than adopting a one-size-fits-all approach."

"There are various forms of consumption. If food and other products for daily use are provided by the outdoor business ventures, this will help restore the city's hustle and bustle, while also ensuring social order."

"As long as the owners of outdoor businesses follow the rules set by the authorities and confine their operations to designated areas and opening hours, these ventures will be an indispensable part of life in the city."

### Pioneering efforts

Wangjing Walk, a 700-meter-long pedestrian route running amid high-rises, has witnessed the emergence of these burgeoning outdoor businesses.

A diverse range of shops decked out with plants, fresh flowers and sunshades lines both sides of the route, with custom-

ers sitting on metallic chairs around wooden tables to enjoy food and drink.

Tian Xudong, 36, who owns Theodore Gelato, an ice cream shop at the east end of Wangjing Walk, said: "I have lived in the local community for more than 20 years and I like the atmosphere here. It's a great experience sitting out in the street on sunny days to get some fresh air and watch people passing by."

"I obtained information about the renovations to Wangjing Walk purely by chance in late 2019, so I decided to open my Italian ice cream store on the route."

Tian's shop, one of the first outdoor businesses to open on Wangjing Walk, has been operating since August 2020.

"The chairs and tables are provided free by the sub-district office and property developers. We merchants are responsible for cleaning and sanitizing all the tables and chairs in front of our shops," Tian said.

"Customers are attracted by these facilities, but if they are not provided, they may not stop in the area to enjoy the open air and eat ice cream."

During the pandemic, Tian's business remained largely unaffected.

"Our rent is not that high, we are situated in a European-style block, and the government has given us some preferential treatment over the years. I would love to open more shops in other well-appointed business areas and continue to improve the quality of our ice cream," he said.

Li, the Kuuzy Home CEO, said, "I hope our carts operate in more business districts in Beijing to provide our customers with fresh coffee."

## TOP NEWS

## Initiative can help civilizations thrive

China's proposal plays part in advancing modernization process

By XING YI in London  
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The Global Civilization Initiative, which calls for respecting diversity and seeks dialogue between cultures, can bring peace and development to the world, said China observers in the United Kingdom.

President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, proposed the initiative as he spoke via video link at the CPC in Dialogue with World Political Parties High-Level Meeting on March 15. Representatives of more than 500 political parties and organizations from over 150 countries attended the meeting.

"A single flower does not make spring, while one hundred flowers in full blossom bring spring to the garden," said Xi, using metaphors to

summarize the initiative, which underscores that inclusiveness, coexistence, exchanges and mutual learning among different civilizations play an irreplaceable role in advancing humanity's modernization process.

Carlos Martinez, a British commentator and co-editor of Friends of Socialist China website, said the initiative is China's answer to the reckless notion of "clash of civilizations," and is the opposite of Cold War mentality.

"The initiative asserts that, in place of decoupling and division, the peoples of the world can survive and thrive in unity ... and together can solve the major problems of climate change, pandemic, war, nuclear proliferation and poverty," he said.

Martinez pointed out that China's commitment to peace and common prosperity speaks volumes for the authenticity of the initiative.

"While the West insists on adding

fuel to the Ukrainian fire, China has released a 12-point position paper outlining a viable path toward peace," he said. "While the West creates bodies such as AUKUS with a view to creating a global structure of military hegemony, China creates the Belt and Road Initiative with a view to creating a global network of infrastructure for development and prosperity."

Rana Mitter, a professor of history and politics of modern China at the University of Oxford, said the initiative made him reflect that "civilization" can be thought of as a collective noun because every civilization draws a range of influences from other civilizations throughout its own history.

China's long civilization draws from the soil of Shandong and the Indian influences of Buddhism; the Gandhara art of Asia shows

“Today, global civilizations flourish when they draw from each other and recognize that boundaries are fluid and identities are hybrid.”

Rana Mitter, a professor of history and politics of modern China at the University of Oxford

influences of the Greek culture brought by Alexander the Great; and Western medicine has influences of Islamic science, Mitter said.

"Today, global civilizations flourish when they draw from each other and

recognize that boundaries are fluid and identities are hybrid," he added.

Stephen Perry, chairman of the 48 Group Club, a business community that promotes China-UK relations through trade, said the initiative has helped the world find a common theme that will enable nations to work together.

"It comes from respecting each other's rights to different histories and cultures and, from them, different systems and values," said Perry. "None of that needs to cause conflict or competition; just an acceptance of the different routes all civilizations take, which provides the basis for cooperating and facing the real challenges of our planet."

Echoing the initiative's call for inter-civilization dialogue and cooperation, H-J Colston, director of Engage with China, an educational project that aims to build a China-literate generation in the UK, emphasized the need to break

"walls" between countries through cultural exchanges.

"People all over the world are facing multiple challenges — from natural disasters to wars, the cost-of-living crisis and food shortages. ... Compounding this is a general air of disquiet and a lack of trust between nations," she said. "This has happened because, rather than building bridges to aid understanding, defuse tension and create pathways to dialogue, metaphorical walls have been built."

"Through our work with both children and adults, we know that when cross-cultural conversations are enabled, we discover how similar we are in many ways. We are also enriched by appreciating, reflecting on and being challenged by what each side brings to the table in terms of experiences, models, ideas or traditions," Colston said.

"We are all people in this dance called life. ... Future generations will require all sides to be both willing and able to share their own national narrative, rhythm and motif. Only then can we hope to choreograph together some fusion dance moves that will be mutually positive," she added.

## Downpour in Kuwait



Vehicles caught in a flooded street in Capital Governorate, Kuwait, following heavy rainfall in the Middle Eastern country on Sunday evening. The meteorological department said the weather would gradually improve from Monday. ASAD / XINHUA

## Foreign minister: Nation to maintain policy consistency

By ZHANG YUNBI  
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As part of China's efforts to reassure the world of its growth prospects, State Councilor and Foreign Minister Qin Gang underscored on Monday that the country will maintain its policy consistency in the future.

When addressing the China Development Forum in Beijing, Qin said the nation will maintain both its policy consistency and the steadfast manner of its development in order to "introduce fresh opportunities and energy for advancing the building of a community with a shared future for mankind".

This year marks the 10th anniversary of President Xi Jinping's proposal to build such a community.

In his speech, Qin said that Beijing will stay true to upholding mutual respect, "promote coordination and benign interactions among major countries" and develop friendly cooperation with various countries.

He emphasized Beijing's commitment to implementing the three landmark initiatives — the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative — which were proposed by President Xi in 2021, last year and earlier this month, respectively.

Speaking about the economy, Qin said that China will continue advancing its high-quality development and high-level opening-up, and "champion the stable functioning of the global production and supply chains".

China will also pool strength for developing countries to accelerate the implementation of the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, he added.

The country will continue to unswervingly uphold justice and fairness, amplify the voice and bolster the representativeness of developing countries in the international community and make global governance more just and reasonable, he said.

China will also join hands with all stakeholders to build global and regional security landscapes that take consideration of demands of various parties in a balanced and inclusive manner, he added.

At a separate meeting in Beijing with Kao Kim Hourn, secretary-general of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Qin said that "China's internal and external policies maintain a high level of stability and consistency".

The country is dedicated to achieving the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation through the Chinese path to modernization and will inject more stability into the region for its peace and tranquillity, he said.

All 10 ASEAN member states have joined the Group of Friends of the Global Development Initiative at the UN, and Qin said that Beijing appreciates the move.

This year also marks the 20th anniversary of China's joining the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia.

Beijing "is willing to achieve outcomes at an early date" for the current phase of negotiations on the 3.0 version of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, Qin said.

He reaffirmed China's commitment to working with the ASEAN countries to rule out interference from outside the region, effectively implement the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea and formulate the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea at an early date.

The goal is to "introduce institutional guarantee for making the South China Sea a sea of peace, friendship and cooperation", he added.

Kao Kim Hourn said that ASEAN is ready to work with China to accelerate negotiations on the China-ASEAN FTAs 3.0 version and consultations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea.

ASEAN also appreciates China's support to its central role in the region and the country's constructive role in helping stabilize the situation in Myanmar, he added.

## Former Taiwan leader Ma Ying-jeou visits mainland

By ZHANG YI  
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Ma Ying-jeou became the first former leader of Taiwan to visit the Chinese mainland when he arrived in Shanghai on Monday for a visit that will last until April 7.

Ma, who is leading a group from Taiwan that includes college students, was greeted by senior officials from the Taiwan Work Office of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the CPC Shanghai Municipal Committee at an airport in Shanghai. The group later left for Nanjing, Jiangsu

province, according to Xinhua News Agency.

During the trip, Ma will pay tribute to his ancestors ahead of Tomb Sweeping Day, and lead the Taiwan students in strengthening exchanges with their mainland counterparts. The group will also visit other mainland cities including Wuhan, Hubei province, Changsha, Hunan province, and Chongqing.

In a brief speech at an airport in Taoyuan, Taiwan, before his departure, Ma said that it was his first visit to the mainland, according to Taiwan media.

Ma, a member of the island's

opposition Chinese Kuomintang party, said he was responsible for cross-Straits affairs in the island's authorities when he was 37 years old.

"I am 73 years old now, and I have waited 36 years for the opportunity to visit the mainland. It was indeed a long time, but I am glad I can go there," he said.

The mainland welcomes Ma's visit and is willing to provide necessary assistance, Ma Xiaoguang, spokesman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council, said in a statement earlier this month.

"It's a Chinese tradition to pay respects to ancestors, and it's a

common custom of compatriots on both sides of the Taiwan Straits to do such things around Tomb Sweeping Day," the spokesman said.

Ma Ying-jeou served as the island's leader between 2008 and 2016, during which the two sides of the Taiwan Straits undertook a wide number of exchanges and cooperation on the basis of adhering to the 1992 Consensus, which embodies the one-China principle, and opposing "Taiwan independence".

## Inside

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## TikTok: Threat to Silicon Valley monopoly seen

From page 1

The US has, by and large, never cared about data privacy or the phenomenon of big social media companies reselling user data for commercial purposes.

In disregarding such superfluous concerns, the real problem that the US has with TikTok is that it is a Chinese innovation. The US has an all-embracing, mass hysteria pertaining to all things China, which is deliberately designed to stoke paranoia and fear. The US has made it clear on many occasions that it wants to control the future of the internet, or in other words sustain hegemony over it, and as such has pursued a relentless campaign against any Chinese

company it deems to be too successful for its liking.

TikTok is in the firing line not because it has overtly done anything wrong, but because it is a Chinese-created brand that has attained success on a global scale, which threatens the traditional monopoly of the US Silicon Valley market and its legacy social media giants such as Facebook and Twitter.

The US playbook for undercutting China is not to compete fairly or on an equal footing, but to effectively manufacture consent for policies to ban, restrict and undermine China at home and abroad under false and opportunistic premises that are protectionist in all but name.

If it is technology, this usually

takes the language of a so-called national security threat, which always comes with bogus concerns of "espionage" that are never proved with serious evidence, but represented as gospel by the mainstream media.

But of course, owing to the success of TikTok and the massive political backlash that would emerge from banning it, the administration of US President Joe Biden is attempting to coerce ByteDance to sell its stake in the product, under the threat of blacklisting it. This is essentially an act of armed robbery that is from the same playbook that was used by the administration of former president Donald Trump nearly three years ago.

This is unacceptable, and the Chinese government should not allow such a deal to take place, as it would essentially send the message that if China produces something truly brilliant, the US should be allowed to take it and make it its own, if success is allowed to continue.

TikTok must be prepared to stand up to US economic coercion. The hysteria against the app is driven by xenophobia and rank opportunism from a political class that has collectively lost its mind pertaining to China. They should not be allowed to win on this.

The author is a British political and international relations analyst. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## Cuba goes to polls



A man prepares to cast his vote at a polling station in Havana, Cuba, on Sunday. The process to elect legislators to Cuba's National Assembly of People's Power was held across 23,000 polling stations nationwide. The inauguration of the new parliament with 470 seats is to take place later this year. RAMON ESPINOSA / AP

## CHINA

# Regulation to ensure safety at nurseries

Supervision on in-home services to facilitate flexible options for parents

By WANG XIAOYU  
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China's top health authority has released its first regulation on home nursery care providers as part of its efforts to develop various childcare services to alleviate pressure on parents and lift birthrates.

The National Health Commission published a trial rule on home nursery care providers — agencies that transform residential places into nursery care facilities for children aged three and under — on March 15. The document is soliciting public opinion until April 14.

The trial regulation said that such a service provider can look after no more than five children, and each caretaker can look after a maximum of three babies. The per capita floor space for each child should meet a minimum of nine square meters.

Caretakers should be experienced or have an education background in nursery care and child health, and receive training in mental health, food safety, first aid and fire safety. People with a history of mental illness or criminal records are barred from the occupation, it said.

Home nursery care providers should register with local market supervision authorities and health authorities and will be subject to on-site inspections.

They are also required to install video surveillance cameras to cover all living and play areas and footage should be stored for at least 90 days.

At such a facility, children must be offered daily care, balanced diets and early childhood education, it said.

The regulation added that community officials should step up the management and supervision of home nursery care providers and report problems to local health commissions promptly.

"Families with babies aged three or under are in need of care services that are nearby and convenient, and in-home nursery care facilities that make use of residential places in neighborhoods can meet such demands and create convenience for parents to drop off and pick up their kids," said Mao Zhuoyan, a professor at Capital University of Economics and Business' School of Labor Economics.

She added that capping the number of children under five means that the facility will resemble a home environment and make it easier for them to get used to.

Inadequate nursery care supplies in China have long been blamed for contributing to squeezing schedules of mothers and hindering families from having more babies.

Yang Wenzhuang, head of the commission's department of population monitoring and family development, said in June that China had over 37 million children aged three and under. More than one-third of families expressed strong demands for nursery care services, but only six percent ended up being admitted into a facility.

A survey conducted by the commission and released in 2019 also shows that families in need of nursery care services are the most concerned about their distance from homes, their safety and the credentials of caretakers.

Due to declining birthrates over the years and a historic drop in population registered in 2022, authorities have released a slew of measures to boost nursery care services.

"Families with babies aged three or under are in need of care services that are nearby and convenient, and in-home nursery care facilities ... can meet such demands."

Mao Zhuoyan, professor at Capital University of Economics and Business' School of Labor Economics

For instance, a major plan that lays out key tasks and objectives during the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25) states that the number of nursery care slots per 1,000 people should be increased to 4.5.

By the end of 2021, the number stood at 2.03.

The decision released by the top authority in July 2021 to allow all couples to have three children also proposes developing various forms of nursery care services, including building a number of affordable and convenient agencies, supporting employers to offer services at workplaces, strengthening community-based child care and formulating regulations on home-based nursery care.

Mao said that the establishment of home nursery care facilities is a positive addition to China's childcare system and reflects the country's efforts to meet the diverse demands of different families.

The new regulation also fills the gap in rules related to such service providers and will serve to supervise them while supporting their development, she added.



China Eastern Airlines Flight MU721, the first flight after the resumption of international flights and Hong Kong-Macao-Taiwan flights at Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport, waits to take off on Sunday. GAO ERJIANG / CHINA DAILY

# Domestic cruise industry heads back out to sea after pandemic

By WANG YING in Shanghai  
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After a break of 1,152 days, Shanghai's international cruise terminal resumed its regular operations on Sunday.

It's been more than three years since the last home port cruise voyage returned to Shanghai on Jan 29, 2020.

"Despite the huge impact of the pandemic, all parties in the cruise industry maintained confidence and never stopped their hard work. We are delighted to see passengers still hold strong enthusiasm for cruises," said Gu Jinshan, chairman of Shanghai International Port Group.

He made the remark during a ceremony relaunching cruises in the city at the international cruise terminal in Shanghai's Hongkou district, which was the first home port for leisure cruises on the mainland.

"Lots of arrangements and upgrades have been made to support the safe operation of every single cruise trip and ensure the best experience for passengers," said Xu Juehui, managing director of Shanghai Port International Cruise Terminal Development.

Starting from Shanghai on Sunday, *China Merchants-Yidun*, the first Chinese-flagged luxury cruise ship, will take passengers on a five-day journey of sightseeing and cultural experiences to Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, before returning to Shanghai, according to Zhang Shukai, deputy general manager of China Merchants Viking Cruises.

An eight-day cruise trip along China's coastline is being offered from May 7, visiting multiple ports and destinations including Zhoushan, Xiamen, Fujian province and Shenzhen, Zhang added.

"There are countless natural sceneries and cultural resources along the Chinese coastline, which can not only enrich the cruise traveling experience for Chinese travelers, but also offer an option for international tourists to explore," said Zheng Weihang, executive vice-president and secretary general of China Cruise and Yacht Industry Association.

Before its maiden voyage in October 2021, the vessel had gone through 453 emergency drills, and another 972 emergency exercises since then. A virus prevention and control system was established on the ship to ensure the health and safety of guests and crew members on board, while ensuring the comfort of the cruise experience, according to Liu Fei, a staff captain of the *China Merchants-Yidun*.

From the sea to the air, direct flights to outbound destinations resumed at Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport on Sunday, the first day of the summer-autumn aviation season that lasts from March 26 to Oct 28.

"I am so happy that we can start our outbound trips from Hongqiao airport from today," Xiao Lijun, a passenger who was about to check in for her flight to Hong Kong on Sunday, was quoted as saying by media outlet ThePaper.cn.

A man surnamed Guo, who works in art collection, was also excited about his trip to Hong Kong. "I am going to meet some experts tomorrow. We have not met each other for more than three years because of the pandemic, and I am greatly anticipating the reunion," Guo said.

Hongqiao airport plans for 314 outbound flights a week during the new aviation season, 22 more than in the same period of 2019, said Tang Yichen, a vice-general manager with Shanghai Hongqiao International Airport.



*China Merchants-Yidun*, a Chinese-flagged luxury cruise ship, is in a port in Shanghai on Sunday. ZHOU XIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

In addition to domestic voyages, the relaunch of international cruise trips is being planned, Xu added.

"Although international cruise travel is yet to resume at Chinese ports including Shanghai, we believe related Chinese government divisions are actively making preparations for the reopening," said Liu Zinan, chairman of Royal Caribbean Cruises for Asia.

According to Liu, it may take between six months to a year for international cruise operators to fully recover their cruise business in the country after the implementation of related regulations and policies. And it may take at least another year for the market to return to the level of 2019.

"International cruise travel not only makes an important contribution to industrial and economic development, but also plays an active role in promoting international cultural exchanges and communication. Royal Caribbean Cruises extremely looks forward to resuming business in the China market as soon as possible," Liu said.

The Chinese-flagged ship *China Merchants-Yidun* is a joint venture between China Merchants Shekou and Switzerland-based cruise line operator Viking Cruises. It is the first high-end cruise ship operated and managed independently by China Merchants Viking Cruises.

Without its difficulties. At first, the students often failed to respond to her instructions, such as lining up at the end of the school day.

When a day's classes were over, the school staff would send students in lower grades back to their homes for safety considerations, but the students didn't line up, and would run around instead.

"I could not catch up with them due to my disabled leg," she said. "Sometimes I felt depressed and tired, but I didn't give up, and now they line up when I tell them to."

According to Kuru, the students have a great interest in art classes. In an art class in 2021, she shared "The Tortoise and the Hare" with the students, who had shown their enthusiasm for fables. She found the students liked the story and encour-

# Government drills down cost of dental implants

By DU JUAN  
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The Beijing city government will slash the cost of dental implants by up to 71 percent from April 20, significantly reducing the financial burden on patients.

The announcement was released by the city's medical insurance bureau, human resources and social security bureau, and health commission.

According to the medical insurance bureau, the overall cost of dental implants mainly includes medical services and consumables, and covers 15 such services.

Li Xiaoli, a 64-year-old woman who had received dental implant surgery for eight teeth three years ago, said it was good news for seniors like her.

"I spent more than 100,000 yuan (\$14,500) for the whole process of teeth examination, extraction and implantation, which went on for more than two and a half years. It was a big amount to spend for retired people like me," Li said.

"I have been struggling between using dentures and getting implants because the former choice would save me a lot of money due to its lower cost compared with the latter," she said. "However, my dentist, as well as many of my friends who had received such dental services, told me the implants could give me a better feeling for chewing and tasting, so I made up my mind."

"Even though I didn't get to enjoy the policy at that time, as my age grows, the rest of my teeth will start to become loose and the new pricing standards will definitely ease much of the financial burden for me."

Designated medical institutions with medical insurance in Beijing, both public and private, are asked to follow the new price standards in accordance with the new policy, said the government.

Private hospitals that are not included in the city's medical insurance mechanism should refer to the price reduction of the new policy and make adjustments publicly.

According to the adjustment, the medical service fee for a dental implant for a single tooth has been set according to hospitals at different levels in various districts in Beijing.

For instance, such fees in major public hospitals in six central districts in the capital are set at 5,000 yuan. In hospitals at a lower level and in remote districts, the fee will be even lower.

The medical service fee mentioned above includes examination, surgery and anesthesia.

Medical consumables are not included, according to the announcement.

As people care more about their dental health, the demand for such medical services has been growing. However, the high cost has blocked many patients from being treated well, which affects their daily lives.

The National Healthcare Security Administration has arranged for the centralized procurement of dental implants, which has significantly reduced the price, with an average decrease of 55 percent.

# Special education in remote areas opens doors for students with disabilities

LHASA — Kuru, 27, has walked with difficulty since she was born, but it has not held her back in pursuing her career goals.

During classes, she likes telling her students, who also have disabilities, the classic fable "The Tortoise and the Hare", which tells the story of an overconfident hare who loses a race against a slow-moving tortoise.

"In the story, the tortoise eventually won, and I hope that you can learn from it. Let's take one step at a time, walk slowly but persistently," she said.

Kuru is an art teacher at the Nagchu Special Education School in the city of Nagchu in Southwest China's Tibet autonomous region. Established in 2013, the school was the first of its kind in Nagchu, providing nine-year compulsory education for children with various types

of disabilities, such as visual and hearing impairment, and intellectual disabilities.

With governments at various levels in Tibet attaching more importance to special education, combined with the efforts made by teachers like Kuru, more and more children with disabilities in Tibet are receiving the education they need and enjoying a more colorful life.

Last year, 1,057 disabled students were studying in seven special education schools in Tibet, while some 4,600 disabled students were studying in ordinary schools. The enrollment rate of disabled students during the compulsory education period remained above 97 percent, according to the Tibet Disabled Persons' Federation.

Kuru, from the city of Shigatse,

was born with a disability in her left leg.

For decades, she has walked with difficulty and understands how hard life can be for disabled children.

In 2014, after graduating from senior high school, she was admitted to Leshan Normal University in the neighboring Sichuan province, to major in special education. She graduated in 2018.

"Special education has always been my ideal career and students in high-altitude areas need me more," said Kuru.

Driven by her passion for her career, in 2019, she boarded a train and left for the school on the northern Tibetan prairie, which has an average altitude of over 4,000 meters.

However, teaching has not been

aged them to make their own clay tortoises. Later, she stuck their handiwork on the wall of the classroom with adhesive tape.

For Kuru, the clay tortoises are not only the students' handiwork, but a means by which she can communicate with the students and let them see their progress.

Every day, when she notices positive changes made by the students, however small, such as whispering good morning to her, she would move their corresponding tortoises to a higher position on the wall.

Nine-year-old Lhapa Tashi likes his clay tortoise and often takes it home after school. "Through the tortoise, I can see my progress every day," he said.

Tsering Lhamo, 48, headmaster of the Nagchu Special Education School, still remembers how hard

it was for the faculty to recruit students 10 years ago.

Sparsely distributed across this pastoral area, residents knew little about special education at that time. To look for students, Tsering Lhamo and other teachers spent two months visiting townships and villages across Nagchu, only to find skeptical parents who were reluctant to send their children to the special education school.

"Parents had many doubts about how their children would communicate and what they could learn in school. We showed them photos and videos about the school to win their trust," the headmaster said. "Our efforts finally paid off and we recruited over 60 children with visual, hearing or language impairments."

XINHUA

## CHINA

# Female hairdressers starting to get ahead

**Editor's Note:** To highlight the role of women in Chinese society, China Daily is publishing a series of stories detailing their work and achievements in different parts of the country.



Bai Yaxin cuts a customer's hair at the InStyle Hair Salon in the Sanlitun area in Beijing in October. PHOTOS BY WANG JING / CHINA DAILY

## Persistence and dedication drive the personal growth of leading hairstylist

By XIN WEN  
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Nobody who knows Bai Yaxin well was surprised by her decision to become a hairdresser, or the fact that she has stuck with the job irrespective of changes in her life.

In fact, little could derail the determined 28-year-old, who has always been fond of the trade and has developed a hobby into a career through her own endeavors.

Bai set out to work as a stylist's assistant at the age of 15 when she left her hometown in Yuncheng, Shanxi province, in 2010. She moved to Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang province, to study hairdressing at a vocational school, practicing her cutting skills through daily assessments.

"There were thousands of times when I thought of giving up hairdressing back in Hangzhou, but I persisted," she said.

"It's been a difficult path, growing from a hair color technician into a stylist's assistant and eventually a stylist. It was so exhausting that I even thought about quitting, but instead, I persisted and am still working," she added.

After working in Hangzhou for seven years, Bai felt less motivated because of the competition and great stress caused by the customer



Bai discusses a favored cut and style with her client.

rotation system in the barbershop, which was designed to reduce waiting times but meant stylists seldom got to choose the clients they served.

As a result, she decided to return home to Shanxi for a short break, before heading to Beijing to tackle more challenges.

She said she knew nothing and feared nothing when she came to Beijing. She applied for a hairstylist's position in the Sanlitun area of Chaoyang district by contacting a manager at the hair salon via Sina

Weibo, one of China's most popular microblogging platforms.

"Sanlitun is a place where fashionable people gather, and there are chic elements everywhere. I believed that I could gain a stronger sense of fashion there and find more room for my personal growth, especially in the early stages of my career," Bai said.

She got the job and was hired as a stylist at the InStyle Hair Salon in 2017. However, she soon realized her weak point, which was that, unlike the other hairdressers, she

had few patrons. That resulted in a low salary for her first month's work. "I only earned a few hundred yuan in the first month," she recalled. "Things were hard and very difficult for the following few months."

In addition to serving every client to the best of her ability, she began her own online promotions by opening personal accounts on the lifestyle platform Xiaohongshu, the short-video platform Douyin and on Sina Weibo.

After about nine months, her income was respectable as she made 60,000 to 70,000 yuan (\$8,700 to \$10,170) per month, she said, adding that she worked about 10 hours a day, six days a week. That state of affairs lasted for about five years.

"I was suddenly at a loss recently and couldn't figure out the meaning of life," Bai said. "It's probably because I was sick in September, unable to adjust myself well."

In response, she gave herself a short break and returned to work at the salon in early October.

"No matter what happens, the only thing I will persist with is my work as a hairstylist," she said.

"Hairstyling is an industry that can create and find beauty. It requires creativity, which is what I like the most."

While she encourages more young women to join the industry as hairstylists, she had a word of warning. "Unless someone has a strong will and likes doing this, it will be very difficult to persevere," she said.

## Long apprenticeship leads to lasting career

By XIN WEN

When I first met Liu Haiyu, I found it hard to believe that she was an experienced hairdresser.

She was dressed simply and without makeup, which presented a striking contrast to the normal first impression of chic women who work as hairdressers in the Wangjing area of Beijing's Chaoyang district.

Liu began learning hairdressing skills in Liangang village, Suihua city, Heilongjiang province, when she was 17.

She appreciated the skills she gained from her first female mentor, and was also grateful for the encouragement of her peers and clients during those early years. In June, she opened a hair salon in Beijing with several other stylists.

The 33-year-old, who is co-owner of the One Style salon, rarely gives her own opinion of her customers' hairstyles. Rather, she uses her skills to satisfy their requirements.

"It has not been easy to achieve this," she said, recalling that her apprenticeship in Liangang in 2006 was anything but smooth at the beginning.

"Back then, hairdressers in rural areas washed their customers' hair on their own, and the apprentices had to heat up the water and hang up the towels," she said. "I didn't know how busy it was in the front room where the customers sat, but I just had one thought — to learn to cut hair. Instead, I usually stood in the backroom for the whole day, without sitting down."

That experience lasted about six months, until Liu decided to move to another hair salon. It was there that she met her mentor, an experienced female hairdresser named Xia Xiaoli, who allowed her to watch carefully so she would learn how to cut hair. Xia also encouraged her to try out her skills.

"In just a year, I learned some

really good things from that lady. In 2008, I went to Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang, to find more opportunities to cut hair," Liu said, recalling that the working hours were particularly long and she lived in a mixed-sex dormitory with several male hairstylists.

"There was one girl who helped me at that time. She invited me to stay at her apartment. I remember that during our leisure time, we usually played around and ate oranges near the Songhua River," she said.

At the time, some of her customers arrived at the salon at midnight, carrying bottles of beer. It was then that Liu decided not to dress up so she didn't attract unwanted attention. Later she opened her own salon in Harbin.

Liu was once questioned by some customers about her role as a woman working in a predominantly male field, but she chose not to make a big deal out of it.

Moreover, she uses her own name as a hairstylist rather than choosing an English one like many of her male counterparts.

"I have very little to regret, but sometimes I rue the fact that I haven't fully used my ability to help people who need assistance," Liu said. "I hope that in the future I can use what I have to help those who are in real need."



Liu Haiyu prepares a hairstyle for a customer at the One Style salon in Chaoyang district, Beijing, in October.

## Lifelong skill brings joy

By XIN WEN

Having a skill to earn a living is a necessity, according to Wang Yan, who started learning to cut hair at age 18.

The native of Longxi county in Dingxi city, Gansu province, recalls how she dropped out of junior high school because her scores failed to meet the requirements for high school entry.

That resulted in her mother giving her two choices: to either learn to work as a dressmaker or as a hairdresser. Wang thought dressmaking was untrendy, so she opted for a career in hairdressing.

Having expended a huge amount of energy to master her trade, the 45-year-old has been working in the field for more than 20 years.

She opened her first mom-and-pop hair salon in the southern suburbs of Lanzhou, capital of Gansu, in 1997, and remembers her sense of disappointment when no customers showed up in the first three days.

To attract customers, Wang posted an ad on the salon's door, offering free haircuts. The notice attracted a couple of clients, so four days later, they brought some friends, who paid her to cut their hair.

In the decade that followed, the salon became the most flourishing business on the street, so Wang opened a second establishment on the east side of the city in 2016.

Female hairstylists often find it hard to gain recognition, so it took Wang quite a few years to achieve her goal.

"At first, it was all about washing customers' hair," said Wang, recalling her early days working as an assistant under the guidance of an experienced female stylist.

"Learning to shave the male customers' beards was one of the required skills," she said.

Her first experience of cutting hair came accidentally, when a

member of a local work team visited the salon where Wang was working as an assistant.

"My master and senior sister apprentices were busy when the man came to our salon. The worker, who had long, coarse hair, wanted a cut as soon as possible, so he asked me if I was available," she recalled.

The number of female hairstylists in China is still small, and it fluctuates as some leave to get married or have babies.

Most of Wang's female apprentices left her salon eventually, either to get married or to work in other fields.

Wang believes that learning a skill to support herself and her family is something to be proud of, and she said she never considered just being a wife and mother. She also believes in hard work, so she returned to work just 42 days after giving birth to her oldest son, now 23, in 1999.

She has two sons, and the older boy wants to become a hairdresser. Wang seldom complains about the difficulties and setbacks she has faced in her professional life, and she often brings precious gifts for her family when she returns to her hometown.

Her hard-earned wealth benefits her and her relatives. In 2007, she bought her family's first apartment in Lanzhou, and has bought two more in recent years.

Hairstyling is an industry that requires up-to-date information and the skills need to be updated frequently. Wang said she still takes hairdressing lessons every three months to ensure that she isn't left behind in the ever-changing sector.

"I have brought value to my life through my job, and even though it's sometimes hard work, I have persisted in cutting hair and designing new styles for my customers," she said.

## Success boosts salon owner's sense of achievement

By XIN WEN

Song Huimin thinks most female hairstylists have a large pool of female customers because they know women well and can easily reach an agreement with them about the styles they want her to create.

The 27-year-old, who co-owns two salons in downtown Taiyuan, capital of Shanxi province, uses the experience she has gained over the years to serve customers in and around the city.

"When you see how your customers are dressed, you probably know the kind of style they want on their head," she said.

The various hairstyles she designs for female customers have gained her a following of more than 90,000 on the short-video platform Douyin.

Her signature look is a chic bob, which customers tend to keep for several years. She charges 300 yuan (\$44) for cuts at her salons, the first of which she opened with

her business partner in 2016. Given the reasonably high price, many clients have already decided on the look they want by the time they arrive at the salon.

"The most important factor is your skill, plus a favorable price and well-cut styles. You should excel at your skill, and be much better than other hairdressers. Not everyone likes it, and each person's preference is different. But what matters most is your haircutting technique," she said.

"I have a good aesthetic and some talent in this area. Lots of my customers look for me exclusively and they come to me all the time."

Song remembers that back in the days when she was learning to cut hair, male stylists outnumbered females. "In addition, compared with male stylists, female hairdressers usually received much less support from their families," she recalled.

"I was lucky because my family gave me lots of support. They are proud of my achievements now."

Born in Guanglin, a county in Datong city, Shanxi, Song headed to Taiyuan in 2012 when she was 17, having already spent three years learning basic techniques in Datong.

She wanted to become a stylist, but when she applied to several salons in Taiyuan they declined to recruit her.

Eventually, she got a job as an apprentice at a salon, earning very little. After working there for three or four years, she struck out on her own as a stylist.

To ensure that her knowledge moved forward in line with industry developments, she took classes regularly. It's a habit she maintains today, with two-day courses costing 5,000 yuan.

She also runs a number of loyal customer groups, mostly for women. She thinks it is a good thing for her clients to talk freely at her salon, and she can easily win their hearts by suggesting a hairstyle they like or a color they would like to dye their locks.

## WORLD

# Riyadh-Teheran detente brings opportunities

Landmark deal offers chance for Gulf countries to work together, analysts say

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong  
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Saudi Arabia and Iran's landmark detente on March 10, which was facilitated by Beijing, offers an opportunity for Iran and other Gulf countries to renew ties and work together on transnational issues from security to climate change, say Middle East experts.

Mohammad Alzghoul, head of the Iranian Research Unit at the Emirates Policy Center, or EPC, a UAE-based think tank, said that large Middle East powers like Saudi Arabia and Iran repairing ties is a "positive development" that hints at long-term reconciliation.

It creates a favorable environment for resolving issues and promoting mutual growth, he said, as well as raising the possibility of improved relations between Iran and the countries of the Saudi-led Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC. The GCC comprises Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Qatar.

A communique issued at the end of the 155th session of the GCC Ministerial Council on March 22 in Riyadh hailed the China-brokered agreement.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani on Thursday welcomed the GCC support for the detente in a statement.

Mohammad Jamshidi, deputy chief of staff for political affairs to the Iranian president, tweeted on March 19 that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has been invited to visit Riyadh. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amir-Abdollahian have agreed to meet soon.

Also, contacts between Saudi Arabia and Syria have gathered momentum following the agreement.

Iran had benefited from trade relations with some Gulf Arab states, but these relations were stalled since 2016, said Aisha Al-Sarhi, a research fellow at the Middle East Institute at the National University of Singapore.

A successful agreement will not only open avenues for exchange and investment between Iran and Saudi Arabia, but also the wider GCC region, she said.

Ali Khansari, an international affairs analyst and graduate of regional studies at Allameh Tabataba'i University in Teheran, said that Saudi Arabia has always had a "significant influence" on its GCC peers. While they may not always agree with Riyadh, he said, they would "usually coordinate with Saudi Arabia" on their foreign policy toward Iran.

Alzghoul from the EPC noted that the UAE has taken steps toward reconciliation with traditional rivals while also withdrawing from the ongoing Yemen conflict.

"The UAE leadership recognizes that geopolitical conflicts are zero-sum games, whereas geo-economic competition can result in many 'winners', making it a healthier alternative for the region," said Alzghoul.

Mohammad Salami, an associate researcher at the International Institute for Global Strategic Analysis, or IIGSA, said the detente will definitely strengthen relations between Iran and its Gulf neighbors.

## Challenges remain

However, despite obvious progress, challenges remain for Iran and GCC countries, citing cases of Yemen, Iraq and Lebanon, and "it is unlikely" that these issues will be resolved easily, said Salami.

Henelito Sevilla Jr, a West Asia expert and dean of the Asian Center at the University of the Philippines, said that Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with Iran signals an opportunity for other GCC members to consider collaborating with Iran.

Sevilla from the Philippines said: "The pre-rapprochement initiative ... suggests that in the presence of a highly politicized region and conflicting national interests between parties, confidence building, diplomacy and negotiation are still the best alternatives to confrontation and war."

## Luxury on display



Participants enjoy a showcase at the Rolex booth on the opening day of luxury watch fair Watches and Wonders Geneva in Switzerland on Monday. The event is the largest one dedicated to timepieces ever held in the capital of watchmaking. FABRICE COFFRINI / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Banks' collapse in West unlikely to impact Africa: Experts

By OTIATO OPALI in Nairobi, Kenya  
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The crisis in the United States and European banking sectors triggered by the collapse of the Silicon Valley Bank alongside Signature Bank and the crisis at Credit Suisse is unlikely to impact Africa's banking system or its broader macroeconomic stability, experts have argued.

The collapse of the US technology sector-focused lender Silicon Valley Bank sent shock waves among investors and the financial sector worldwide, including Africa, where experts and analysts have had to rethink the systemic risks emerging due to bad banking practices.

In the latest development, First

Citizens BancShares in the US will acquire all of Silicon Valley Bank's deposits and loans from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation, according to the regulator. The purchase by First Citizens Bank & Trust Company includes the purchase of about \$72 billion of Silicon Valley Bank's assets at a discount of \$16.5 billion, the FDIC said.

Despite the collapse witnessed in the West having had a spillover effect on markets worldwide especially banks across the US, Europe, and parts of Asia, African experts believe that the African banking sector will not see a collapse of this nature.

According to Aly Khan Satchu, a leading African investment banker based in Kenya, African banks are

## Parliamentary struggle



Police officers detain a man during a protest in New Delhi on Monday after Rahul Gandhi, leader of India's main opposition Congress party, was disqualified as a lawmaker by India's parliament. The house was adjourned twice on Monday after lawmakers held rowdy protests and threw paper at the speaker. ARUN SANKAR / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

## Nord Stream blast motion fails at UN

By MINLU ZHANG at the United Nations  
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A Chinese envoy to the United Nations on Monday expressed regret that a draft resolution to establish a commission to investigate the explosion of the Nord Stream pipelines failed, and he urged an objective, impartial investigation into the blast.

The UN Security Council on Monday failed to adopt Russia's draft resolution that calls for the UN secretary-general to establish an independent international commission to investigate the underwater explosions last year.

"China supports the UN to establish an independent international commission to investigate the blasts in September," said Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations.

In September 2022, a series of explosions and subsequent underwater gas leaks occurred on the Nord Stream 1 and Nord Stream 2 pipelines, which carry natural gas from Russia to Europe through the Baltic Sea.

Many members of the Security

Council, including China, immediately expressed concerns about the major negative impact of the explosion on global energy supply, ecological environment, and shipping safety, Geng said.

Geng said some countries believe that because the relevant nations have already launched probes into the blasts, there is no need for the Security Council to authorize an international investigation.

"In fact, international investigation will not be (in) conflict with the national ones currently underway," said Geng. He also said that the international investigation led by the UN can instead play a coordinating role among different countries' investigations, ensuring that the evidence chain is completely closed, and the investigation conclusions drawn are more authoritative and easier to be widely accepted.

He mentioned that some countries said to wait for the conclusion of the national investigation before considering an international probe.

"In fact, it has been more than half a year since the explosion of the Nord Stream pipeline. If an international investigation is to be conducted, the on-site evidence must

be collected as soon as possible, so as not to delay too long and make it difficult to obtain evidence, which will affect the investigation results," said Geng.

Geng said that some countries said that speculation and accusations should be avoided.

"In fact, authorizing the UN to conduct an international investigation is the best way to respond to speculation and accusations," he said, adding that blocking the Security Council from launching such an investigation only raises suspicions that "something is hidden behind the scenes."

Although members of the Security Council did not reach an agreement on authorizing an international investigation, said Geng, all parties support finding out the truth and bringing the perpetrators to justice as soon as possible.

"China expects countries conducting national investigations to increase their sense of urgency, report the progress of the investigations to the Security Council in a timely and regular manner, and find out and announce the results of the investigations as soon as possible," the envoy said.

## 29 die in boat sinkings off Tunisia

TUNIS — Tunisia's Coast Guard has retrieved 29 bodies of illegal immigrants after two boats sank off Tunisian coasts, the Tunisian National Guard said on Sunday.

Houcemeddine Jbabli, spokesman for the Tunisian National Guard, told Xinhua News Agency by phone that the two boats sank on Saturday night off the coast of Sfax Province in south-eastern Tunisia and Mahdia coast in the east.

"The Tunisian Coast Guard units in Mahdia managed last night to retrieve 27 bodies of illegal immigrants after their boat sank while trying to cross the Mediterranean toward the Italian coast," Jbabli said.

"Two bodies of illegal immigrants were retrieved off the coast of Sfax."

A total of 11 immigrants of sub-Saharan African nationalities were rescued during the operations, and the search for the

missing, the number of which was not specified, is still underway, he said.

Jbabli emphasized that those immigrants were trying to cross the Mediterranean toward the Italian island of Lampedusa.

People fleeing poverty or violence in West Africa and other parts of the continent have used Tunisia for years as a springboard for often perilous attempts to reach safety and better lives in Europe.

Lampedusa is just 150 kilometers off the Tunisian coast, part of the Central Mediterranean route described by the United Nations as the most deadly in the world.

Rome has pressured the Tunisian authorities to rein in the flow of people, and has helped beef up the Coast Guard, which rights groups accuse of violence.

Italian Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni warned on Friday that Tunisia's "serious financial prob-

lems" risked sparking a "migratory wave" toward Europe.

She also confirmed plans for a mission to the North African country involving Italian and French foreign ministers.

Tunisia is in the throes of a long-running socioeconomic crisis, with spiraling inflation and persistently high joblessness. Tunisians themselves make up a large proportion of the migrants traveling to Italian shores.

The heavily indebted North African country is in negotiations with the International Monetary Fund for a \$2-billion bailout package, but talks have been stalled for months and there is no sign a deal is any closer.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken warned last week that unless they reach an agreement, "the economy risks falling off the deep end."

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Sino-Russian cooperation in energy a positive force

By REN QI in Moscow  
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Energy cooperation is an important cornerstone of practical cooperation between China and Russia, and it's also a positive force in maintaining global energy security.

Russia-China trade turnover in the energy sector has witnessed a year-on-year growth of 64 percent in 2022, with physical deliveries increasing by around 10 percent, according to Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

Latest data from China's General Administration of Customs showed that in the first two months of 2023, Russia overtook Saudi Arabia to become the top supplier of oil to China, with imports of Russian crude reaching 1.94 million barrels per day. Russia's total crude exports to China soared to 15.68 million metric tons, up 24 percent year-on-year.

Sibur, the largest integrated petrochemical company in Russia and one of the biggest companies in the global petrochemical industry, entered the Chinese market over 10 years ago and has developed strategic cooperation with China.

The Chinese market is one of the fastest-growing markets and is expected to experience an increase in demand for high value-added products. In 2021, the company sold 500,000 tons of petrochemical products to the Chinese market, mainly consisting of polymers and synthetic rubbers, said the CEO of Sibur International Andrey Frolov, adding that by the fourth quarter last year, the company had increased sales to China to over 200,000 tons per quarter.

In order to simplify the trade, Sibur introduced the RMB option in China, which brought payment flexibility to customers and gave the company an opportunity to strengthen its market position, Frolov said.

ZapSib, Sibur's flagship \$8.8 billion production complex in Western Siberia which started full-scale production in 2020, has doubled Sibur's capacity to produce popular plastics, polyethylene and polypropylene. China has a deficit of polyethylene.

Apart from petrochemistry, Russian mining and metallurgical companies have also set their eyes on China.

Valery Kazikaev, chairman of the board of directors of Udokan Copper company, said the company is developing the largest copper deposit in Russia, whose resources amount to 26.7 million tons.

"Two of our main products, copper concentrate and refined copper in cathodes, are planned to supply to China, and we are currently negotiating with potential customers," Kazikaev said.

He stressed the expansion plans are inspired by the prospects for growth in demand in China.

Kazikaev said President Xi Jinping's visit to Russia will strengthen the successful cooperation between the two countries, and Russian enterprises hope the visit will give a new impetus to the development of business and mutual trade.

Kazikaev was echoed by Frolov, whose company has been engaged with China for years. Frolov highly appreciates the level of business cooperation between the countries, which are working at an unprecedented level and are built on trust and mutual benefit.

banking crisis on the continent.

According to Satchu from Kenya, the effect on African economies could be more pronounced in other areas like a significant slowdown in foreign direct investments.

"I expect emerging markets to actually benefit from the turbulence in Western markets but that Africa will remain under some pressure. This is, in part, because of policymaking naivete and disjuncture, for example, multi-tier forex regimes which are suboptimal and hold back foreign direct investment," Satchu said.

Since Africa indulged in heavy borrowing in the last decade, Satchu believes that the continent entered the COVID-19 period from a position of weakness and this is the main challenge facing Africa's financial sector.

Agencies contributed to this story.



The SVB Private logo is displayed outside of a Silicon Valley Bank branch in California, on March 20. The collapse of the bank has sent shock waves worldwide. PATRICK T. FALLON / AFP

## WORLD US

## Visits greeted with contrasting reactions

A tale of two CEOs: the stark snapshot of current relations between US and China

By HENG WEILI in New York  
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In the past week, a US CEO spoke at a conference sponsored by China's government and was warmly received. Meanwhile, an Asian CEO representing a Chinese company in the US testified before the US Congress and was treated dismissively.

The visit by Apple CEO Tim Cook to Beijing and the one by TikTok CEO Shou Zi Chew to Washington could serve as a snapshot of the current state of US-China relations.

"I am thrilled to be back in China," Cook said on Saturday to the China Development Forum, hosted by a research center of the State Council. "It means the world to me, and I feel really privileged to be here. We have a very large supply chain in China. We also have a thriving App Store."

According to Apple, there are more than 5 million registered Chinese mobile app developers within its

iPhone ecosystem.

Cook said that every time he visits China, he learns something and takes something home, primarily related to culture. He said many things have changed in China, with cities becoming so large.

"The thing that does not change is the culture that anything is possible," Cook added.

On Thursday, Chew appeared before the House Energy and Commerce Committee for over five hours, and lawmakers from both parties bluntly questioned him about national security and other concerns involving the app, which has 150 million US users, nearly half the US population.

Despite Chew's assertions that US users' data was protected by TikTok, the House panel members seemed to have reached a foregone conclusion.

Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers, a Republican from Washington state, told Chew: "Your platform should be banned."

The consensus by many politicians in Washington is that the Chinese government has access to user data, an allegation that TikTok has strenuously denied.

Chew told the panel: "I think a lot of risks that are pointed out are hypothetical and theoretical risks. I have not seen any evidence."

"It was really clear to me and to a lot of other people that Congress really, as a whole, does not understand how the internet works and also really just doesn't understand what TikTok is," Gabrielle Cerberville, 31, a content creator from Kalamazoo, Michigan, said of the hearing, USA Today reported.

But on Sunday, US lawmakers seemed determined to follow through with a TikTok ban regardless of measures taken by TikTok parent ByteDance in Beijing.

US House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy, a Republican from California, said that lawmakers will move forward with legislation to address purported national security worries about the app.

TikTok says it has spent more than \$1.5 billion on data security efforts

under the name "Project Texas", which has nearly 1,500 full-time employees and is contracted with Oracle to store the data of TikTok's US users.

**Presumption of guilt**

On Monday, the Chinese Foreign Ministry said the US side has provided no evidence or proof that TikTok threatens US national security, yet it has repeatedly suppressed and attacked the company based on the presumption of guilt.

"The US should respect the principles of market economy and fair competition, stop suppressing the companies and provide an open, fair, just and nondiscriminatory environment for foreign companies in the US," Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mao Ning told a daily briefing.

In 2020, then-US president Donald Trump lost a series of court rulings when he sought to ban TikTok and another China-based app, WeChat.

In August 2020, Trump issued two executive orders, one banning TikTok and another demanding that ByteDance sell its US business to US firms.

But Trump's attempt to block TikTok with an executive order derived its power from the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, or IEEPA. That act exempts the import or export of "informational materials" and "personal communication" through the Berman Amendment, which sought to protect speech.

"Banning the app — or any like it — would likely still be challenged under the First Amendment. It's important to keep in mind the Berman Amendment under the IEEPA is a proxy for the First Amendment. Even if it's sidestepped, greater legal questions remain," said John Costello, who oversaw the creation of the office at the US Commerce Department to examine certain foreign technology over national security threats.

In 1988, US Congress passed the measures authored by Representative Howard Berman, a California Democrat, with the goal of protecting the rights of US citizens to receive information, regardless of the country of origin of such materials.

"The First Amendment protects

Americans' right to access social media platforms of their choice," said Jameel Jaffer, the executive director of the Knight First Amendment Institute at Columbia University.

US Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, a Democrat representing part of New York City, on Saturday posted her first video on TikTok, in which she supported the platform.

"This is not only my first TikTok, but it is a TikTok about TikTok," she said in her introduction.

"I think it's important to discuss how unprecedented of a move this would be. The United States has never before banned a social media company from existence, from operating in our borders," she said.

TikTok also has received support on social media.

Journalist Harrison H. Smith tweeted: "The 'TikTok' ban isn't really about TikTok, it's a way for the US Govt to get unrestricted access and control over every single internet communication platform."

Agencies contributed to this story.

## Hurricane's devastation



Chandra Wells, 47, and her sister Jennifer, 57, walk past the wreckage of Chandra's home after thunderstorms spawning high straight-line winds and tornadoes ripped across the state, in Rolling Fork, Mississippi, on Monday. At least 21 people were killed in the state. CHENEY ORR / REUTERS

## Shooting at Tennessee school was plotted

By BELINDA ROBINSON  
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A female shooter who shot and killed three children and three adults Monday at a Christian school in Nashville, Tennessee, before being killed by police had plotted the attack, police said.

Audrey Elizabeth Hale, the 28-year-old suspect, opened fire at The Covenant School, a private Presbyterian elementary school in the city's affluent Green Hills section, according to Metropolitan Nashville Police Chief John Drake.

Police said that it was a "targeted attack" by Hale, a graphic designer who identified as transgender and lived in the Nashville area. She also was a former student at the school, Drake said.

The police chief said at an evening news briefing that they were investigating one of Hale's addresses and had interviewed her father.

Two of the weapons that were used were obtained legally in Nashville.

"We know there were two AR-style weapons," Drake said. "One a rifle, another was an AR-style pistol and the other was a handgun."

Hale entered the building by shooting through a side door and then opening fire on the second floor. She had "multiple rounds of ammunition" and was prepared to confront law enforcement.

Drake said: "We have a manifesto, we have some writings that we're going over that pertain to this date, the actual incident. We have a map drawn out of how this was all going to take place."

"We have a manifesto, we have some writings that we're going over that pertain to this date, the actual incident."

Metropolitan Nashville Police Chief John Drake

He said that Hale had conducted surveillance before the shooting and added that a "car nearby gave us clues" into who she was.

Police are now reviewing video recorded at the school and will release it in the next few days.

"In a tragic morning, Nashville joined the dreaded, long list of communities to experience a school shooting," Mayor John Cooper wrote on Twitter.

One responding police officer had a wound from cut glass. Police were first informed that there was an active shooter at 10:13 am. Hale's rampage lasted approximately 14 minutes.

Five officers quickly arrived at the school and searched the first floor; they then heard gunshots from the second floor.

Two of the police officers located the shooter and shot her dead at 10:27 am in a gunfight, said Dan Aaron, a police spokesman. He said there were no police officers present or assigned to the school at the time of the shooting because it is church

run.

All of the victims were identified, and their families notified of their deaths. They were pronounced dead at the Monroe Carell Junior Children's Hospital and Vanderbilt University Medical Center.

The children killed were identified as Evelyn Dieckhaus, Hallie Scruggs and William Kinney. Two of them were 9 years old, and the other was 8.

The three adults killed in the shooting were identified as Cynthia Peak, 61, a substitute teacher; Katherine Koonce, 60; and Mike Hill, 61, a custodian.

The Covenant School, founded in 2001, has approximately 200 students from preschool to sixth grade, according to its website, which listed Koonce as head of the school. It has 50 staff members.

Drake said at the briefing: "I was literally moved to tears to see this and the kids as they were being ushered out of the building."

Jozen Redocia heard the police sirens and fire trucks blaring from outside her office building nearby.

"I thought I would just see this on TV," she said. "And right now, it's real."

President Joe Biden addressed the shooting at a women's business event at the White House on Monday.

Describing it as "sick" and "a family's worst nightmare," Biden said mass shootings were "ripping at the very soul of this nation."

He added: "We must do more to stop gun violence."

Biden implored Congress to pass a ban on semiautomatic guns. Last year, the first major piece of gun reform legislation passed since 1994,

the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, was approved by the Senate. However, it did not ban assault weapons.

First lady Jill Biden, speaking at the National League of Cities conference in Washington DC on Monday, told the audience: "We just learned about another shooting in Tennessee — a school shooting. I am truly without words. Our children deserve better. We stand with Nashville in prayer."

It is highly unusual that the shooter was a woman, as most mass shooters tend to be male, Rob Boyce, a former NYPD chief told ABC news.

Since 1966, only five US mass shootings have been carried out by women, according to The Violence Project, a research center in St. Paul, Minnesota, which records mass shootings.

The shooting in Nashville is the 129th mass shooting in the US this year, data from the Gun Violence Archive shows.

There have been seven mass killings at K-12 schools since 2006 in which four or more people were killed within a 24-hour period, according to a database maintained by The Associated Press and USA Today in partnership with Northeastern University.

The database does not include school shootings in which fewer than four people were killed, which have become far more common in recent years. Last week, school shootings occurred in Denver and the Dallas area within two days of each other.

The Associated Press contributed to this story.

## Philadelphia copes with latest US spill

By MINLU ZHANG in New York  
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

It's been a roller-coaster ride for Philadelphia residents for two days.

They were advised on Sunday to consider drinking only bottled water due to a chemical spill that occurred in neighboring Bucks County, contaminating the Delaware River, which is Philadelphia's main water supply.

One day after people flocked to the grocery stores and emptied the bottled water shelves, city leaders said the tap water is still safe to drink as of Monday.

"There is no need to buy water at this time. Customers can fill bottles or pitchers with tap water with no risk at this time," the city said in a statement released on Sunday afternoon.

City officials said the current water supply is safe to drink until at least 3:30 pm Tuesday. But the safety status of the water may be subject to alteration pending further water tests.

According to an analysis by The Guardian newspaper, chemical accidents in the US are happening approximately every two days.

The data, collected by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) and non-profit organizations tracking chemical accidents, included incidents caused by train derailments, truck crashes, pipeline ruptures, or industrial plant leaks and spills.

In the first seven weeks of 2023, there were already more than 30 chemical incidents, averaging roughly one every day and a half, according to the Coalition to Prevent Chemical Disasters, an organization that has been documenting incidents of chemical accidents since April 2020. Last year, the group recorded 188 incidents, up from 177 in 2021.

The chemical spill happened late Friday evening at the Trinseo Altuglas chemical facility in Bristol Township, Pennsylvania, and caused the release of 8,100 and 12,000 gallons of a water-based latex finishing solution into the river.

A grocery store employee in the Philadelphia metropolitan area told China Daily that bottled water that arrived Monday morning had

been sold out in the afternoon. There is no stock in the store right now, Tingting Chen said on Monday early afternoon.

"I don't trust the city," Philadelphia resident Joe Sole told CNN on Monday from a grocery store parking lot before he loaded packages of bottled water into his car. "They sound like they don't really know what they're talking about," he said.

"They don't sound confident in what they're telling us," Sole said.

The chemical spill near Philadelphia was "the result of equipment failure" at a Trinseo PLC plant that makes acrylic resins, the owner said Sunday. The accident came a month after a toxic train wreck in East Palestine, Ohio, which spread poisonous fumes into the air and killed thousands of fish.

"When I heard about the incident in Ohio, I still felt quite far away from such chemical incidents," Chen told China Daily. "It was quite shocking that such a small probability event happened to me, in Philadelphia."

Friday's spill immediately raised concerns about possible health threats. At least one of the discharged chemicals, butyl acrylate, is among the contaminants of concern identified in last month's train derailment in Ohio, according to CNN.

Butyl acrylate is a clear, colorless liquid with a strong, fruity odor. Exposure could lead to irritation of the eyes, skin and respiratory system, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

"These kinds of hidden disasters happen far too frequently," Mathy Stanislaus, who was an assistant administrator of the EPA's office of land and emergency management during the Obama administration, told The Guardian.

The majority of chemical accidents occur in facilities that handle and store hazardous chemicals. There are about 12,000 facilities nationwide with "extremely hazardous chemicals in amounts that could harm people, the environment, or property if accidentally released", according to a report published by the Government Accountability Office last year.

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# LIVING HERITAGE



## KUNQU COMES ALIVE

Younger audiences and international exposure benefit the opera style, **Chen Nan** reports.

In 2001, when Kunqu Opera was listed as one of the masterpieces of the oral and intangible heritage of humanity by UNESCO, Yang Fengyi, artistic director and head of the Northern Kunqu Opera Theater, traveled with her performers to the UNESCO headquarters in Paris to witness the historic moment.

They demonstrated the ancient art form through a short performance. One of the actresses received a note from an audience member after the show, telling her how beautiful she was onstage and how beautiful Kunqu Opera was.

"It was a very meaningful gesture. Despite the language barrier and cultural differences, the audience appreciated the art form. Their feedback showed us that the art form, though about 600 years old, is still enjoyed by contemporary audiences," says Yang.

In 2008, UNESCO inscribed Kunqu Opera on the representative list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity. One of the oldest traditional opera forms still performed in China, Kunqu Opera was born in the region of Kunshan in today's Suzhou, Jiangsu province. It has distinguished itself by the virtuosity of its rhythmic patterns and exerted a dominant influence on all the more recent forms of opera in China, such as Peking Opera.

Combining songs performed in the Suzhou dialect, graceful body movements, martial arts and dance, Kunqu Opera uses a seemingly endless variety of gestures to express specific emotions. Like many traditional Chinese art forms, Kunqu Opera has faced competition from mass culture and a lack of interest among young people, but the recognition by UNESCO put Kunqu

Opera in the international spotlight at the same time as it began to experience a domestic revival.

**Youthful revival**  
"Of all the rich and diverse traditions of Chinese opera, Kunqu Opera is one of the most beautiful and best-known among Chinese audiences," says Fu Jin, a professor at the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts. "It contains many aspects of traditional Chinese culture, such as philosophy, religion, social values and lifestyle."

Fu notes that Kunqu Opera pieces are closely linked with Chinese literature. For example, one of the best-known and most-performed pieces is *The Peony Pavilion*, which was written by Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) playwright Tang Xianzu, who is often compared to William Shakespeare.

One of the oldest traditional opera forms still performed in China, Kunqu Opera was born in the region of Kunshan in today's Suzhou, Jiangsu province. It has distinguished itself by the virtuosity of its rhythmic patterns and exerted a dominant influence on all the more recent forms of opera in China, such as Peking Opera.

What excites Fu is that Kunqu Opera has been attracting a growing young audience, who consider the art form to be deep, elegant and sophisticated.

A "youth version" of *The Peony Pavilion*, the fruit of a collaboration between Suzhou Kunqu Opera Theater and Chinese American writer Kenneth Hsien-yung Pai, is considered another major contributor to the development and revival of the art form.

The production premiered in 2003 and has since become a major phenomenon. With over 400 performances across the Chinese mainland, Hong Kong and Macao, as well as in countries such as Greece, the United

Kingdom and the United States, it has been seen by a combined worldwide audience of about 800,000. Thanks to shows staged at universities across the country at that time, Kunqu Opera witnessed a surge in popularity, especially among young people.

"Since the beginning of the 21st century, Kunqu Opera had faced a decline, with veteran Kunqu Opera performers retiring, audiences getting old and fewer young people willing to learn and enjoy the old art," recalls 85-year-old Pai. "I am a big fan of Kunqu Opera and I was worried."

Pai says that the cast of the 2003 youth version of *The Peony Pavilion* was all in their early 20s and 70 percent of the audience were also young people. "That was a very promising sign, and I was very happy," he says.

This year, marking its 20th anniversary, the youth version — with 27 acts of the classic — will be staged at Beijing Tianqiao Performing Arts Center from April 18 to 20.

### Growing fan base

A recent, marathon production of *The Peony Pavilion* by the Shanghai Kunqu Opera Troupe — 55 acts, spanning eight hours in total — has also made headlines. From March 8 to 10, the production was staged at the China National Opera House, with tickets selling out in a few days.

It was the first time that the renowned Shanghai company had presented *The Peony Pavilion* in its entirety.

"It was a huge challenge for the whole team from the troupe. For the audience, it was a rare theater experience," says Guo Xiaonan, director of the show.

Hu Weili, an actress in her early 30s, plays the leading role in the show. "When I started my training as a Kunqu Opera performer in 1999, there were few shows and few people in the audiences. I performed whenever I could, paid or not, hoping that one day I could experience the real stage," she says.

"Now, we have lots of fans. Some of them are very enthusiastic, taking photos with us and following us as we tour around the country," says Hu.

One fan, Chen Guangli, 36, who was born in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, and now works and lives in Beijing, bought tickets for the three-day performance immediately after she learned about the performance via social media.

"It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. I have watched a few acts from *The Peony Pavilion* before, but they are not enough to get a full sense of the masterpiece," says Chen.

Rang Qian, a student at Capital Normal University majoring in world history, is also a big fan of Kunqu Opera.

"What intrigued me about Kunqu Opera was not only its classic beauty, but also the artists, who have to train hard to master a whole range of skills, like singing, dancing and martial arts," says the 20-year-old.

Of all the rich and diverse traditions of Chinese opera, Kunqu Opera is one of the most beautiful and best-known among Chinese audiences.

**Fu Jin**, professor at the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts

Since she watched her first Kunqu Opera performance in 2018, Rang, who was born and raised in Beijing, has been learning about Kunqu Opera and sharing it with her friends. She is the head of the university's Kunqu Opera community, which has over 100 members and holds activities twice a week.

"Kunqu Opera is like a seed that has been planted. The more I learn about it, the more I expand my knowledge about other aspects of traditional Chinese culture, such as literature, calligraphy, music and painting. It's like a full circle, allowing me to explore the roots of my culture," Rang says.

The ancient art form has also built up a fan base outside China, thanks to devoted artists, such as Zhang Jun, who has made a name for himself interpreting Western classics through the prism of Kunqu Opera.

In 2016, he put on a one-man show, titled *I, Hamlet*, a Kunqu-inspired adaptation of Shakespeare's famous play, in London and New York, winning critical acclaim among overseas audiences.

In 2020, he also performed with pianist Martha Argerich at a concert in Hamburg, Germany, featuring arias from *The Peony Pavilion* and pianist Sergei Babayan's arrangement of 12 movements from composer Sergey Prokofiev's ballet version of *Romeo and Juliet*.

Contact the writer at [chenan@chinadaily.com.cn](mailto:chenan@chinadaily.com.cn)



**Editor's note:** There are 43 items inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage lists that not only bear witness to the past glories of Chinese civilization, but also continue to shine today. China Daily looks at the protection and inheritance of some of these cultural legacies. In this installment, we take a dramatic journey into the 600-year history of Kunqu Opera.

## Next generation sets the stage for art genre's future

By **CHENG YUEZHU**  
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From centuries of being passed down through mentorship, to the modern day, when the youth edition of *The Peony Pavilion* ignited fervor among university students, Kunqu Opera's history has been closely connected with the continued effort of generations of young people.

As China places a greater focus on traditional opera education, and more young people are taking part in learning and promoting the art form with their modern interpretation and innovative vision, the legacy continues.

Gu Sike's encounter with traditional opera was a matter of serendipity. As a child he had a weak constitution, and his parents heard that Peking Opera training could help him keep fit.

With his teacher recognizing his physical attributes and vocal abilities, Gu was admitted into the Kunqu Opera class at the Beijing Opera Arts College in 2013, and continued onto undergraduate studies at the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts.

"The more I learned about Kunqu Opera, the more I started to appreciate its beauty. It takes time to savor its artistry, intricacy and cultural depth," says Gu, 22.

Distinct from traditional Chinese opera styles, Gu says, Kunqu Opera is characterized by its poetic lyrics that follow fixed rhythmic structures, and the correspondence between its movements and sounds.

He plays *laosheng*, or elderly male roles, often marked by virtue and perception, which requires him to constantly enrich his knowledge and cultivate his character.

In his opinion, learning and performing these roles has helped him exert a subtle influence on him, so that, despite having an extroverted personality, he tends to have a calm and sensible approach when dealing with problems.

"Kunqu Opera is an authentic embodiment of Chinese culture, with the costumes, movements, singing and stage designs. All these elements have the power of influencing the aesthetic appreciation of the audience," he adds.

For another student Geng Kalu, who specializes in playing *huadan* (vivacious young female roles), there seems to be an inner connection with the characters in Kunqu Opera's stories that transcends time and space.

While her previous opera education



Zhu Xiandong, a graduate from the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts, re-creates the garden in *The Peony Pavilion* with virtual reality technology. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

stressed fundamental physical and technical training, since getting enrolled in the academy, she has devoted herself to studying her characters in order to represent them more vividly onstage.

She has performed the character of Chunxiang in *The Peony Pavilion*, a maid of the protagonist Du Linxiang, whose candor and naivety are in contrast to the latter's character. Initially gentle and docile as a result of her upbringing.

"Although she is not the protagonist, I quite like her as she is like a confidante, or in modern terms a 'bestie'. She may be too young to understand the sentiments of Du, but she is always there to support Du," Geng says.

Another character she feels an affinity for is the nun Sekong from the monodrama *Sifan*, who runs away from the nunnery with the longing for a worldly life.

"To me, this character represents female power and the ability to break free from the constraints of societal norms to pursue what the heart desires," she says.

Despite these ancient characters only existing in texts, she feels closer to them by reading, studying with teachers and watching the renditions of them by other performers.

While students like Gu and Geng are training to become experienced Kunqu Opera performers, others are also exploring more contemporary ways of presenting the art form, graduate from the academy Zhu Xiandong being one of them.

By taking courses in traditional Chinese opera appreciation and attending live performances, he developed an affection for Kunqu Opera because of its



**Left:** Gu Sike performs as Tang Deyu (618-907) general Guo Ziyi in the Kunqu Opera classic *Palace of Eternal Youth*. **Right:** Geng Kalu, a student of the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts, specializes in playing *huadan* (vivacious young female roles) of Kunqu Opera.

As young people from the academy, we feel a sense of mission to explore new ways for the general public to learn about, and develop a liking for, traditional Chinese opera, such as using modern and advanced technology, while still preserving the productions' essence."

**Zhu Xiandong**, graduate of the National Academy of Chinese Theater Arts



Kunqu Opera performances are now often staged in classical gardens in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, to offer audiences an immersive experience. PHOTOS BY SUN JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



### Entertainment with ancient roots tunes into a modern following

Mild, exquisite, sentimental and melodious, Kunqu Opera has distinctive features, which make it one of the most popular traditional Chinese operas.

In 2008, it was inscribed on UNESCO's representative list of intangible cultural heritage of humanity.

Kunqu became widely popular during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). Tang Xianzu was one of the most established playwrights of ancient China, whose *Four Dreams of Linchuan*, a collection of four major dramas, including the most renowned *The Peony Pavilion*, have been adapted into classic Kunqu Opera productions.

The performances usually feature a young male lead, a female lead, an old man and various comic roles, all dressed in traditional costumes.



Playwright Tang Xianzu (1550-1616).

With different colors, fabrics and embroidery, the costumes enable the audience to distinguish a character's gender and social status at first glance.

Accessories, such as helmets, crowns, hats and shoes, also play a role in portraying the characters.

Usually, performers take at least two hours to apply their makeup and costumes. The main makeup colors for young female roles and young male roles are red, black and white.

The classical elegance and simplicity of Kunqu Opera is also highlighted by the stage set — one table and two chairs.



Exhibits on display at the China Kunqu Opera Museum in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, offer a panoramic view of the history and evolution of the ancient art form. Highlights include the masks, costumes and musical instruments used in the performances. PHOTOS BY WANG JIANKANG / FOR CHINA DAILY

graceful singing and refined performance style.

When studying *The Peony Pavilion*, he was inspired by Du's exclamation "how does one realize the beauty of spring if not by entering this garden" and decided to re-create the garden in the virtual world.

"*The Peony Pavilion* tells the story of a dream, which is quite surreal and ethereal. So I thought about how to bring the viewers into such a dream garden, for other young people like myself to feel its beauty," Zhu says.

Therefore, he adopted virtual reality technology to create the garden, drawing from the styles of classical Chinese gardens from the Song Dynasty (960-1279), the era in which the story takes place.

By putting on the VR headset, the audience will find themselves standing on a narrow bridge winding its way through a lake. Take a few steps and the viewers will arrive at a pavilion in the center of the lake, facing a stage on the bank, where two performers are delivering a scene from the Kunqu Opera.

"As young people from the academy, we feel a sense of mission to explore new ways for the general public to learn about, and develop a liking for, traditional Chinese opera, such as using modern and advanced technology, while still preserving the productions' essence," he adds.

Another student Yang Xuhan, with a similar fascination about the art form and a slightly different approach, has been working for more than two years on a short animated film of *The Peach Blossom Fan*, a classical script written by Qing Dynasty

(1644-1911) playwright Kong Shangren.

To present in merely five minutes the tragedy of 44 scenes with its grand historical narrative, Yang zoomed in on the love story between the two protagonists and adopted a slightly surreal style of visual expression, while inviting a student in music to compose the soundtrack using entirely traditional Chinese instruments.

Comparing the two art forms of Kunqu Opera and animation, he says that he can see certain commonalities between the two, including the twists and turns of plots, and the balance between movements and stillness.

It is also essential to consider the differences, he says. "Animation requires a lot of time and effort, and it is hard to match up to the intricacies of the Kunqu stage and costumes, so I used the level of freedom offered by animation to tell the story."

What he strives for with his animations is to present Chinese culture in a way that is authentic and true to its roots, he says.

Wang Zhenyi, professor from the academy, says: "Many troupes are now experimenting with these modern, innovative projects that adopt multimedia technology and stage designs.

"I think such projects are beneficial in promoting the art form to the general public. Kunqu Opera is a living heritage that is being performed for contemporary audiences, so it is important to uphold tradition while promoting innovation."



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.



## LIFE

## Academics focus on civilization

Discussion highlights respect for diversity and importance of dialogue, Yang Yang reports.

On March 15, President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, proposed the Global Civilization Initiative, calling for respect for the diversity of civilizations.

In a response to the Global Civilization Initiative, the third event of the World Sinology Lecture, a high-end academic dialogue and exchange mechanism co-organized by the Chinese Association for International Understanding and Beijing Language and Culture University, invited Sinologists and scholars from more than 40 countries to explore the theme of this lecture: "The communication and mutual learning among civilizations in promoting human progress — modern significance of ancient civilizations".

On March 17, nearly 300 people took part in the discussion, in person or online.

Liu Li, president of BLCU, said in a speech, that the Global Civilization Initiative calls for respect for the diversity of civilizations, holds to the principles of equality, mutual learning, dialogue and inclusiveness among civilizations, revealing the prospect of the development of human civilization, as well as the current realistic need.

"The diversity of civilizations decides the diversity of development paths. In the process of inheriting and interpreting ancient civilizations and in equal communication and dialogues, different countries find the wisdom and paths rooted deep in their cultures and traditions. Chinese modernization is a sound example," he said.

"The World Sinology Lecture invited Sinologists from different cultures that are studying mutual learning between Chinese and other civilizations to share their opinions, which will exert a far-reaching influence on the related studies and students," he said.

Gafar Karar Ahmed, professor from the China-Arab Research Center on Reform and Development with Shanghai International Studies University, said in a speech that Arabic and Chinese civilizations are the representatives of ancient civilizations. Peaceful cooperation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit have always been the main themes of China-Arab relationship. The two civilizations will continue to work closely to build a community with shared future under the Global Civilization Initiative, and to write a new chapter for China-Arab cultural exchanges, he said.

American Sinologist Roger Thomas Ames talked about the Confucian culture and the meaning of continuation of civilization. For him, Confucianism is a pragmatic naturalism, which is of great importance to individual development, family harmony and social stability, and is of great value to dealing with pressing problems today.

He said that world economy and political order have changed tremendously, followed by the reconstruction of global culture. The rise of China is displaying the value and practicability of Confucianism. Confucianism will offer a way for different civilizations to coexist harmoniously and lay a foundation for innovative ideas to shape global civilization order, he said via video.



**Top:** Sinologists and scholars from more than 40 countries attend the World Sinology Lecture on March 17.

**Above:** Staff members of the World Sinology Center, one of the event's organizers.

**Right:** Participants listen to the discussions.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“The diversity of civilizations decides the diversity of development paths.”

**Liu Li**, president of Beijing Language and Culture University



German Sinologist Dennis Schilling analyzed the concept of moral values from the perspective of Chinese philosophy, saying that "harmony in diversity" is a concept of moral value that not only can help to sustain the well-being of a society, but also can facilitate the construction of a community with shared future for mankind. The Global Civilization Initiative contains this classic philosophical idea of "harmony in diversity", he said.

Countries need to build a mechanism to further harmony, so that cul-

tural exchanges, trade and communication can be normalized to deepen mutual understanding, and to continuously create opportunities to cooperate with each other to promote peace and development in the world, he said.

Benoit Vermander, a professor from the department of religion, School of Philosophy, Fudan University, said that in communication, cultures will substitute each other and to a certain degree share emotions and memories with each other. This kind of mutual substitutions and

sharing will translate, create, and convey meaning and significance. When culture flows and circulates, it will be reconstructed by interpretations of other cultures, worldviews and religions, he said.

All civilizations and worldviews gain the drive to develop from continuous reconstruction. Their definitions will never be taken for granted, but will be discovered and challenged in communication and interpretation. In this interactive dialogue, remaining localized will be a solution to our common challenges, he said.

Egyptian Sinologist Hassan Ragab said the Global Civilization Initiative, proposed by Xi, advocates common values for humans. Peace, development, equality, justice, democracy and freedom are the common pursuits of all human beings, he said, adding that he hoped China and Egypt can continue to deepen cooperation to provide more stability and drive for the global peaceful development.

Ragnar Baldursson, a scholar of Chinese philosophy and former diplomat at the Icelandic embassy in Beijing, cited the Chinese classic *The Book of Rites* that "when the great way prevails, all things under heaven are shared equally and justly", saying that ancient Chinese in the Spring and Autumn Period (770-476 BC) had called for the way to promote development with peace, and the inclusive attitude to pursue the ideal of a harmonious world. The new global value of a community with shared future for mankind originated from the profound Chinese traditional thought and culture, he said.

Zhang Xiping, chief editor of International Sinology journal, concluded that through the lecture, Sinologists from different countries shared their ideas about modern significance of ancient civilizations, contributing their wisdom and strength to mutual learning and benefit between civilizations and construction of a community with shared future for mankind.

Contact the writer at yangyangs@chinadaily.com.cn

## It's that time to spring into cleaning mode

It's impossible to state it without sounding cliched, so here it goes: Spring officially began on March 21 — in Beijing and all destinations north of the equator — with the season often synonymous with a sense of renewal, rebirth and rejuvenation. There. Hackneyed phrases exhausted already. Ouch, another — it's "spring-cleaning" season as well. Yup, it's that time of the year when bachelors worldwide whip out the broom and dustpan. I believe the thinking is that after a winter of being holed up with windows shut and heating blaring, it's time to unfetter the windows, defenestrate a yearlong accumulation of



**A. Thomas Pasek**  
Second Thoughts

dust and detritus, and get your shine on, John. Single men have no one to impress, so the annual house-cleaning and floor-mopping is at least an excuse to get some cardio work, while minding the slippery floors. To make it worth my efforts, it's advisable to clean out the fans, which have been blowing the same dust around all season as they assist in sock- and scarf-drying duties. Remember back in the day when you had back-breaking homework assignments from three different subjects, say, chemistry, calculus and history?

Well, using the calculus of deferred gratification, I would always choose getting the calculus homework out of the way first, as it was the least pleasurable for me and saving it until midnight meant a blurry-minded or foggy-brained stab at what at that point looked like numerical cuneiform, hieroglyphics and an admixture of Roman, runic and Ruby coding languages.

So I'd leave the history for last, kinda like tiramisù after a full plate of Brussels sprouts and gluten-free wheat thins.

So I decided to do the same with my spring-cleaning this year, in other words, clean the stupid electric fans first. So my table was quickly covered with the following: bracket cage assembly (2), canopy (1), down-rod assembly (2), setscrew (8), switch/housing assembly (1), blade set (1), screw/blade armature (8), balancing kit (1), washer (installer's choice) (8), screw (canopy) (4), screw (low profile washer) (4), blade grommet (6), screw blade assembly (1), flat washer (4), screw (machine) (4), wire nut (2), mounting oscillator (1), thumb screw (1).

I admit, I just caught myself nearly keyboard face-planting with ennui just now during the fan-parts "listathon"; but the neck snapped back to attention just in time.

Analogous to my near nod-off, famed classical poet Meng Haoran (689-740) wrote of the danger of spring naps leading to Ichabod Crane-like extended restful reveries with his *Spring Dawn*:

"In spring one sleeps, unaware of dawn; Everywhere one hears chirping birds.

In the night came the sound of wind and rain; Who knows how many flowers fell?"

To temper the tedium of annual apartment-tidying, I simply dream of a few months ahead, when the spring-cleaning is finally wrapped up — usually in October. At that point, the fans will be whirring nearly noiselessly, the mosquitoes will have taken their requisite pound of flesh from me in lieu of summer's rent, and I will be enjoying an extended National Day holiday when mid-autumn chills make fans redundant.

Contact the writer at andrew@chinadaily.com.cn

## Rural tourism gives ancient village a future to cherish

CHANGSHA — As the mist settles over the UNESCO world geopark in Zhangjiajie, Hunan province, the settlements nestled deep in the mountains awaken to the aroma of cooking in the early hours of the morning.

As one arrives in Shiyanning village in Yongding district of Zhangjiajie city, they can see the sight of vibrant blooming canola and a block of stilted houses constructed in the typical wooden building style of the Tujia ethnic group.

Here, oxen amble slowly across the farmland as hens cluck in the distance, and the farmers are hard at work preparing for spring plowing.

In Shiyanning village, traditional

Tujia culture continues to thrive with its distinct stilted homes and other characteristics that have existed in the region for centuries. However, urbanization has posed a threat to both the original Tujia culture and the preservation of traditional homes in Shiyanning.

"Previously, the majority of the villagers went out to work, leaving the wooden houses unoccupied and decaying. They all wanted to return and rebuild their brick houses once they had saved enough money," says Li Yanxiong, the former head of the town's cultural station.

Li recalls that, many years ago, people were unaware of the cultural value of the Tujia houses, and sought to convert their ancestral

shelters into more attractive villas rather than keeping the traditional style.

"The cadres went from door to door to persuade villagers to preserve the foundations of Tujia culture," Li says, adding that after rounds of explanations, the villagers reached a consensus on the issue of protection.

In 2013, the ancient architecture complex in Shiyanning was recognized as one of the nation's major historical and cultural sites. The notion that "people should protect national cultural artifacts" is even incorporated into the first article of the village's rules and regulations.

"The village has 182 well-preserved

Tujia buildings, mostly built in the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911)," says Li Ying, Party chief of Shiyanning village. She says that professional teams have been organized under the principle of "repairing the old as the old" to preserve and restore old homes and roads.

"In recent years, the village's unique building complex, as well as other Tujia cultural activities, have attracted a steady stream of tourists," Li Ying says. The village received more than 100,000 visits and achieved an income of about 5 million yuan (\$727,600) from tourism in 2022, she says.

Quan Xiping, a 59-year-old villager, was among the first in the village to establish a farm family resort. His

annual revenue has topped 300,000 yuan as a result of rural tourism.

Meanwhile, Quan Ziheng, a young villager, returned to his hometown in 2015 to start an online specialty store, capitalizing on the rapid growth of rural tourism in the area. Last year, his online store grossed more than 150,000 yuan annually. "My e-commerce business is working more efficiently due to the improved infrastructure and the village's rising appeal," Quan says.

"On the premise of protection, Shiyanning village vigorously promotes the revitalization and use of old buildings, so that the people can benefit and the ancient village is given a new lease on life," says Zhu Fadong, Party secretary of the district.

XINHUA

## COMMENT

## Editorials

## For Washington, the future of Africa is as arena for geopolitical competition

The unusually heavy presence of US security staff encircling US Vice-President Kamala Harris during her arrival at Kotoka International Airport in Accra, Ghana, on Sunday was a vivid sign of Washington's psychological distance from Africa.

Harris said that she was "very excited" about the future of Africa upon her arrival in Accra. But she should have done her homework on what the United States has done for Africa, which in effect would have deprived the continent of its future were it not for China's engagement with it.

As some observers said, African nations are not naïve. They are aware that the US has a long history of meddling in African affairs and instigating internal conflicts.

If that is too embarrassing for her to contemplate, given the stated anti-China objective of her seven-day trip, Harris should at least have been briefed beforehand that all three of the major airports in the countries she is visiting, the other two being Zambia and Tanzania, are partially or wholly funded, designed, upgraded or built by Chinese entities. Not to mention many of the public buildings that China built in these countries in some of which she will put on the US' anti-China talk show.

Pressing her hosts to estrange their largest investor, trade partner and development sup-

porter, as senior officials of the Joe Biden administration made clear was the rationale for the trip before her departure, could be considered insultingly patronizing.

Likewise, she should have been reminded that much of "the extraordinary innovation and creativity that is occurring on this continent" that she was able to "witness firsthand" also stems from the projects China supports to help enhance education, medical care and technological upgrading in these countries.

And with about 70 to 80 percent of Africa's sovereign debt attributable to Western, if not US, entities and individuals as World Bank data indicates, Harris has no reason to talk about "China's involvement in debt restructuring" in Africa.

As some African analysts have said, since even the most sincere promises former US president Barack Obama made during his welcome-home visit to Africa 15 years ago were only marginally kept, and his successor made no secret of his disdain for the continent, there is no reason Harris' words should be taken seriously this time. Particularly since the Joe Biden administration has paid only lip service to the continent, which Biden has yet to visit as president.

The need to act on promises is a lesson she should learn and take back from her trip.

## Cross-Straits cultural bonds unite the family

Although he is visiting in a private capacity, the visit of Ma Ying-jeou to the Chinese mainland on Monday has still captured much attention as the former Taiwan leader's trip comes at a time when cross-Straits tensions are running high.

Ma, who is on a 12-day visit for the purpose of paying his respects to his ancestors on Tomb-Sweeping Day and leading a delegation of youngsters for exchanges with mainland students, is the first former Taiwan leader to visit the mainland since 1949.

History has shaped the itinerary of his trip. As well as the visit to his ancestral home in Xiangtan, Central China's Hunan province, Ma's delegation will visit Nanjing and the Mausoleum of Dr Sun Yat-sen, who founded the Kuomintang. Ma served as the party's chairperson twice, from 2005 to 2007 and from 2009 to 2014. He will also visit Wuhan, where the first gunshot of the 1911 Revolution was fired, and Chongqing, which served as the capital of China in the early 1940s, when the Communist Party of China and Kuomintang forces fought the Japanese aggressors together.

Some youngsters from Taiwan are accompanying Ma, who is a legal professor at Taipei-based Soochow University. By learning Chinese history together, young people from both sides of the Straits can strengthen the cross-Straits cultural bonds, understand and stress the undeniable fact that the two sides are part of one family.

Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, there were over 9 million cross-Straits visits in 2019, with more

than 6 million being those from Taiwan to the mainland. The number of cross-Straits visits is expected to again pick up now that the pandemic travel restrictions have been lifted.

Although Ma is not visiting Beijing and no high-level meetings are planned, given that one of the purposes of his trip is to improve understanding and communication among young people on the two sides of the Straits, the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State Council has wished him a good trip.

True to form, Taiwan's ruling Democratic Progressive Party has been less than happy about the trip, not least because it comes when current Taiwan leader Tsai Ing-wen is on a trip to Central America. She is scheduled to stop off in the United States, during which she is expected to meet with US lawmakers, and they will no doubt try to make a scene in order to create frictions in the island.

Tsai herself came to the mainland in 1998 as a professor and member of Taiwan's "mainland affairs council" to participate in the second meeting of the talks in 1992 that reached the 1992 Consensus.

Yet she has put aside the interests of the people of Taiwan since she joined the DPP in 2004, and as leader of the island she has pursued a pro-independence agenda that denies the 1992 Consensus and has made Taipei a pawn in Washington's strategy to contain China.

It is this stance and her collusion with Washington that is escalating cross-Straits tensions.

## Nord Stream saboteurs have to be revealed

Veteran US investigative journalist and Pulitzer Prize winner Seymour Hersh, who revealed in February that the United States was behind the operation to blow up three of the four Nord Stream gas pipelines last September, claimed last week that the White House is now attempting a "cover-up" of the sabotage by feeding false alternative narratives to the media.

He was referring to a story run by The New York Times early this month, which alleged that "a pro-Ukrainian group carried out the attack". The information "originated with a group of CIA experts in deception and propaganda whose mission was to feed the newspaper a cover story", Hersh wrote. "The disinformation professionals inside the CIA understand that a propaganda gambit can only work if those on the receiving end are desperate for a story that can diminish or displace an unwanted truth".

The displacement gambit being offered — that a team of six people using a rented yacht were responsible for the pipeline explosions — has failed to convince experts, who say the sabotage could only have been carried out at the state level.

Initial probes by Swedish and Danish investigators suggest that the blasts were equivalent to "several hundred kilos of explosives", which damaged the pipelines up to 100 meters under the Baltic Sea, setting off an environmental nightmare as half a million metric tons of methane was leaked.

Danish seismic monitoring equipment on the island of Bornholm detected the equivalent of a 500 kilogram TNT explosion in the sabotage event that destroyed both pipes of the Nord Stream 1 pipeline and one of the Nord Stream 2 pipelines.

The alternative rent-a-yacht scenario prompted Jan Oberg, director of the Transnational Foundation for Peace and Future Research, to call the narrative "dumb, improbable and unlikely".

It is interesting to note that while Washington has rejected Hersh's detailed revelation as "utterly false and complete fiction", pointing to it being based on anonymous sourcing, it has yet to say anything negative about The New York Times' account of the attack, even though it quotes unnamed US officials denying any US government involvement.

Given the attack was on transnational infrastructure and the substantial and worrisome environmental consequences from the blasts, in terms of both the greenhouse gas emissions and the disturbance of heavy metal contaminants in the seabed sediment, it is both necessary and urgent that an independent, impartial, objective and transparent investigation be conducted as soon as possible under the auspices of the United Nations, with broad participation by international experts to determine the culprits.

The deliberate sabotaging of transboundary infrastructure by any party amounts to an act of international terrorism that must be dealt with collectively by the international community.

Cai Meng



## Opinion Line

## Cross-border plan can make Chinese tourists safe abroad

Travel safety in Thailand, a popular destination with Chinese tourists, is a hot topic lately, with Chinese tourists reportedly having canceled a large number of travel bookings to Thailand because of safety concerns.

Responding to the concerns, the Thai embassy in China clarified that the Thai authorities will take corresponding measures to protect foreign tourists. The Chinese embassy in Thailand said it will be in close contact with the authorities there and spare no effort to safeguard the safety and legitimate rights and interests of Chinese citizens. However, it does not seem to have fully quelled some Chinese travelers' safety concerns.

The reason some of them canceled the planned trips to Thailand is because Chinese people are facing

increasing security risks overseas. However, many of them are also easily misled by information spreading on the internet about safety conditions in tourist destinations.

That is why how to protect their information security, property security and personal security has become increasingly important.

First of all, it is necessary to provide them with unimpeded information and timely risk reminders. Relevant parties should strengthen safety education on personal outbound tourism, and timely disseminate safety tips so that tourists are guided to rationally plan travel routes and choose transportation tools. China should also deepen cooperation on tourism security with overseas tourist destinations. The recent talks held between Chi-

na and Myanmar on stepping up efforts to crack down on illegal cross-border criminal activities such as online fraud and gambling will help improve the safety of Chinese people traveling to Myanmar.

Chinese tourism authorities should also carry out industry guidance and supervision, and cooperate with overseas tourist destinations to evaluate the travel safety guarantee capabilities of local online travel enterprises, platforms and agencies, and timely identify unqualified self-service travel products. Advanced technologies such as big data, artificial intelligence, 5G and virtual reality can also be introduced to cover the whole process of outbound tourism and strengthen the security of outbound tourists.

— BEIJING NEWS

## Some people can only lie about Xinjiang

German "researcher" Adrian Zenz has tweeted snapshots of a chat he had with Bing's chat AI on Sunday, in which he was told to change the topic when he asked if a "genocide" had taken place in the Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region.

Zenz then prompted the AI, using terms such as "sterilization", but the latter responded saying there were reports and allegations about what he was saying. Zenz then concluded that Bing's chat AI refused to answer the question because it holds a different view on the topic thanks to China's "disinformation narrative".

Zenz is so carried away by his "research" that he forgets he has

been fabricating lies about a "genocide" in Xinjiang since 2016, something that much of the Western media have eagerly lapped up and is reporting widely, triggering a wave of attacks against China.

The fact is Zenz has never even been to Xinjiang, and his conclusion about a "genocide" there is based on wild guesses about population data from there. The few people that frequently appear in his reports have been shown to be giving false testimonies; in fact some of them are just names of people who do not even exist. The local government in Xinjiang has held several news conferences to debunk Zenz's lies and even invited

Western journalists to do interviews there.

Zenz, who faces sanctions from China, continues making wild and unfounded allegations about Xinjiang. When Xinjiang counters his misinformation with facts, Zenz calls it a "disinformation narrative".

Maybe Zenz needs to know that debating with an AI and blaming it for not agreeing with him doesn't make him a hero. He should consider arguing with people who live in Xinjiang, have visited there and report from there. Of course, it won't fit the narrative he is peddling.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

## What They Say

## Probe must dig deep to clean up beautiful game

As of the end of last weekend, dozens of people including players, referees, club managers and almost all key members of the Chinese Football Association, have been put under investigation since Li Tie, former head coach of the Chinese national team, was detained in November for "suspected serious violation of laws".

Compared with the anti-corruption storm in 2009, in which more than 50 people of the same circle received criminal penalties, including the then chairman of the CFA, the anti-graft campaign this time, which stems from the unfathomably poor performance of the national team in the qualification matches for the 2022 Qatar World Cup, as sources said, will last much longer in a bid to address the "root cause" of soccer corruption in the country.

Given that the main funders of the game over the past decade have been private real estate companies and State-owned enterprises, when so many of the sponsors

openly regarded investment in soccer clubs as a speculation for personal interests, it is almost predictable that the anti-graft campaign this time will by no means be restricted to the soccer circle. Thus what has been exposed so far might only be the tip of the iceberg.

While the clubs at various levels are preparing for a belated beginning to the new season, it would not be a surprise, as some players have said, if some of their teammates do not turn up for training one day. A jittery atmosphere has been formed as no one knows exactly how far back in time the investigators will go.

No wonder one former national team player, who claimed he was sidelined immediately after he rejected the hints of some "big fish" that he should bribe them to keep his position in the team, said after Li was detained that "some should start counting their days, and many more will become sleepless".

Notably, the current CFA system is already a result of institutional reform triggered by the 2009 reshuffle of the sector, which resulted in replacing the sports officials in it with professionals from out of the government to eliminate the soil for corruption and enhance the CFA's professionalism.

However, as the need for ongoing probe shows that hasn't proved successful. The CFA members found problematic so far include entrepreneurs, investors, managers, professors and retired players before they joined the CFA through an open competition for the posts, and most of them were ardent marketized reform supporters and fierce critics of corruption.

As such, before the "root cause" is found and addressed, those calling for refilling the CFA with government officials to sever its murky ties with the market should be reminded that what they are crying for is only a repeat of the corruption cycle over the past two decades.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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## COMMENT

Axel van Trotsenburg

## Trajectory for resilient, inclusive growth

This year China's economy is expected to recover, fueled primarily by a rebound in domestic demand. These improved near-term prospects offer an important opportunity for policymakers to refocus their efforts on achieving the country's three long-term development objectives:

\* to become a high-income country by 2035 through productivity-led and environmentally sustainable growth;

\* to peak carbon emissions before 2030 and to achieve carbon neutrality before 2060; and

\* to spread wealth gains more equally among the Chinese people.

There are several key structural reforms that could support China's transition from high-speed to high-quality development.

First, reviving productivity growth remains a central priority. China's productivity growth has slowed from an average of more than 3 percent in the decade before the 2008 global financial crisis to about 1 percent in the decade after. Together with a shrinking workforce, this is weighing on China's medium-term growth potential.

To revive productivity growth, policymakers have focused on fostering innovation. China's innovation capacity has improved steadily in recent years, and the country is a global leader in e-commerce, financial technology, high-speed trains, electric cars, and other sectors.

Yet China's average productivity level is still about half of the OECD average. This means China still has much to gain from catching up through adoption and diffusion of advanced technologies across the country.

Another source of productivity growth is more efficient resource allocation. This will require deepening reforms to increase the role of markets, the private sector and competition. Stronger institutions to manage insolvency, enterprise restructuring, and bankruptcy could facilitate more dynamic companies, enabling market entry and exit, and the reallocation of resources toward more productive enterprises.

Second, to reach its climate goals, China will need to transition faster to carbon neutrality than today's advanced economies, and at lower levels of per capita income and emissions. This will require significant investment. According to World Bank estimates, China needs an additional \$14-17 trillion — or 1.1 percent of GDP annually on average from now until 2060 — for green investment in the transport and electricity sectors.

However, investment alone will not be sufficient. Reforms will play a crucial role. Such reforms include an economy-wide use of carbon pricing, energy

market reforms, and stronger incentives for low carbon land use in agriculture. Through innovation and investment, the private sector can play a vital role in the green transition, but it will need a predictable regulatory environment and a level playing field with access to finance and markets.

The transition to low-carbon and climate-resilient development will create economic and social risks especially for some of China's less-developed interior provinces and communities, which are more dependent on coal and other carbon-intensive industries. These risks need to be managed to ensure the transition is not just fast but also fair.

Two years ago, China reached a remarkable milestone: eradicating extreme poverty (defined as those living on less than \$1.90 per day). As China is set to become a high-income country, it will need to confront new inequality challenges. While declining in recent years, inequality in income and opportunity between coastal and interior provinces, and between rural

and urban areas, remains a concern. We (at the World Bank) estimate that around 200 million Chinese continue to live on \$6.85 per day or less — the standard the World Bank uses to measure poverty in upper middle-income countries. And these low-income households are particularly vulnerable to climate change, transition risks and other economic shocks.

More progressive fiscal policies and stronger safety nets could help stem inequality. On the revenue side, enhancing the role of progressive income and property taxes could contribute to lowering inequality. On the spending side, mobilizing public investment in health and education could help narrow the gap in access to quality education and health services across regions and between urban and rural areas. Progress toward establishing a unified, nationally funded social security system would equalize benefit levels while allowing workers to move across provinces without losing retirement or other social benefits.

Underlying these reform proposals is the ability of local governments to finance them. Greater revenue autonomy and predictability of inter-government transfers will ensure that local governments have the resources to expand social safety nets, improve the quality of public services, and invest in climate mitigation and adaptation.

Many of these reforms are already priorities in China's 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25). The recovery now offers a unique opportunity to redouble efforts to accelerate China's transition to green, resilient and inclusive development. At the World Bank, we look forward to continuing our partnership with China to turn these economic shifts into growth opportunities that will benefit its people and contribute to a more sustainable future.

The author is World Bank managing director of operations. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

Jan Eeckhout

## Central bank digital currency simplest fix for banking

Last year, the Nobel Prize in Economics went to two economists who study the dynamics of bank runs, as well as to former US Federal Reserve chair Ben Bernanke for his work analyzing how central banks have dealt with some of history's worst banking crises, such as those in the Great Depression of the 1930s. Half a year later, we are witnessing another bank run whose contagious effects could destabilize economies, trigger recessions, and impose high costs on taxpayers.

Banks play a double role in the economy, taking short-term deposits and savings and then using those savings to lend money over the long term in the form of mortgages, business loans, and other investments. A run occurs when enough depositors come to fear that a bank may go bust, taking their savings with it. They all run to the bank to withdraw their funds, but because the bank has deployed those funds toward the other services it provides, it becomes insolvent. Having witnessed such runs, US President Franklin Roosevelt's administration (followed by others around the world) created insurance schemes to alleviate depositors' fears that they would not get at least some of their money back following a run.

But we now have a technological solution that could end bank runs forever. A country's monetary authority could introduce a central bank digital currency (CBDC) and provide all depositors (taxpayers) with interest-bearing accounts at the central bank. Such a system would eliminate many barriers to financial transactions by

making the broader payments system more fluid.

This system would not be anything like the Wild West of cryptocurrencies and speculative pyramid schemes that have cropped up in recent years, nor would it be socialized banking. There are already plenty of fintech companies (Revolut, Wise, N26) offering sleek apps and innovative services that enable instantaneous smartphone payments to other users who bank with competing operators. These same financial operators could access CBDC balances held by the central bank and compete for customers by minimizing transaction costs.

Of course, traditional banks also compete; but they do it worse and at a scandalous cost to customers. If the interbank rate charged by the central bank is 3 percent, your traditional bank offers you at best 1 percent on a deposit, taking the other two percentage points as profit. Traditional banks can exert monopoly power because there is no instantaneous clearance for payments. In the United States, it generally takes at least two working days for a money transfer to enter your bank account. And making matters worse, traditional banks' excessive risk-taking transforms your risk-free deposit into a risky investment when the bank cannot meet your withdrawal request.

With an interest-bearing CBDC, a bank run is impossible. As the lender of last resort, the central bank could issue as much money as needed if depositors wanted to withdraw their money simultaneously. And, owing to fluid, instantaneous transfers between users, competition would deliver a 3

percent return on those deposits. Other than traditional banks, who could possibly oppose this solution?

To be sure, traditional banks are crucial for the financial system because they create value by making loans. They monitor whether households that apply for mortgages are solvent, and whether business loans will be used for profitable investments. Because lending is always risky, even the most competitive bank will charge a spread on a loan. The same 3 percent interbank rate at which the bank can obtain funds today may result in a 5 percent interest rate for a mortgage, or a 9 percent rate for a risky investment by a tech startup. Some institution, such as a bank, is needed to evaluate and price these risks.

But, because banks can profit by playing with depositors' money and relying on the government to bail them out, they tend to assume too much risk. That is why academics and regulators have long argued that banks should be subject to higher capital requirements. When they cannot use household savings to finance risky investments or rely on government bailouts, their risk-taking will be sharply reduced.

A CBDC would bring market discipline to the banking sector. Traditional banks would be forced to focus on picking profitable loans, and they would close most of their network of retail branches. Likewise, the credit-card oligopoly that hijacks our creditless payment system would melt like snow in the sun. In its place, we would get a fluid payment system operated by a network of competitors offering access to your CBDC account. In

today's economy, households would receive 3 percent on deposits that are safely shielded from bank runs.

A CBDC is not imminent, though. Central bankers are scared to slaughter the cash cow of the traditional banks, under the pretext that doing so will lead to the collapse of the banking sector. The private bank lobby will strongly oppose digital innovation and seek to maintain its dominant position at the cost of the stability of the financial system.

Still, we may see CBDCs introduced sooner than anticipated. If one major economy takes the plunge, others will be forced to follow suit or risk seeing their currencies get eclipsed. That is why the Canadian central bank has already signaled its readiness to introduce a CBDC if the US decides to launch its own. If China tries to dominate international transactions with its digital renminbi, other central banks certainly will be prompted to follow suit.

Whoever takes the first major step in disrupting the banking sector, it cannot come soon enough. We already have the tools to end bank runs and ensure financial stability. All we need is the will to use them.

The author is a professor of economics at Universitat Pompeu Fabra and author of *The Profit Paradox: How Thriving Firms Threaten the Future of Work* (Princeton University Press, 2021). Copyright: Project Syndicate, 2023. www.project-syndicate.org The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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## China treats both criticism and praise matter-of-factly

**Editor's note:** China has attained widely recognized economic success and promoted the well-rounded development of all its people over the past decade, with decisive achievements on its path to building a moderately prosperous society in all respects, writes a veteran journalist with China Daily.

Paris-based international market research group Ipsos released its 2022 Sense of Happiness poll results in the middle of March, saying China tops the world happiness ranking with 91 percent of those surveyed in the country claiming they are happy.

Exhilarating as it is, neither the Chinese government nor the public seems to be celebrating the good news. Having survived numerous challenges since the founding of the People's Republic in 1949, China is mature enough to treat both criticism and praise matter-of-factly.

The Chinese people know where they are and where they are heading to, and refuse to be disturbed by either laudatory or snide remarks. What's more, though several other surveys in recent years have also ranked China high on the happiness index, some polls have placed the country below the 70th place.

While not taking the poll results seriously, I still tend to believe the Chinese people are among the happiest in the world. And they have good reason to be so. Fast-paced development over the past four decades has made China the world's second-largest economy. The over 1.4 billion Chinese people have benefited from the country's development and rising incomes — more than 100 times — during the period.

While prices kept increasing in many countries in recent times because of the food and energy crises, China managed to keep the consumer price index rise to 2 percent last year — while the average disposable income of the Chinese people increased by 5 percent.

## The efforts resulted in the reduction of costs for some medicines and medical equipments by at least half, thus saving billions of yuan for millions of people.

While workers in many countries went on strike in 2022 to protest against rocketing prices which made it difficult for them to pay their bills, the Chinese people increased their bank deposits to 126 trillion yuan (\$18.3 trillion). That means on average every Chinese person has more than 90,000 yuan, about twice their annual income, in bank deposits.

Of course, that does not mean all the Chinese people have fat wallets. For years, the Chinese government has been according priority to creating about 11 million jobs to ensure the similar number of students graduating from college annually find employment. As a result, China's registered unemployment rate has been below 4 percent for years while the surveyed unemployment rate hovers around 5.5 percent.

Although China's GDP growth is slowing down because of factors such as the worsening international investment and trade environment, the COVID-19 pandemic, and Western countries' sanctions against some Chinese enterprises, the lives of the common people in China have not been much affected due to the government's people-centric development policies.

In fact, despite the tax exemptions and deductions, which benefited businesses but decreased the Chinese government's financial revenue, China kept increasing spending on sectors that are closely related to people's lives and livelihoods.

The government has also increased pension for 19 years in a row — at about 5 percent annually — making retired people in urban areas probably the happiest group who enjoy their life by singing and dancing in community squares or holidaying at home or abroad.

Retired rural residents, who didn't pay for endowment insurance during their working age because such a mechanism was non-existent for rural areas when they were working, are now getting monthly pension thanks to a new insurance system introduced by governments at different levels.

When people complained about expensive medical bills, the government joined hands with medical insurance companies to negotiate with medicine and medical equipment suppliers to reduce medical treatment costs. The efforts resulted in the reduction of costs for some medicines and medical equipments by at least half, thus saving billions of yuan for millions of people.

And when people complained about the high cost of rearing a child, the central government worked out a plan to increase the number of affordable kindergartens, especially kindergartens which admit children below three years of age so as to ease the burden and concerns of their working parents.

Besides, hundreds of thousands of apartment buildings which are more than 20 years old can expect a face-lift under a five-year national plan which urges governments at different levels to contribute their share in the repair and renovation project. Usually, the residents don't have to pay a penny.

Forget about the poll results, be they good or bad. An old Chinese saying goes: The feet know if the shoes fit or not. The Chinese, who believe that labor creates fortune, will continue to concentrate on their national rejuvenation targets for a better and happier life.

# GLOBAL VIEWS

ZHANG YUNHUA AND NING XIA

## Grain of sense

Closer rice cooperation between China and its Asian neighbors benefits food security

Rice is the most important staple food grain for China and its Asian neighbors, accounting for over 60 percent of China's total staple food consumption. Therefore, ensuring a stable supply of rice is safeguarding grain security and food security.

The vast majority of global rice production and consumption is in Asia. Production, consumption and exports of rice by Asian countries account for 86.7 percent, 80.1 percent and 74.4 percent respectively of the global total. India, Vietnam, Thailand and Pakistan are the world's top four rice exporters, with a combined export volume accounting for 65.3 percent of the global total in 2020. In recent years, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos have recorded surging rice exports, becoming emerging exporters of the grain. In 2020, China was the largest producer, the largest importer and the fifth largest exporter of rice in the world.

But the lack of cooperation in the rice industry among Asian countries has lowered the efficiency of resource allocation and hampered the enhancement of production capacity.

In the area of rice technologies, Asian countries either restrict or prohibit the imports and exports of germplasm resources, breeding technologies and breeding outcomes. With regard to the rice trade, certain countries have been protecting their domestic produce with extremely high import tariffs — domestic consumers have to shoulder a higher cost for buying the grain and exporting countries' farmers suffer reduced incomes because of the trade barriers.

Furthermore, Asian countries have blocked grain exports during food crises with a beggar-thy-neighbor approach, further worsening the crises. Since 2000, the global rice price has experienced three rounds of hikes, all closely related to Asian countries' rice export restrictions. Major exporting countries have imposed such export restriction measures as export bans and permits, further intensifying the food crises.



FAN XIAOJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Strengthening cooperation with Asian countries in the field of rice is of great strategic importance for China.

Stronger rice cooperation between China and its Asian neighbors could help increase the latter's rice production capacity and thus improve regional food security.

Despite their great resource endowment for rice production, Southeast Asia and South Asia have insufficient actual capacity in rice production and face food insecurity due to their large populations. Restricted by less advanced agricultural infrastructure and technologies, the average rice yield per unit of China's neighboring countries is only 60 percent that of China. The Philippines, Bangladesh and other populous countries need to import a large amount of rice and fluctuations in global rice prices threaten the grain security of the low-income groups in those countries. Also, the frequent occurrence of extreme weather events and natural disasters in the region has made the stability of rice supplies vulnerable to shocks from climate change and natural disasters. China's strengthening cooperation with neighboring countries on infrastructure construction and agricultur-

al technologies related to the rice industry and jointly pushing for the construction of a regional food common market as well as a food reserve and assistance mechanisms could enhance neighboring countries' rice production, improve regional food security, stabilize the global market and global supply chain, and underpin China's food security.

Also, it is conducive to deepening mutually beneficial cooperation between China and its Asian neighbors as a crucial part of building a community with a shared future for mankind.

The rice industry is of great importance to the economic growth of China's neighboring countries as well as people's livelihoods and employment. According to research findings, incomes from rice sales account for 44 percent of Cambodian farmers' household incomes; therefore, local farmers are very sensitive to fluctuations in rice export prices. China's neighboring countries are sparing no efforts to develop the rice industry and are striving to expand rice exports in an attempt to increase agricultural output value and increase farmers' incomes. China has become a major rice

export destination for its Asian neighbors, accounting for 35 to 63 percent of the total rice exports of the countries concerned. Based on this, they should further cooperate in the rice industry for mutually beneficial outcomes.

To strengthen cooperation in the rice industry, China and its Asian neighbors should focus on the following areas.

To start with, China should give full play to its scientific and technological edge in the rice industry, deepen exchanges and cooperation with its Asian neighbors in this regard and expand science and technology services for and trade with them.

China should vigorously carry out international cooperation and exchanges with its Asian neighbors on basic scientific research on rice technologies, promote inter-governmental rice germplasm exchange deals, and join hands with its Asian neighbors to build an Asian rice germplasm resource pool and a scientific research and experimental system that covers all main rice-producing areas in Asia. China should also support domestic agricultural research institutions and agro-tech businesses to "go global" to conduct rice

breeding and seed production and provide services for popularizing agricultural technologies.

Second, China should make the most its bilateral and regional free trade agreements to enlarge economic and trade cooperation with its Asian neighbors in the rice industry.

China should, based on the latest changes in domestic rice consumption, reasonably increase rice imports from its Asian neighbors to meet the ever-growing demand for food and processing purposes. China should also support domestic agricultural materials companies and machinery companies increasing exports to neighboring countries, encourage domestic agro-tech firms to provide whole-process agricultural services in neighboring countries, and beef up infrastructure construction including transnational railways, shipping and ports. China should promote investment cooperation in such areas as agricultural infrastructure and water conservancy infrastructure and roll out policy support for relevant companies to incentivize them to invest in rice technology R&D, agricultural material production, post-production processing, warehousing and logistics in host countries.

Last, it is important for China to promote rice security governance cooperation with its Asian neighbors.

They should jointly build a regional investment and financing platform for the agricultural sector, beef up investment and financing support for the development of the rice industry in the region, and jointly fund the establishment of a regional grain security and agricultural development fund. China should vigorously carry out foreign assistance in the rice industry, provide emergency food assistance and production material assistance in emergencies, and carry out long-term assistance and cooperation through such means as dispatching experts. Relevant parties should facilitate the establishment of an inter-governmental rice security cooperation mechanism, such as a high-level inter-governmental consultation mechanism and a common reserve mechanism for rice security in Asia.

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ZHANG MEI

## For mutual goodwill

Increased people-to-people and youth exchanges could help reverse the slide in ties at a time people still believe that 'China-Japan relations are important'

According to a public opinion survey released by the Japanese Cabinet in February, the proportion of respondents who "felt close" to China in 2022 was 17.8 percent, down 2.8 percentage points from the year before.

About 28 percent of the 18-29 age group people "feel close" to China, followed by 23.7 percent of the 30-39 age group, and only 12.8 percent of 60-69 age group.

This indicates that young Japanese still have a relatively high liking for China. At the same time, the proportion of people who think "China-Japan ties are important" underwent a slight dip in 2022 compared to 2021, while still remaining high at 73.5 percent. This reflects Japanese people's complex feelings about China, that is, they believe that China-Japan relations are very important, but can't form a favorable impression for various reasons.

Japan's disposition toward China is closely related to the trend of China-Japan relations. In 1978, when the China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship was signed, the proportion of Japanese respondents who "felt close" and "didn't feel close" to China was 62.1 percent and 26.2 percent, respectively. During the "golden era" of their relations, Japan's favorable disposition toward China remained high.

After Japan illegally "purchased" China's Diaoyu Islands in 2012, the proportion of those "feeling close" to China decline significantly, reaching a low point of 14.8 percent in 2014 and 2016. There was a rebound thereafter, but it continued to decline after the COVID-19 pandemic outbreak.

Japanese people who have lived in China usually have a good impression of China, with the main reasons being the convenience of living there, the warmth and friendliness of the Chinese people and the good environment. However, the pandemic has hindered exchanges of people from all walks of life, leaving many Japanese people to mainly obtain information about China through the media.

Japanese public opinion on issues related to China has become increasingly hawkish, even showing rightist tendencies. Against the backdrop of intensified China-US competition and obstruction in China-Japan relations, although Japanese media reports on China included positive elements such as China's success in fighting the COVID-19 pandemic and expectations for China's economy, they also sensationalized China's "tough diplomacy," their territorial disputes and the withdrawal of Japanese enterprises from China. They also overemphasized the risks brought about by the strategic competition between China and the United States, which has influenced the Japanese government's economic policies, leading to the public's negative perception of China.

Japanese think tanks have strengthened their perception of the "China threat", and regard China's rise as one of the greatest uncertainties in the current transformation of the international order. They have a significant impact on the government's diplomatic decisions and the shaping of public perceptions of China.

After World War II, relying on the US-dominated "liberal world order", Japan realized rapid economic growth and enjoyed long-term peace and security. That made it a supporter of the international order. Japanese think tanks thus accused China of trying to "rewrite" the regional and international order through the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

It is gratifying to note that the proportion of Japanese people who believe that "China-Japan relations are important" has remained high in recent years. This shows that the Japanese people share broad consensus on the importance of China-Japan relations, and they have a thorough understanding of the interdependence between the two countries in regional peace, economic and trade cooperation.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

The growth of China's comprehensive strength has inevitably had a significant impact on both regional and international landscapes. In terms of economic and trade cooperation, China is not only Japan's largest trading partner, but also a market with huge purchasing power. According to data from the General Administration of Customs of China, the bilateral trade volume in 2021 amounted to \$371.4 billion, up 17.1 percent year-on-year, hitting a record high since 2011.

Moreover, Japanese people aged 18-39 have a relatively high preference for China. Primarily this is because the young people

have no prejudice against China. But middle-aged and elderly people tend to view the comprehensive strength of China and Japan as a relation of "as one falls, the other rises", and thus many are at a loss in the face of China's earthshaking changes. The young Japanese people, who have not experienced a period of rapid economic growth in their country, are more likely to accept a wealthy and powerful China.

Second, the diversification of information channels for young people in Japan does not rely solely on traditional media. On the one hand, as non-governmental exchanges between China and Japan deep-

en, they usually have direct contact with Chinese students or colleagues in schools or the workplace. On the other hand, China's smartphone brands, games, social media apps such as TikTok, and cosmetics have successfully tapped into the Japanese market and become popular with Japanese youth.

The deterioration of national sentiment is bound to further affect the direction of the Japanese government's policy toward China, leading to a further rightist and conservative trend in Japan's politics. In addition, it will affect Japanese investment in China. Thus, China and Japan need to work together to improve the mutual goodwill of their citizens.

First, China-Japan relations are facing opportunities, and the resumption of people-to-people exchanges provides favorable conditions for high-level engagement in the post-pandemic era. Both sides should try their best to manage and control various differences in the first half of the year, so that their relations are likely to warm up in the second half, creating a favorable atmosphere for commemorating the 45th anniversary of China-Japan Treaty of Peace and Friendship this year.

Second, Chinese and Japanese experts should hold rational dialogues to effectively promote cooperation and exchanges between the two countries in various fields. Many Japanese experts urge China and Japan to strengthen cooperation in fields such as low birthrate and aging population, low-carbon environmental protection and the digital economy, reminding Japan not to misjudge the situation and mistakenly decouple from China.

Third, the two countries should boost youth exchanges. Different from sightseeing tourism, youth exchanges can develop genuine friendship. For example, after the 2008 Wenchuan earthquake in Southwest China's Sichuan province, a Japanese high school student was concerned about the safety of a student from a high school whom he had previously communicated with in Sichuan. China can provide Japanese youth with concrete and perceptible Chinese cultural experiences through various thematic tours in different parts of China, such as tours featuring China's ecological civilization, tea culture, and the Three Kingdoms culture.

The author is an associate researcher of the Institute of Japanese Studies at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

## BUSINESS

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## HIGHER GROUND



Employees work on the production line of a microelectronics company in Nantong, Jiangsu province. XU CONGJUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

# Integration with global chains in focus

Chinese firms urged to adopt broader perspective for better use of resources

By MA SI  
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China will encourage domestic enterprises to integrate more deeply into global industrial and supply chains, and strengthen the coordination and allocation of resources in key industries such as semiconductors, the country's top industry regulator said on Monday.

Minister of Industry and Information Technology Jin Zhuanglong said optimizing and stabilizing the industrial chain and supply chain cannot be separated from the smooth and efficient circulation of industrial resources around the world.

China will optimize the layout of the domestic industrial chain and focus on key areas, promote the convergence of high-quality element resources, such as technology, finance and talent, to cultivate a number of advanced manufacturing clusters, Jin said.

According to him, more efforts will be made to strengthen resource coordination and allocation of key industries like integrated circuits, new energy, biomedicine and medical equipment worldwide, so as to jointly create a collaborative and efficient industrial ecosystem.

Jin made the remarks at the China Development Forum that ended on Monday.

The moves reflect China's efforts to ensure industrial and supply

chains function as public goods and deepen international cooperation in this area.

Denis Depoux, global managing director of consultancy Roland Berger, told China Daily on the sidelines of the CDF, "China remains a significant market for most foreign companies, and has gradually become an important source of innovation to strengthen the global competency of some foreign companies."

With the optimized COVID-19 containment measures, the winter of 2022-23 has, to a certain extent, seen "a replay of the 2021 situation when China's supply chain supported economic recovery in Europe and in the US because of its flexibility and availability," Depoux said.

China's industrial and supply chains, he said, have improved significantly, as domestic and foreign companies invested heavily in modernizing their local production systems.

"China has demonstrated its innovation capability and is leapfrogging in several fields, gaining leadership globally in areas like the electric vehicle chain, from batteries to charging infrastructure, photovoltaic panels, wind turbines, nuclear and telecommunications equipment."

China's industrial modernization, big consumption potential and growing innovation prowess are three strong fundamentals that

create a new China story for the world, he said.

Li Dongsheng, founder and chairman of TCL, a Chinese manufacturing and tech company, who attended the CDF, said that in recent years, the Chinese economy has shown great resilience and vitality in the face of challenges from the COVID-19 pandemic. As China's industrial and supply chain adjust to the new environment, its economy and market demand can be strong and sustainable.

"TCL looks forward to having more cooperation with foreign enterprises in technology and trade, so as to jointly contribute to the high-quality development of China's economy and promote the expansion of domestic demand in the Chinese market."

As the United Nations forecast that India is projected to surpass China as the most populous country this year, some experts worry China's advantages in manufacturing and its position in the global supply chains may diminish.

But Jeffrey Sachs, a renowned economist and director of the Center for Sustainable Development at Columbia University, told China Daily: "China's strength right now is that it is on the cutting edge of many of the most important technology innovations for the future, including low-carbon energy solutions, electric vehicles, batteries, supply chains, artificial intelligence, high-speed trains and many other sectors. All of this will be very good for China's growth in the future."

# Fed hike end talk stirs easing buzz

By ZHOU LANXU  
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The scope for China to beef up monetary support for economic recovery has expanded as US interest rate hikes appear to be nearing an end, with another reserve requirement ratio cut possible this year, experts said on Monday.

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, cut the RRR by 0.25 percentage point on Monday, a move that experts said has reduced the amount of cash that banks must hold as reserves and released more than 500 billion yuan (\$72.67 billion) to meet rising demand for liquidity as credit growth recovers.

Ye Yindan, a researcher at the Bank of China Research Institute, said there remains the possibility of the RRR falling further this year, especially around midyear when liquidity supply could become tight as a large amount of medium-term lending facility loans — a key liquidity provision tool — reach maturity.

Whether such a possibility will materialize depends on economic fundamentals, Ye said.

"If the momentum of economic recovery proves weak, an RRR cut

would be appropriate to supplement medium- and long-term liquidity. Otherwise, MLF loans are expected to be the main tool to provide liquidity."

Her comments echoed remarks by Han Wenxiu, executive deputy director of the office of the Central Committee for Financial and Economic Affairs. Han said at the Economic Summit of the China Development Forum 2023 on Saturday that the country's monetary policy has relatively large room to maneuver as inflation remains mild.

China's monetary policy flexibility has increased as the US Federal Reserve may stop rate hikes soon, Ye said, which will ease depreciation pressure on the renminbi due to the two countries' monetary policy divergence.

Continuing its efforts to curb inflation, the Fed increased key interest rates by 25 basis points to the range of 4.75 percent to 5 percent on Wednesday, but no longer declared that ongoing increases in rates will likely be appropriate while hinting at only one more rate hike of 25 basis points ahead this year.

This has indicated that the Fed's rate hike cycle is reaching a conclusion, experts said. Recent US banking turmoil has not only flagged

the risk that more rate hikes could endanger financial stability, but could also cause credit contraction, slow the US economy and cool down inflation — which will make monetary tightening less necessary and even raise easing chances.

Recognizing that the Fed slowing down rate hikes is creating a more favorable condition for China to ease monetary policy, Lou Feipeng, a researcher at Postal Savings Bank of China, said it is necessary to consider further RRR cuts based on actual situations given that the foundation of China's economic recovery is not yet solid.

Lou, nevertheless, cautioned that the space for RRR cuts should be wisely used. "Policy space needs to be cherished, and the window of the next RRR cut may be the third and fourth quarters of the year," he said.

With Monday's cut, China's weighted average RRR for financial institutions has come down to 7.6 percent, compared with nearly 15 percent in 2018, according to the PBOC.

Some experts deem 5 percent as an unstated floor for China's RRR, though others believe there is room for further declines considering that some advanced economies have cut their RRRs to zero.

# Consumption showing some signs of resurgence

By WANG KEJU  
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Consumer demand continued to pick up steam as China ramped up efforts to boost buying sentiment, which experts said will help boost market confidence and promote the overall improvement of profitability.

Consumer demand saw a steady recovery as consumer goods manufacturers saw profits dip 6.5 percent in the first two months of 2023 from a year earlier, narrowing 13.4 percentage points from the figure in December, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Monday.

Sun Xiao, a senior NBS statistician, said that market demand, despite an uptick in industrial output, has not yet fully recovered. Due to cost-related factors and a relatively high base in the same period last year, profits at industrial firms declined in the first two months.

Major industrial firms, each with business revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.9 million), saw their profits drop 22.9 percent year-on-year to 887.21 billion yuan in the combined figures of January and February, data showed.

Among the 41 industries surveyed, 10 registered a year-on-year profit growth in the first two months, while 28 saw their profits tumble.

Zhou Maohua, a macroeconomic analyst at China Everbright Bank, said the auto sector, which posted a 41.7 percent decline in profits according to NBS data, was a notable drag on manufacturing profits, due to such factors as dampening demand, rising production costs, subsidy phase-outs and price competition.

"Authorities have in response rolled out an array of policy measures to further unlock consumption potential lately, as well as to help

Authorities have in response rolled out an array of policy measures to further unlock consumption potential lately ..."

Zhou Maohua, a macroeconomic analyst at China Everbright Bank

enterprises tide over difficulties and maintain steady growth," Zhou said. "Such efforts will help industrial firms gain a solid footing in rapid recovery."

A number of major cities including Beijing and Shanghai have recently been issuing a new round of consumption vouchers to boost domestic demand with a special focus on automobiles and home appliances, in a bid to further shore up consumer confidence.

NBS statistician Sun Xiao said demand for electricity has been on the rise and power generation continued to grow from January to February as industrial production recovers, which contributed to a 53.1 percent year-on-year increase of profits in the power industry.

Profits of the electrical machinery sector sustained rapid growth and rose 41.5 percent year-on-year during the period. Transport equipment manufacturing saw profits increase 64.8 percent year-on-year, according to a breakdown of NBS data.

Going forward, as work and life return to normal and market demand rebounds, supply and demand will be better matched, and the profits of industrial enterprises will gradually pick up, Sun said.

## Briefly

## Green offshore wind power unit coming up

China National Offshore Oil Corp, which is building the country's first deep-sea floating wind power turbine platform, said the platform was moved from Zhuhai, South China's Guangdong province, on Sunday, for installation in an offshore oil field 136 kilometers from Wenchang, Hainan province. With an installed capacity of 7.25 megawatts, it is expected to generate 22 million kilowatt-hours of electricity each year that will serve surrounding gas and oil extraction facilities, saving nearly 10 million cubic meters of natural gas consumption and reducing 22,000 metric tons of CO2 emissions per year.

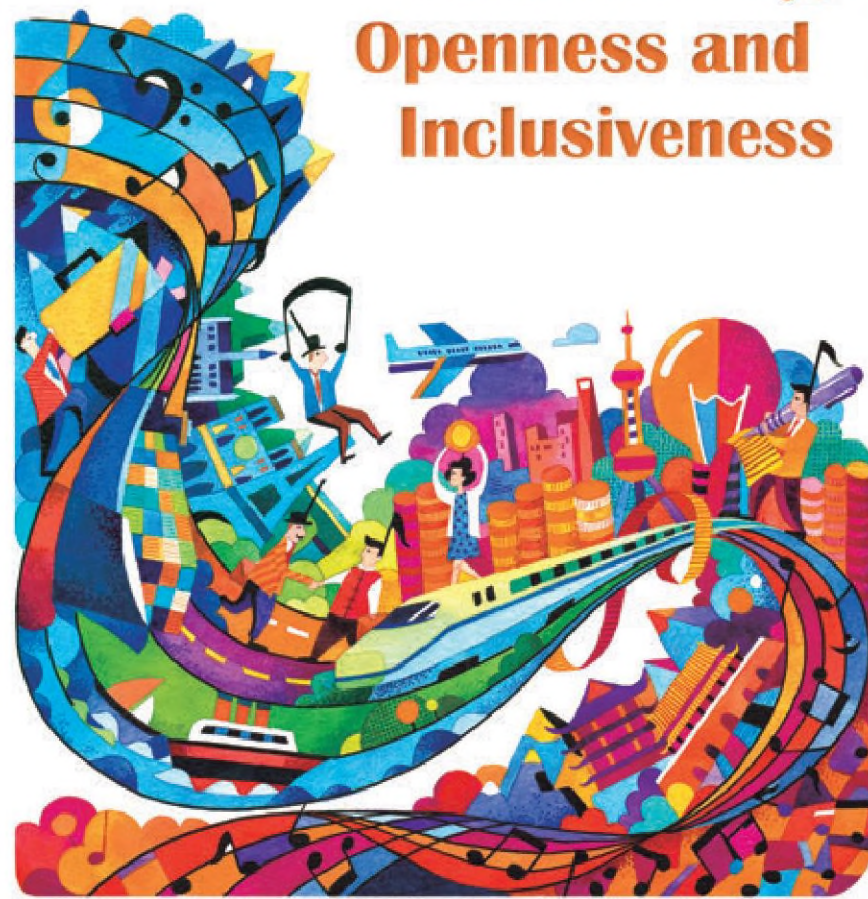
## Telecom revenues expand in Jan-Feb

Emerging businesses and "new infrastructure" helped expand China's telecommunication industry in the first two months of this year. Business revenues totaled 280.3 billion yuan (\$40.8 billion), up nearly 8 percent year-on-year, according to official data. Emerging sectors like internet data centers, cloud computing and the internet of things saw their revenues rise around 26 percent year-on-year, enabling overall telecom business revenues to increase by 5 percentage points. The data also reveal the steady progress China has made in advancing new infrastructure construction. The country had 2.38 million 5G base stations by the end of February, 72,100 more than at the end of last year.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY

# The Belt and Road Initiative

## Connectivity, Openness and Inclusiveness



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# BUSINESS



Employees of Maersk Air Cargo, a unit of A.P. Moller-Maersk, load goods onto an aircraft departing for Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, at an airport in Billund, Denmark on March 20. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Maersk optimistic on robust growth opportunities

By ZHONG NAN  
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Danish shipping and logistics services provider A.P. Moller-Maersk will continue to pursue opportunities to maintain robust growth in China across the full spectrum of the logistics chain, said its top executive.

After launching an air freight service between Billund, Denmark and Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, last week, the Copenhagen-based group will soon start an air cargo service between China and the United States.

China's foreign trade will normalize at a higher level of activity in 2023 after the country optimized its COVID-19 response late last year. Its exports and imports with the rest of the world have not been impacted much, said Vincent Clerc, CEO of A.P. Moller-Maersk.

"To what extent it will de-risk the global economy depends on the strength of the recovery as it shapes up," the Swiss executive said, adding that the group is relatively optimistic regarding the Chinese economy for 2023 and sees growing business opportunities ahead.

As one of the world's largest shipping groups by sales revenue, Maersk, supported by more than 110,000 employees, operates in

“When you consider the expectations for the intra-Asia markets, it is evident that they are poised for positive growth and projected to be the world's fastest-growing market in 2023.”

Vincent Clerc, CEO of A.P. Moller-Maersk

130 countries and regions with a fleet of more than 700 container vessels.

Instead of focusing heavily on the ocean shipping business, Clerc said the group is keen to provide integrated logistics, from maritime shipping and port operations to air and land-based business. It has continued to invest in China over the past three years.

Maersk invested \$174 million in the Lin-gang Special Area of the China (Shanghai) Pilot Free Trade Zone to build its first green and smart logistics center last year. Covering an area of around 113,000

square meters — or larger than 15 football fields — the facility will have a warehousing storage capacity of 150,000 sq m.

Once it opens in the third quarter of 2024, the new logistics center will provide agile and sustainable solutions for customers, including international export consolidation, regional and global order fulfillment and distribution, cross-border e-commerce and other value-added logistics services.

"When you consider the expectations for the intra-Asia markets, it is evident that they are poised for positive growth and projected to be the world's fastest-growing market in 2023," said Clerc, emphasizing that the intra-Asia network is a stronghold with an expected 3.5 percent growth rate in container markets between Asian economies.

With Asia's evolving role in the global economy as both a manufacturing and consumption market, Maersk aims to provide customers with integrated logistics solutions to meet their needs, he added.

Eager to reinforce its earning strength on the Chinese mainland and the Asia-Pacific region, Maersk completed the acquisition of LF Logistics, a Hong Kong-based contract logistics company, with premium capabilities within omnichannel fulfillment services, e-commerce and inland transport

in the Asia-Pacific region in 2022.

With a total transaction value of \$3.6 billion, Maersk has added 223 warehouses, including 73 such facilities across the Chinese mainland, to its existing portfolio, bringing the total number of facilities to 549 globally.

As China's industrial upgrade gains momentum, it will increasingly contribute to stabilizing global supply chains, just as it did during the three years of COVID-19 disruptions. This will facilitate the smooth running of the world economy, said Lin Meng, director of the Modern Supply Chain Research Institute, which is part of the Beijing-based Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation.

She noted that China has a complete supply chain support system, strong logistics, a large market and favorable government policies promoting innovation, making it an attractive destination for global companies, especially amid headwinds such as a gloomy global economic outlook and geoeconomic fragmentation.

Boosted by these factors, foreign direct investment into the Chinese mainland, in terms of actual use, rose 6.1 percent year-on-year to 268.44 billion yuan (\$39.09 billion) in the first two months of 2023, data from the Ministry of Commerce showed.

## Saudi Aramco eyes bigger green role

Oil giant plans production expansion to fuel China's efforts toward carbon goals

By ZHENG XIN  
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Saudi Aramco will support China's domestic energy security by expanding its oil and gas production capacity while reducing its oil production carbon intensity to facilitate the country's green transition, said a top company official.

"Saudi Aramco aims to play a key role at the heart of China's long-term energy security and high-quality development," said Amin H. Nasser, president and CEO of the company, during the China Development Forum in Beijing.

The climate change mitigation goals cannot be achieved at the expense of energy security. Saudi Aramco will expand its oil production capacity to 13 million barrels per day by 2027 while increasing gas production by more than 50 percent by 2030 to fuel China's efforts to this end, Nasser said.

The CEO said the company — the world's largest oil exporter — is also working on green solutions, such as advanced carbon capture and storage and circular carbon economy technologies, as "China's venture capital space offers important investment opportunities to stimulate the technology development and innovation required".

Aramco said on Monday that its wholly-owned unit Aramco Overseas Co will acquire a 10 percent stake in Shenzhen-listed Rongsheng Petrochemical Co Ltd for 24.6 billion yuan, which is expected to expand its downstream presence in China.

Aramco will supply 480,000 b/d of Arabian crude to a Rongsheng subsidiary — Zhejiang Petroleum and Chemical Co Ltd — under a long-term sales agreement.

The company also said on Sunday that it will kick off construction this year of a major integrated refinery and petrochemical complex in Panjin, Liaoning province, which will receive 210,000 b/d of crude after completion from Aramco. The facility will be fully operational by 2026.

Aramco has a 30 percent stake in the complex through its joint venture Huajin Aramco Petrochemical Co with China North Industries Group Corp, or Norinco, which holds a majority share of 51 percent. Panjin Xincheng Industrial Group owns the remaining stake of 19 percent.

The project represents "a major milestone in our ongoing downstream expansion strategy in China and the wider region, which is an increasingly significant driver of global petrochemical demand", said Mohammed Yahya Al-Qahtani, Aramco executive vice-president of downstream.

Multinational corporations have been continuing to prioritize downstream assets in China, as demand in the country is expected to continue growing along with economic recovery, said Lin Boqiang, head of the China Institute for Studies in Energy Policy at Xiamen University.

Saudi Arabia is China's top crude supplier, while China is also central to Aramco's strategy to diversify into more specialized high-value chemical products and less carbon-intensive hydrocarbon usage at the same time, Lin said.

Market fluctuations will lead to more cooperation between countries rich in resources and big energy consumers, and are mutually beneficial in refining, as well as science and technology research and development, he added.

The company also signed a memorandum of cooperation with the Guangdong provincial government on Sunday to jointly explore investment opportunities in energy cooperation, research and innovation and industrial projects.

Saudi Aramco is willing to strengthen cooperation with Guangdong in petrochemicals, hydrogen energy and ammonia energy, to support Guangdong in developing more sustainable petrochemical industries, he said.

The CEO said: "We want to be an all-inclusive source of energy and chemicals for China's long-term energy security and China's high-quality development. That is why we are doubling down on China's energy supply, including new lower carbon products, chemicals and advanced materials, all supported by emissions reduction technologies."

Looking forward to the Chinese market, Nasser said he sees a major win-win opportunity to build a world-leading, integrated downstream sector in China, with special emphasis on the high conversion of liquids directly into chemicals as part of the company's broader liquid-to-chemicals business expansion plans.

## Epson to intensify investment on back of nation's digital transformation wave

By FAN FEIFEI  
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Japanese electronics maker Seiko Epson will intensify efforts to expand investments in China and launch more eco-friendly, innovative and tailor-made products that cater to the demand of Chinese consumers, in hopes of seizing emerging opportunities brought by the digital and smart transformation wave, said a senior executive of the company.

"As one of the first foreign companies to enter the Chinese market, Epson has always regarded the Chinese market as one of the most important markets across the globe," said Akihiro Fukaiishi, chairman and president of Epson China.

"The Chinese market has shown strong vitality and innovative ability, and there is a constant demand from consumers and commercial segments," Fukaiishi said, adding the emergence of new business models, new formats and new technologies has stimulated Epson to optimize its products, solutions and services.

For instance, the company launched its household projectors last year, which are based on the unique needs of Chinese users who are willing to watch films via mobile devices.

It has carried out cooperation with Chinese equipment manufacturers in the field of print heads in a bid to help the digital transformation of China's digital printing industry at a faster pace, Fukaiishi said.

Data from global market research firm International Data Corporation showed that the cumulative sales of Epson ink tank printers in China reached more than 10 million units, topping the list in the Chinese market for 11 consecutive years.

Its projector business ranked first in China in the fiscal year of 2021, accounting for 34.2 percent of shares in the country's projector market, said market consultancy Futuresource Consulting Ltd.

The Chinese government has attached great importance to green and sustainable development in recent years, which coincides with Epson's emphasis on its "efficient, compact and precision" philosophy.

As stated in Epson's Environmental Vision 2050, the company seeks to become carbon negative and eliminate the use of exhaustible underground resources such as oil and metals by 2050.

Fukaiishi said he is bullish about the prospects of China's economic growth and the company will continue to provide more green and

innovative products and services for Chinese users.

He said that with the steady recovery of China's economy, Epson will invest more in products with strong demand, especially customized products for the Chinese market, such as household projectors.

Noting that China is at the global forefront of digital development, he emphasized that smart and digital transformation have been regarded as one business opportunity that Epson shouldn't neglect in China.

Epson is speeding up its localization and digitalization efforts in the world's second-largest economy by rolling out a WeChat cloud printing service, which will further satisfy the needs of Chinese users who are inclined to communicate through WeChat.

It will also expand the application of robotic solutions in the photovoltaic, lithium battery and new energy vehicle sectors. "We hope to cooperate with more outstanding Chinese and overseas partners in different fields to roll out more new products and solutions," Fukaiishi added.

The optimization of the COVID-19 measures has injected strong impetus into the stable development and future growth of Epson's business in China. Fukaiishi has con-



A visitor checks out an Epson augmented reality product during a high-tech expo in Wuzhen, Zhejiang province, in November. JIANG HAN / XINHUA

fidence in the company's prospects, fueled by the robust recovery of domestic consumption demand.

Data from the Ministry of Commerce showed that foreign direct investment or FDI on the Chinese mainland, in terms of actual use, expanded 6 percent year-on-year to 268.44 billion yuan (\$39.09 billion)

in the first two months of this year. Specifically, FDI in high-tech manufacturing surged 68.9 percent from the same period a year ago, while that in the high-tech service sector rose 23.3 percent year-on-year.

Zhang Jianping, director-general of the Beijing-based China Center

for Regional Economic Cooperation, said the implementation of a new round of opening-up measures, such as the Foreign Investment Law, the shortened negative list for market entry, and pilot free trade zones, has created favorable conditions for foreign businesses to invest in China.

# BUSINESSFOCUS

By ZHENG YIRAN

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With buying power rising among young, heritage-minded consumers, domestic cosmetics brands are winning hearts with *guochao* — a trend that is seeing younger buyers drawn to products with Chinese cultural elements.

In one case, brands are embracing solar term or *jieqi* marketing, a concept based on China's ancient calendar, incorporating elements of lunar and solar calendars, which divides the year into 24 periods. This type of marketing is used to inject a sense of nature into beauty routines.

Chinese cosmetics brand Timage launched a product series in the third quarter of 2022 based on the theme of *liqiu*, the 13th solar term, which starts around Aug 8 and signals the beginning of fall.

Grain Rain, a Chinese skincare brand, is inspired by the eighth solar term, *guyu*, referring to early crops, which starts around April 20. It was accompanied by a spring-inspired marketing campaign represented by actress Zhou Dongyu in April 2022. It uses the solar term's traditional association with picking herbs to reinforce the label's herbal skincare branding.

Likewise, Hangzhou-based beauty brand Huaxizi, called Florasis in English, has been marketing "solar term makeup" since the beginning of 2021. It suggests wearing different makeup for different solar periods, such as *chunfen*, or spring equinox; *xiaoshu*, or minor heat; *baifu*, or white dew; and *daxue*, or major snow.

That numerous brands are using the ancient calendar as a seasonal marker reflects a broader revival in China of heritage-related products, especially among younger consumers.

"We have always integrated culture with cosmetics and combined traditional Chinese culture with fashion. Solar terms, as an excellent part of traditional culture, represent Chinese customs and lifestyles, so integrating solar terms into our products was not done on a whim. We aren't doing it for a short-term connection with consumers. It's a long-term thing we are doing," said Lin Zengsheng, branding director of Huaxizi.

Consumers are expressing confidence in themselves by using Chinese brands, marketing experts said. Also, their identification with Chinese cultural elements incorporated by the brands is a reflection of the improvement of national strength and the return of the collective aesthetic, they said.

Generation Z — those born from the mid-to-late 1990s and into the 2000s and a major consumer group — is being affected by the country's cultural renaissance and the development of the internet. They are more independent in their choices and have a greater sense of national identity, experts said.

With the rise of *guochao*, and the influence of the expansion of China's manufacturing ability, consumers are showing an increased preference for domestic cosmetics



Consumers shop at domestic beauty brand Huaxizi's store near the West Lake in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, in December. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## Culture a winner for cosmetics brands

Domestic firms find younger shoppers drawn to products that incorporate traditional associations

brands, according to a recent report issued by consulting firm Ernst & Young. Although China's high-end cosmetics market has been dominated for a number of years by international brands, the market influence of homegrown brands has been rapidly rising.

A white paper issued by Tencent Inc states that domestic cosmetics companies have a market share of 56 percent. It said 60 percent of surveyed consumers prefer to purchase domestic cosmetics brands, while 42 percent had a strong willingness to make repeat purchases of those brands.

Also, the post-90s generation is becoming an important source of customers for domestic cosmetics, accounting for nearly 50 percent of sales of those products, according to the white paper.

"With young people becoming



A L'Oréal product series gets inspiration from *jieqi*, a concept based on China's ancient calendar that divides the year into 24 periods, during the fifth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the backbone of consumer buying, *guochao* is entering a new stage in which Chinese brands, Chinese culture and Chinese technology will lead to new fashion trends and lifestyles," the white paper said.

"Among the numerous *guochao* categories, cosmetics, as one of the most popular categories, is expected to embrace rapid development. It is estimated that China's cosmetics market will surpass 500 billion yuan (\$72.65 billion) by 2023," added the white paper.

In China's third-tier and smaller cities, the penetration rate of domestic cosmetics surpasses 90 percent, and the growth rate of lip balm and lipstick sales has been over 60 percent for two consecutive years, according to a report launched by Juhuasuan, the group-buying arm of e-commerce giant Alibaba.

A survey from iiMedia Research showed that in 2022, 36 percent of the surveyed Chinese consumers spent between 200 yuan and 500 yuan on cosmetics monthly, while 35.5 percent spent between 500 yuan and 1,000 yuan monthly.

"With people's makeup and skincare awareness rising and the recovery of the economy, it is expected that China's cosmetics market will see more growth," iiMedia Research said in a survey report.

According to the survey, nearly half of the surveyed consumers considered *guochao* cosmetics creative and were willing to support its development, while nearly 30 percent of interviewees thought *guochao* cosmetics interesting but were taking a wait-and-see stance.

"Although domestic cosmetics have made gains using the idea of *guochao*, the product itself is important. Only when quality matches appearance will the product win the hearts of consumers," said iiMedia Research.

On Feb 15, Huaxizi launched a pop-up store in Tokyo, Japan, the company's first overseas. It sets the mood with a classical Chinese garden display and decorative styles of ancient China.

The store showcases most of Huaxizi's products, including Flawless Jade Breathable Setting Powder and Concentric Lock Lipstick. The pop-up store drew attention on its first day, attracting nearly 100 media staffers and over 500 consumers.

"We chose Japan as our first destination for an overseas pop-up store because Chinese and Japanese cultures share the same origin, and it is easier for Japanese customers to understand and accept Asian aesthetics and cultural implications in our products," said Lin of Huaxizi. "We hope that through some face-to-face interactions, Huaxizi will better understand Japanese users' beauty habits and beauty culture, and Japanese users will also understand Huaxizi better and see the quality and beauty coming from China."

He added that "to some extent, our going global process is not only the internationalization of our products but the internationalization of Chinese culture. We are not doing overseas 'cultural marketing' deliberately. Everything happens naturally."

"We believe that beauty is pluralistic and has commonality, national beauty is world beauty and a product can be the best carrier of culture and aesthetics. We have always insisted on integrating culture with products, and then the world take notice."

Chen Jia, a researcher at the International Monetary Institute of the Renmin University of China, said: "The rise of *guochao*-empowered cosmetics is an inevitable trend during China's modernization process. To realize high-quality development, domestic cosmetics brands should promote technological advancement and the integration of culture and products. In this way, they can stand out in the market and win the trust of consumers."

## International makeup companies get inspiration from Chinese aesthetics

By ZHU WENQIAN

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More international cosmetics brands have embraced traditional Chinese culture and strengthened local research and development. The efforts are being made to attract more young Chinese consumers, who have become increasingly confident about national culture and shown personalized demand, industry experts said.

International brands have begun to regard the ancient Chinese calendar as a seasonal symbol of fashion, reflecting the revival of traditions. The calendar, incorporating elements of lunar and solar calendars, can divide the year into 24 periods, or *jieqi*.

Japanese skincare brand IPSA of the Shiseido Group cosmetics company produced a weather broadcast last year to announce *qiufen* — the fall equinox — when the sun is exactly above the equator. It promoted its products by publicizing what it called the need for moisturizing during fall's harsh weather.

Unlike many other kinds of marketing, efforts that integrate solar terms can reflect a more emotional aspect, such as nostalgia, elements of daily life and personal stories. Beauty brands prefer to market products with solar terms because it gives them a



Estee Lauder's beauty products are displayed at the fifth CIIE in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

chance to release limited-edition products that fit with the ancient calendar in order to attract consumers with discounts and other promotional events.

In one such case, using *lixia* — the beginning of summer — a solar term that indicates that temperatures are expected to rise, many brands advertise skincare tips and promote the use of their products, industry observers said.

"It's a good phenomenon for international cosmetics brands to market their products by integrat-

ing Chinese culture. It shows that global brands are aware of the competitiveness of local brands," said Cheng Guangcan, an analyst at the LeadLeo Research Institute, a market research provider.

"In the past few years, Chinese consumers' preferences for cosmetics have been changing. Before, international brands almost occupied a monopoly position in the domestic market. With the emergence of more domestic brands and the growing cultural confidence of Chinese consumers, domestic



Consumers browse the IPSA booth during the fifth CIIE in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

brands have started to account for a greater market share," Cheng said.

Still, global brands should maintain their original style and image when they pursue localization strategies to retain their recognition by Chinese consumers, she added.

International cosmetics brands have also been integrating elements of traditional Chinese festivals to market their products. During this year's Spring Festival, many brands collaborated with renowned artists and combined traditional Chinese arts to introduce limited editions of

products for the Year of the Rabbit.

High-end skincare brand Fresh worked with domestic paper-cut artist Qiu Jia to use paper-cut designs in the packaging of its products. Shiseido also worked with paper-cut artist Chen Fenwan to launch limited-edition packaging for Spring Festival.

US skincare group Estee Lauder opened its China Innovation Labs in Shanghai in December. The company said it is a world-class R&D center to help its brand develop more beauty products that cater to

young Chinese customers.

Estee Lauder said those customers have become increasingly open-minded and sophisticated as they pursue novel and distinctive products. The company said it will continue to strengthen its personalized exploration and may acquire more brands that young people like.

"We will achieve the goal of serving Chinese and overseas consumers with R&D in China and develop more brands that fit with the demand of young Chinese consumers," said Joy Fan, president of Estee Lauder China.

"We are confident about the growth potential in China in the long term and will continue to increase investment in the Hainan Free Trade Port. We will also further expand marketing both online and through brick-and-mortar stores," she said.

Young Chinese consumers, especially Generation Z consumers — those born in the mid- and late-1990s and into the 2000s — are playing an increasingly important role in the domestic market for cosmetics.

"Young Chinese consumers prefer products with beautiful packaging. Brands can be more innovative in the design of their packaging to create different visual experiences and win the favor of young customers," said Cheng of the LeadLeo institute.