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WORLD USA

'Indirect trade' puts US-China import drop in different light

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Young students gather for Model United Nations

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High-end equipment

Rising demand for animal medical devices buoys domestic makers

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CHINA DAILY

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Dancers perform on Tuesday during the closing ceremony of the Chengdu FISU World University Games at the Chengdu Open Air Music Park in the Sichuan provincial capital. WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY **See story, page 3**

Stronger policy support needed to boost exports

Intensive measures key to tackling weak global demand, shoring up foreign trade, experts say

By **WANG KEJU**
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China's foreign trade grew steadily in the first seven months of the year but exports in July declined at a steeper-than-expected pace amid subdued global consumer demand, which highlights the need to roll out stronger policy steps to further boost the country's foreign trade, experts said on Tuesday.

High-tech and green products, the diversification of trading partners in emerging markets and more intensive government support should serve as key factors in sustaining the stable performance of exports, as part of the efforts to better support the country's sound economic recovery, they added.

Their comments came after data released by the General Administration of Customs on Tuesday showed that the country's foreign trade grew by 0.4 percent year-on-year to 23.55 trillion yuan ($3.27 trillion) in the first seven months.

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Lyu Daliang, a spokesman for the GAC, said that the country's foreign trade has been running smoothly in general and is in line with expectations while the long-term good fundamentals have not changed.

It is worth noting that China's exports in July declined 9.2 percent from a year ago to 2.02 trillion yuan while imports shrank 6.9 percent year-on-year to 1.44 trillion yuan, the data showed.

Li Dawei, researcher at the Chinese Academy of Macroeconomic Research's Institute for International Economy, said the authorities should offer services such as exchange rate hedging, process export tax rebates faster, expand the scale of export credit insurance services and enhance customs clearance to help foreign trade firms reduce costs and overcome difficulties.

Meanwhile, it's of great importance to foster new drivers of export growth amid falling global demand for the country's traditional export products such as electronic items, clothing and footwear, Li said.

Tech-intensive green products such as solar batteries, lithium-ion batteries and electric vehicles will be given more prominence to shore up foreign trade growth further, Li said, adding that it will help the country to move up the global value chain and facilitate industrial upgrading at home.

According to statistics from the GAC, in the first seven months, automobile exports surged 118.5 percent year-on-year to 383.73 billion yuan, while the exports of cellphones and labor-intensive products fell 6.5 percent and 2.1 percent, respectively, year-on-year.

The year-on-year slump in China's exports for three consecutive months since May can be attributed to sagging global trade demand amid central banks raising interest rates to curb inflation by reining in business and consumer activity, said Zhang Jingjing, chief macroeconomic analyst for China Merchants Securities.

Although the depreciation of the RMB exchange rate in recent months has increased the profitability of export-oriented enterprises and enhanced the willingness of foreign customers to place orders to a certain extent, the overall external demand for China's exports has not yet improved, Zhang said.

It is crucial to diversify export sources to counter the squeezed demand in the United States and Europe, said Xu Hongcai, deputy director of the economic policy committee of the China Association of Policy Science.

Further efforts should be made to scale up trade cooperation with economies involved in the Belt and Road Initiative, as well as member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Xu said.

Data from the GAC showed that China's trade with ASEAN member economies and with countries involved in the BRI registered a 2.8 percent and 7.4 percent year-on-year increase respectively in the January to July period.

STUDENT-ATHLETES SHOW SPORTING SPIRIT IN CHENGDU

Games highlight growth of university sports development

By **SHI FUTIAN** in Chengdu
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in-depth

Many student-athletes saw their sporting dreams come true at the Chengdu FISU World University Games, which ended in the Sichuan provincial capital on Tuesday.

A spectacular stage for the athletes to perform to their best, the games marked not only career milestones for the competitors, but also bore testimony to the rapid growth of university sports development in China.

Liu Lixin, deputy head of the Chinese delegation and vice-president of the Federation of University Sports of China, said, "The games are not just a great platform for student-athletes from across the world to compete together, they also offer a great opportunity for the students to show their sporting spirit to the world.

"The participation of the Chinese delegation is the best showcase for the growth of university sports in the nation in recent years. Facilitating such development is important in improving the physical health of our students, and a crucial way to find and nurture future sports stars."

*See **Games,** page 2*

WORLD WATCH
By Adhere Cavince

Time to harness full potential of Sino-Kenyan cooperation

The recently concluded visit by Foreign Minister Wang Yi to Kenya, the first since William Ruto assumed office as the country's president, provided a good opportunity for China and Kenya to strengthen ties and improve economic cooperation.

The visit came as the two countries mark 60 years of diplomatic relations.

China is Kenya's largest trade partner and top investor, and Kenya is the landing point for the Belt and Road Initiative in Africa. Under the China-proposed initiative, launched in 2013, Kenya and China have worked together to deliver many infrastructure projects, including the Standard Gauge Railway, Nairobi Expressway, Global Trade Centre and the Mombasa oil terminal. These are flagship projects of the Kenya Vision 2030 program and play a pivotal role in anchoring Kenya's economic transformation.

Wang, who is also director of the Office of the Foreign Affairs Commission of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, is particularly suited to advancing the partnership dialogue between Kenya and China. He brings history, experience and continuity in promoting constructive dialogue that aims for inclusive development and prosperity between the two nations. He also has witnessed the rapid development in

*See **Kenya,** page 3*

Chinese pop artist's 'revenge' song goes viral, triggers debates

By **CHEN NAN**
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Few people expected that a new song written and performed by Chinese pop singer-songwriter Daolang, who kept himself out of the limelight for years, would go viral on social media.

However, the track *Luocha Haishi (A Market in a Faraway Land)* — one of the 11 original songs from the 52-year-old artist's latest album titled *Shan Ge Liao Zai (Folk Songs Fading Away)* — has topped the charts on several Chinese music apps and has become one of the biggest hits of the year so far.

The song, which was released on July 19, garnered 8 billion streams by 6 pm on July 30, according to Tide News, a news app affiliated with Zhejiang Daily Press Group.

Some people have volunteered to translate the song into other languages and adapt it into other art forms including traditional Chinese opera.

The curiosity surrounding the song seems to be driving its popularity. Social media users are furiously debating if the lyrics have hidden meanings.

Reading between the lines, some online listeners said the song is a stinging satire on the current "unhealthy and chaotic environment in show business" in China, while others see *Luocha Haishi* as Daolang's "revenge" on people who once despised his music.

According to the album's introduction, *Shan Ge Liao Zai is a* mix of *Liaozhai Zhiyi*, or *Strange Stories From a Chinese Studio*, which is a collection of ghost stories by Qing Dynasty (1644-1911) writer Pu Songling, and Chinese folk songs of different regions.

> "I don't know whether the song is targeted at a certain group of people or one person. What makes it meaningful is that it fuels discussions and makes people think."
>
> **Miao Huaiming,** professor of the School of Liberal Arts at Nanjing University

"*Shan Ge Liao Zai* is Daolang's attempt to explore popular Chinese folk music and folk tales after his 2020 album, *The Book of Plucking Rhymes*, which highlighted the folk music of regions on the southern banks of the Yangtze River," it said.

The lyrics of *Luocha Haishi* is adapted from a *Liaozhai Zhiyi* tale by the same name, which talks about a man's adventure in a faraway kingdom called Luocha. The people of this imaginary land regard ugliness as beauty, call black white and confuse between right and wrong.

The music is based on Tianjin Shidiao, a unique music genre in Tianjin that originated under the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644).

"I am impressed that Daolang adapted (into a song) a tale from the *Liaozhai Zhiyi*. It's so cool to write songs to express sarcasm without using any nasty words," a fan wrote on Sina Weibo.

Another user said: "The song portrays a music industry where people tend to like the same songs. Music companies try to churn out hits just to make money, and the music is boring as a result."

In an interview with Yangzi Evening News on July 28, Miao Huaiming, a professor at Nanjing University's School of Liberal Arts, said that Daolang uses Luocha, the kingdom in folk tale, as a metaphor for the music industry.

"As a researcher on classic Chinese literature, I support Daolang, whose new song is creative and gives *Liaozhai Zhiyi* a new interpretation. I don't know whether the song is targeted at a certain group of people or one person. What makes it meaningful is that it fuels discussions and makes people think," Miao said.

Born as Luo Lin in Neijiang, Sichuan province, Daolang moved to the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region in the 1990s and founded his music studio. He was deeply influenced by Chinese folk music, especially the music of various ethnic groups.

In 2004, he rose to fame with an album called *The First Snowfall in 2002*. Though the album and the title song won many awards in China and the album sold millions of copies, some critics scoffed at Daolang's music.

Chinese singer Na Ying once said Daolang's songs "lacked aesthetics", and in 2010, she refused to select him as one of the "Top 10 Influential Chinese Singers".

*See **Song,** page 3*

Power struggle



Diesel containers are brought to refill a generator in Niamey, the capital of Niger, on Monday. Nigeria announced on Aug 2 that it was cutting off electricity supply to its neighbor in line with the sanctions imposed by Niger's West African neighbors. AFP

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PAGE TWO

Games: Thousands of competitors attracted



University basketball players compete in a match in Chongqing this month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

From page 1

"The stories of Chinese student-athletes who excel at these Games by showing an exemplary sporting spirit can attract more young people to learn about, embrace and love sports. Taking part in sports is highly beneficial to students, as it brings them fun, makes them healthier, and forges a strong mentality."

The Chengdu FISU Games attracted 6,500 student-athletes from a total of 113 countries and regions. The Team China delegation comprised over 700 members. The average age of the Chinese athletes was 22.9 years, and the squad was gender-balanced, with women comprising 205 of the 411 athletes.

A number of young Chinese athletes did exceptionally well at the Games, including Xia Yuyu, who won gold in the women's 10,000 meters. A student-athlete at Tsinghua University, Xia has been a regular competitor in many domestic and international long-distance running events. Notably, she was a winner at last year's Beijing Marathon.

"I really want to thank my university, which helped me solve many problems during preparations for the Games in Chengdu. It's not been easy for my coach, who has had to attend to all the details of my training and daily life," Xia said.

"The great result I achieved should be credited to the terrific support from my university, my coaching team and the Federation of University Sports of China. They offer me a lot so that I can perform to my best ability on the track."

This year's event was Xia's last competitive appearance at the Games. She said she pushed herself to the limit to achieve the best possible result. Before the Games, she ran for 30 kilometers during training each day.

"I don't have any regrets in appearing at my last World University Games. I know how hard it is to win an athletics gold medal at these Games, so I just wanted to give it a try. I was determined not to give up," Xia added.

"My biggest wish after winning is that my story can inspire more young people to embrace sports. Throughout my competitive career, I have aimed to show the best sporting spirit of a Chinese student-athlete. I have a never-say-die spirit, and I hope this will have a positive influence on the younger generation."

The growth of university sports in China is not solely due to student-athletes, as coaches also play a crucial role — one example being Xia's coach, Cao Zhenshui.

"No words can express my excitement. Xia Yuyu is a student with great ambition, and she has put in a lot of hard effort. We achieved our dream," Cao said.

After graduating from Beijing Sport University, Cao joined Tsinghua University as a physical education teacher in the 1980s. Recalling that time, he said the equipment used was not up to standard.

The coach told China Youth Daily: "When I first took charge of the middle- and long-distance running team at the university, we didn't have that many runners. It was hard for us to win a title at a municipal-level tournament in Beijing.

"We didn't have enough equipment. A jersey bearing the name 'Tsinghua' was shared by several runners. One of them washed the jersey after competition, before handing it to another runner for the next tournament."

Cao said that due to the growth of university sports in China, training conditions have improved rapidly in recent decades.

Now, with considerable support from the government and other areas of society, a number of promising Chinese student-athletes have shone on the world stage thanks to scientific training methods and state-of-the-art venues, facilities and equipment.

More than medals

However, not all student-athletes can win medals at events such as the World University Games. For the most of them, taking part in sports is important, as this can have a deep influence on their lives.

For example, failing to win a medal at the Games in Chengdu will not change the love of athletics harbored by Chinese twin brothers Xing Jiadong and Xing Jialiang. In 2020, they entered Peking University, and since childhood, sports have played a key part in their lives.

The twins' father, a PE teacher at a middle school in Inner Mongolia autonomous region, specialized in events such as the shot put and discus.

Xing Jiadong, who finished ninth in the men's discus at the Chengdu Games, said: "We learned these sports from our father when we were kids, and we trained more professionally in middle school. We first practiced the shot put, and then the discus. Our father initially just wanted us to have healthy bodies, but sports gradually became our hobby and passion."

The twins attended middle school in Beijing, where they continued to train.

Xing Jialiang, who was born first, said this was quite a tough time for them. Each day, they had to train late at night after completing their school work, but their passion for sports and their support for each other helped them get through.

"If my brother trains alone, he might miss some details of his training, so I have to be there. We look after each other and offer advice and encouragement to one another. It's always better for us to be together," said Xing Jialiang, who finished fourth in the men's shot put in Chengdu.





Clockwise from top left: University students exercise and take part in a hurdles race. ZHAO QIRUI AND HAO QUNYING / FOR CHINA DAILY. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



> "The stories of Chinese student-athletes who excel at these Games by showing an exemplary sporting spirit can attract more young people to learn about, embrace and love sports."
>
> **Liu Lixin,** vice-president of the Federation of University Sports of China



University players take part in a soccer match in Shanghai in May. ZHANG WEI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Despite failing to win a medal at the Games, the brothers' love of athletics remains as strong as ever.

Xing Jiadong said: "I was so proud to attend the opening ceremony as a member of the Chinese delegation. I felt the passion of Chengdu and all the people here. This will be a lifetime memory for me. I will now train harder in sports and also at law school."

Encouraging more students to embrace sports and adopt healthier lifestyles has always been a priority for the International University Sports Federation. The organization proposed and developed the FISU Healthy Campus program, which aims to enhance all aspects of well-being for students and campus communities in general.

FISU acting president Leonz Eder said: "It's a mix of education, culture and sport. We also take great care of the huge number of students on campus who do not compete at the Games.

"Less than 1 percent of sports students worldwide make it to the top, but tens of millions of students need a healthy lifestyle and good nutrition. That's why we started to promote the Healthy Campus program."

A number of elite coaches and team leaders, including former Olympic and world champions, are behind the student-athletes who excelled at the Games in Chengdu, and the coaches' participation in university sports is always welcomed.

One such example is Ding Ning, who joined the Chengdu Games as deputy leader of the Chinese table tennis squad.

"I just told the players competing in the World University Games for the first time that they needed to be focused, play each match well, and have the best preparation," Ding said.

"A young player told me days before the Games that she was very nervous playing in front of a home crowd. I told her that she needed to get used to the noise from the stands and consider it as support."

Competitive return

Ding, one of the most iconic players in the history of Chinese table tennis, won a gold and a silver medal at the 2012 London Olympics, before pocketing another two golds four years later at the Games in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil.

After retiring in 2021, Ding pursued postgraduate studies at Peking University, where she graduated last month. She then returned to competition in Chengdu in a new role as deputy team leader.

"Training philosophies have evolved in university sports. For example, we used to focus solely on skills, but now we place more emphasis on the overall physical condition of an athlete. We also have smart equipment to monitor athletes' vital signs during training, which is very useful in prolonging their careers and avoiding injuries," Ding said.

Chinese badminton icon Li Xuerui, who won the women's singles gold medal at the 2012 London Olympics, was a star coach at the Chengdu Games.

"I'm proud to coach the Chinese badminton squad at the Games. They trust me, and I shoulder this responsibility. I just want to pass my experience on to the younger generation of players," said Li, who retired in 2019 before becoming a university badminton instructor.

"I never took part in the World University Games as a player, but student-athletes can always make an impression with their energy and vitality, and I love the atmosphere at the Chengdu Games," Li said.

"From being a player to becoming a teacher, my roles have changed, and the feeling is very different. When I was a player, I just focused on myself, but now I have to think more about my students and how to attract more people to the sport of badminton.

"The World University Games are a great platform for young student-athletes to experience a major international event. The experience they have gained in Chengdu will inspire them for sure."

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TOP NEWS



Susan Mai Easterbrook Cole (fourth left) and Nancy Easterbrook Millward (third left), great-granddaughters of the late United States General Joseph Stilwell, and other guests unveil a poster on Tuesday for a photo exhibition on the life of Stilwell at the Chongqing Stilwell Museum.
DENG RUI / CHINA DAILY

Chongqing salutes lasting legacy of US General Joseph Stilwell

By TAN YINGZI in Chongqing
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Stories about the late United States Army General Joseph Stilwell have never been forgotten in Chongqing, and new chapters have been added to the saga.

On Tuesday, to commemorate 140 years since Stilwell's birth on March 19, 1883, the city held a series of events fondly remembering the hero who fought side by side with the Chinese people during the latter part of the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45).

In front of Stilwell's former residence, a three-story cliff house near the Jialing River, his great-granddaughters Susan Mai Easterbrook Cole and Nancy Easterbrook Millward planted an osmanthus tree, which symbolizes friendship, loftiness and peace, together with Liu Ning and Liu Yinna, the great-grandson and great-granddaughter, respectively, of Chinese People's Liberation Army Commander-in-Chief Zhu De.

Although the two military leaders never met, they admired and respected each other, forming a deep cross-national friendship while resisting Japan's aggression. Their descendants have continued the friendship over the years.

Chongqing served as the nation's temporary capital during the war. The general's residence in the city was converted into a museum dedicated to his service that opened to the public in 1994.

Stilwell is the only high-ranking US military figure who has a museum dedicated to his memory in China.

Themed "Remember our shared struggle for peace: Carry on China-US people-to-people friendship", the commemorations on Tuesday included, in addition to the planting of friendship trees, a photo exhibition, a symposium and field visits in Chongqing.

"Stilwell's legacy of friendship with the Chinese people and the contributions that flowed from that friendship should be remembered and built upon," the general's grandson John Easterbrook told the audience via video link during the opening ceremony of the symposium.

The Stilwell Museum has contributed and will continue to contribute to remembering his legacy by hosting people-to-people activities, he added.

> "General Stilwell's legacy is not merely one of military achievement, but one of mutual respect, shared purpose and the spirit of cooperation."
>
> **Jason Rubin,** representative in China of the US State Department

"The Chinese people never forget a friend ... and Stilwell certainly was a friend," Easterbrook said.

The 82-year-old Easterbrook, a retired Army colonel, has been assisting the museum with exhibits and has visited China 17 times. But he could not make it to the anniversary event this year because of health issues.

Qiu Wenxing, deputy director of the Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs at the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, said at the symposium that the people of the two countries need to carry on the friendship fostered by General Stilwell.

"Both history and reality have proved that China and the United States have more common interests than differences," Qiu said. "History shows that when we properly handle each other's core and major interests, China-US relations will grow smoothly. Otherwise, they will be in trouble."

During a speech at the symposium, Jason Rubin, a representative in China of the US State Department, urged more direct engagement and communication between the two nations.

"General Stilwell's legacy is not merely one of military achievement, but one of mutual respect, shared purpose and the spirit of cooperation," he said.

"His commitment to fostering a partnership with China during the darkest days of World War II laid the foundation for an enduring relationship between the people of our nations that long outlasted Stilwell's presence in China," Rubin added.

Stilwell, who died in 1946 and was a four-star general in the US Army, visited China five times between 1911 and 1944 and lived in China for 12 years. Stilwell served in many positions, including chief of staff of the allied China theater and commanding general of the US Army forces in the China-Burma-India theater.

Song: New album praised for combining music genres

From page 1

Daolang's agent recently told a news platform, Ding Duan News, managed by Henan Daily, that the singer will not do any interviews or comment on any interpretations of his latest hit.

Hong Qi, a singer-songwriter and Daolang's friend, said in an interview that Daolang loves traditional Chinese culture and folk music, and so it was very natural for the experienced musician to choose the theme that he did. "Any other interpretation comes from people's own imagination," Hong said.

On August 2, rock musician Wang Feng, who some believe is the target of ridicule in the song, responded to online comments by saying that he "never looked down upon people who are true to their music".

In a 20-minute video posted on Wang's Weibo account, the singer-songwriter talked about Daolang's new album, praising his mastery of combining Chinese and Western musical styles and instruments, and balancing melody and lyrics to express himself.

"Music is about music itself. It is not about right and wrong; it is not an ethical trial," Wang said in the video.

Kenya: China's experience a magnet around world

From page 1

relations between China and many African nations.

In 1963, when Kenya gained independence, the country's per capita GDP was nearly one-and-a-half times that of China. In 1973, the Kenyatta International Convention Centre was the tallest building in both Kenya and China. Yet in just the three decades ending in 2020, China lifted more than 800 million people out of poverty to become the first developing country to eliminate extreme poverty, and did so 10 years ahead of the United Nations' 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development target.

China's development experience has become a magnet around the world. Many societies, including that of Kenya, want similar outcomes marked by effective education, agriculture, healthcare, housing, transportation and industrialization systems, among others.

Under the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation, China has extended the proceeds of its development to the continent. China has proposed a number of programs, such as the Global Development Initiative, aimed at catalyzing achievement of the UN's Sustainable Development Goals. Similarly, the Global Security Initiative is primed to help societies overcome the perils of conflict and transform into economically thriving spaces.

> **China is home to technologies, experiences and finances that can fuel Kenya's development, while Nairobi offers Chinese companies investment opportunities to internationalize and reach the rest of Africa.**

Kenya and China have tremendous opportunities for growth partnerships. Nairobi is among just five African capitals that are currently in comprehensive strategic cooperative partnerships with Beijing. China is home to technologies, experiences and finances that can fuel Kenya's development, while Nairobi offers Chinese companies investment opportunities to internationalize and reach the rest of Africa. We should see more access of Kenyan products to the Chinese market.

The identified areas of cooperation during talks between Wang and Ruto, such as railways, highways, water conservancy, aviation and renewable energy, complement the government's development blueprint, and the implementation should be expedited.

Yet such enviable outcomes are possible only when the leadership and the people of both countries can harness the power of cooperation through constructive dialogue, trust and enduring friendship. It is time to make the cooperation live up to its potential.

The author is a Kenya-based scholar of international relations with a focus on China-Africa development cooperation. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

World University Games close with fond memories

Governor: Chengdu has become more vibrant, beautiful and comfortable because of athletes

By CUI JIA in Chengdu
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The 31st FISU World University Games concluded on Tuesday night in Chengdu, Sichuan province, winning wide praise from officials and athletes alike.

Declaring the games closed, Leonz Eder, acting president of the International University Sports Federation, said the event has made the dreams of student-athletes come true whether they have won medals or not, because their experience in the city has been gold medal standard.

The closing ceremony was held at the Chengdu Open Air Music Park. It was the first time in the world that the closing ceremony of a large international sporting event has been held in a park, according to the organizers of the games.

State Councilor Shen Yiqin attended the ceremony.

The ceremony aimed to leave the audience worldwide with fond memories of a unique Chengdu, from which they got to know China and fell in love with its people, the organizers said.

Huang Qiang, executive president of the organizing committee of the Chengdu games and governor of Sichuan, said Chengdu has become more vibrant, beautiful and comfortable because of the athletes.

"Student-athletes have put on passionate performances, cheered for each other, enjoyed strolling in the city and created great memories of the Chengdu games. Sichuan forever welcomes you back," Huang said.

'All dreams come true'

"It is difficult to say it in one sentence, but Chengdu really made all dreams come true," Eder said during a news conference earlier on Tuesday.

"Some athletes dreamed of winning medals in the Chengdu games, and they did. Meanwhile, some people dreamed of competing at their best level. Maybe they failed but nevertheless they had a unique experience of competing with top athletes from around the world," Eder said.

"Also, the dream of those who wanted to see China and meet the citizens of Chengdu has become reality," he said.

The organization of the event has been fantastic for everyone, including the athletes and spectators, he added.

"We can only congratulate the authorities who have prepared fantastic venues and great facilities as well as the hospitable people and the best volunteers we could have. All the services were just great and perfect. Nothing to add, just big, big thanks," Eder said.

During the closing ceremony, he said he appreciated the efforts made by all parties in hosting the Chengdu games.

Eric Saintrond, secretary-general and CEO of the International University Sports Federation, said the Chengdu games have offered young people from all over the world the opportunity to see and explore China themselves, which is particularly important given that people sometimes may have seen the wrong picture of the country in Western media.

David Schmude, president of the Continental University Sport Association of Oceania, said the Chengdu games have met the high standards set by the Olympic Games.

"The facilities are world-class. And I would think that the Chengdu games is of Olympic quality," Schmude said.

A total of 6,500 student-athletes from 113 countries and regions competed in 269 events of 18 sports at the Chengdu games, which opened on July 28.

China led the medal tally with 103 gold, 40 silver and 35 bronze. Japan was in second place with 21 gold. South Korea and Italy both won 17 gold and 17 silver and ended up in third and fourth places, respectively, as South Korea won two more bronze medals.

"Amazing" was the word that student-athletes used the most to describe their experiences at the Chengdu games.

Aman Saini, an archer from India, said he was impressed with the services and facilities at the event. "The service of the volunteers, transport facilities, the facilities in the athletes' village and the food are all top level," Saini said.

During the closing ceremony, the FISU flag was handed to a representative of Rhine-Ruhr, Germany, which will host the 32nd FISU World University Games in 2025.

CHENGDU | FISU WORLD UNIVERSITY GAMES SUMMER

103

gold, 40 silver and 35 bronze medals were won by Chinese athletes at the 31st FISU World University Games, putting China at the top of the event's medal tally.

Rainfall blamed for derailment



A derailed passenger train lies on a railway track in eastern Sweden on Monday. Three people who were injured in the accident have been taken to hospital, according to the police. The train, with 120 passengers on board, was on its way from Stockholm to Sundsvall when the front two of a total of four cars derailed just south of Hudiksvall. The embankment was undermined as a result of heavy rain. MATS ANDERSSON / AFP

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CHINA

Shanxi launches Great Wall promotion

By **SUN RUISHENG** in Taiyuan and **ZHANG XIAOMIN**

Shanxi province launched the Great Wall "fortress master" recruitment program recently, inviting scholars, singers and travelers from around the world to create and promote works related to the famous structure.

The winners will each receive a cash prize of up to 10,000 yuan ($1,400).

The 2023 Great Wall Seeking Fortress Masters and Great Wall Tour Diary events are organized by the Shanxi Provincial Department of Culture and Tourism and aim to creatively promote the Great Wall National Cultural Park and its tourism resources in the province.

The chosen fortress masters will be tasked with creating works in their respective fields and receive a 2,000-yuan bonus upon their completion.

The works will be uploaded to social media platforms and scored based on metrics such as views, likes, shares and comments.

"We hope to present a more youthful and fashionable image of the park using storytelling, language and methods that are more in line with the times, presenting the oldest civilization story in the trendiest way," said Li Qianqian, who is in charge of the events.

The selected fortress masters will be invited to visit iconic sections of the Great Wall and experience traditional local crafts and intangible cultural heritage.

Each three-day trip will be filmed and turned into a brief travel documentary.

The Great Wall Tour Diary will integrate tourism, travel photography and a variety of events to promote the Great Wall tourism resources in Shanxi such as sections of the wall at Li'erkou, Shoukoubu and Deshengbu in Datong city.

Shanxi is rich in Great Wall cultural resources. In recent years, the province has leveraged the history and culture of the Great Wall to create a tourism belt, while protecting the resources.

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Olympic retrospective



Volunteers for the 2008 Beijing Olympics take a group photo at an exhibition celebrating the 15th anniversary of the event at the National Stadium, also known as the Bird's Nest, in Beijing, on Tuesday. The exhibition showcased 15 people and their individual stories in the 15 years since the Games. Tuesday was also the 15th National Fitness Day. CUI JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Qingdao beer festival a global success

By **XIE CHUANJIAO** in Qingdao, Shandong
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With 6.17 million visitors this year, the 33rd Qingdao International Beer Festival has solidified its position as a leading global celebration of the amber nectar, experts said.

Held at Golden Beach Beer City in Qingdao West Coast New Area, Shandong province, the 24-day festival of bacchanalian revelry concluded on Sunday.

Highlighting the international flavor of the event, over 2,000 beers from 40 countries and regions were showcased at the festival, with 379 businesses participating.

Cultural activities at the venue's main stage included over 630 performers taking part in 1,110 shows, which included fashion displays, art exhibitions, concerts and drama performances.

The entertainment also featured cutting-edge light and shadow displays, illuminated landscapes, naked-eye 3D videos and fireworks.

Ten sports competitions were also held, including arm-wrestling, boxing, table tennis and street basketball, which attracted more than 6,000 competitors, organizers said.

Tourist routes were set up encouraging people to visit landmarks such as the China Movie Metropolis, local beaches and art galleries.

> "The festival's size not only invigorates our local economy but also bolsters consumer confidence."
>
> **Cui Xijun,** a senior official in charge of organizing this year's Qingdao International Beer Festival

Cui Xijun, a senior official in charge of organizing the festival, emphasized the event's pivotal role in revitalizing Qingdao's culture and tourism sectors.

"The festival's size not only invigorates our local economy but also bolsters consumer confidence," Cui said.

During the festival the hospitality sector thrived, with hotels experiencing full occupancy and restaurants reporting peak business, he added.

A total of 80 percent of this year's festival attendees were from provinces outside Shandong, officials said.

This marked a 20 percent increase compared with the previous year. Jiangsu, Hebei and Henan provided the most outside visitors.

Wang Yixing, a repeat visitor from Jiangsu, said the festival held a special appeal for him.

"Qingdao's beer festival has become an essential part of my summer vacation. This year's edition offered an even more thrilling experience," Wang said.

"Qingdao's vibrant atmosphere injects youthful energy into every visit, making me feel rejuvenated each time."

The resounding success of the Qingdao International Beer Festival has benefits beyond its immediate economic impact.

Ji Hongyan, a senior figure in China's convention and exhibition industry, said the festival's exceptional brand value elevated Qingdao's global reputation and also helped foster a sense of national pride.

Two years ago, the brand value of the Qingdao International Beer Festival was estimated at 36.8 billion yuan ($5.09 billion).

The festival has its roots in the city's Tsingtao Brewery, which is celebrating its 120th anniversary this year.

Tsingtao's products are sold in more than 120 countries and regions and it is a leading domestic brewer with over 60 subsidiaries and factories nationwide.

Businessman excited for esports at Asian Games

By **MA ZHENHUAN** in Hangzhou
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A foreign businessman with a penchant for esports has been impressed by its development in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, with his enthusiasm boosted by the upcoming Asian Games.

The popularity of esports in China has been increasing since it was listed as an official sport to be contested at the 2022 Asian Games in Hangzhou.

"When it comes to esports, my passion for all types of video games runs deep, from retro classics like *Pac-Man, Sonic the Hedgehog*, and *Street Fighter* to modern VR games with ever-evolving hardware," Johan van Dyk, an esports enthusiast and businessman from South Africa, told China Daily.

Van Dyk is engaged in foreign business at the International Talent Center in Xiaoshan district, Hangzhou.

"Among the games, I play *Call of Duty, Rocket League, Overwatch, Apex Legends*, and *FIFA* regularly with my friends in China. These games are an integral part of our competitive culture, constantly pushing us to best each other and have a great time together," said Van Dyk.

He is also a big fan of Hangzhou Spark, the team representing Hangzhou in the Overwatch League, which was founded in 2018.

"I remember Hangzhou Spark became quite popular around the time when I moved to Hangzhou in 2019. I used to joke with my fiancee by saying that I will be the first foreigner on their team," Van Dyk told China Daily, adding that he was impressed by the team's logo, which looks like an emoji.



Johan van Dyk

"The team's representative colors are nice too. The colors of bright pink and blue remind me of the sunset in Hangzhou, especially around the West Lake area," Van Dyk added.

Van Dyk said video games have been an integral part of his life since he was very young, even though esports infrastructure in South Africa was weak.

"I vividly remember my father introducing me to my first game on the Famicom Nintendo device, *Contra*, in 1987. The graphics and gameplay back then were vastly different from today's standards, but those moments spent with my dad or my brothers, huddled around a tiny control device and screen, are some of my fondest memories from my formative years," Van Dyk recalled.

"Lately, I've been reflecting on these cherished memories as I eagerly anticipate attending my first international esports event right here in Hangzhou, my second home."

His enthusiasm for sports was largely inspired by his friends and family members who excel in traditional sports in South Africa. It includes his cousin who recently achieved a remarkable milestone by participating in the World Aquatics Championships in Japan, his good friend who specializes in sprinting, and a family member who has achieved great results in the 100m hurdles.

"While esports may still be on the rise in South Africa, I am proud of witnessing their achievements in the traditional sports arena," Van Dyk said proudly, as these talented individuals represent the spirit of perseverance, hard work and excellence in the world of sports.

"I'm thrilled about the upcoming Asian Games and the incredible atmosphere it will bring with international fans coming together to celebrate sports and competition.

"I'm looking forward to the entire experience of attending the Asian Games, from the opening ceremony to the thrilling matches and the cultural exchanges that will take place. It's a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity, and I plan to cherish every moment and soak in the spirit of sportsmanship and global unity," he said.

Besides esports, Van Dyk is looking forward to watching soccer matches, boxing fights, gymnastics, tennis, jujitsu and rugby during the upcoming Asian Games.

"As for jujitsu, it's a martial art that always intrigues me, and witnessing the practitioners' expertise in combat will be a unique experience," he said. "As a rugby fan, I can't miss the opportunity to watch this sport at the Asian Games. My country has a strong rugby tradition, and I'm excited to cheer on our team as they compete on the international stage."

Van Dyk said that efforts will be made by his company, together with local governments and organizations, such as holding various cultural exchange activities and sports activities for foreign people from all over the world, to allow them to interact with local people and experience the city's distinctive features, especially in Xiaoshan district.

"This could showcase traditional performances, exhibitions of local crafts and art, and enlighten visitors about Xiaoshan's rich history and cultural heritage," he said.

The Continental Corporation, where Van Dyk works as an operations officer, is a business group specializing in international trade, international consultancy, innovation, training and technological advances. Founded in 2014, the company is headquartered in Xiaoshan, with branches in Brazil and Hong Kong. It bridges trade between Brazil, China and other countries in the world.

Van Dyk said his company has assisted several companies by connecting them with relevant people in China and providing consultancy-based solutions.

"I take pride in the success stories of my past ventures, such as sourcing suppliers for rugby equipment for Portugal, facilitating a sponsorship connection between a Scottish football team and a Chinese company, and aiding a Brazilian football team in developing courses for a Chinese education platform," Van Dyk added.

Fang Xiaoying in Hangzhou contributed to this story.

Rail trainees to nurture new talents in Laos

Graduates head home to guide next generation of transport professionals

By **LUO WANGSHU** in Beijing and **LI YINGQING** in Kunming

Lamphone Thipmala headed home to Vientiane on Aug 2, ready to embark on her next educational journey after completing 18 months of study at Kunming Railway Vocational Technical College.

Before departing Southwest China's Yunnan province capital for the Laotian capital, the new graduate posted a farewell picture on her WeChat moments with the caption "Bye bye, Kunming!"

She was among 40 Laotian trainees selected by the Laotian education ministry to study Chinese and railway technology at the school.

After returning to Laos, the trainees will become instructors at the newly established Laotian Railway Vocational Technical College, and nurture the country's future railway professionals.

"It takes only 10 hours on the train from Vientiane to Kunming (via the China-Laos Railway). The railway has boosted the economy and movements of people along the line, and is an important corridor for cargo and passengers and friendly relations between China and Laos," Lamphone said.

"The operation of the China-Laos Railway needs a large number of rail professionals and I am keen to be a part of it."

To help develop railway professionals in Laos, China assisted its neighbor in building the Laotian Railway Vocational Technical College in Vientiane.

The campus is expected to be completed this month. It's not known when the school will begin to enroll students.

Kunming Railway Vocational Technical College is responsible for helping the new school to develop an overall education plan, including setting up departments, drafting textbooks, training instructors and designing curriculums.

To train local instructors, the Laotian education ministry sent 40 trainees to Kunming to study railway-related information and Chinese for two years.

Because of the COVID-19 pandemic, their classes were online for the first six months.

In the next five years, teachers from Kunming Railway Vocational Technical College will be sent to the school to offer assistance in areas such as running the school and organizing teaching activities.

"The 40 Laotian trainees will be the first group of railway instructors in Laos. I hope they can take what they have learned here to their motherland, to help their country in nurturing more railway professionals," said Li Ruilin, head of Kunming Railway Vocational Technical College.

Cun Min, deputy head of the department of commerce in Yunnan, said it was not easy for the trainees to come to study in China during the pandemic.

"They arrived in March and July last year. The 32 participants who arrived in March were the first group of foreigners to enter China via the land port in Yunnan since the pandemic began," she said.

> "The operation of the China-Laos Railway needs a large number of rail professionals and I am keen to be a part of it."
>
> **Lamphone Thipmala,** a Lao trainee at Kunming Railway Vocational Technical College

"We ensured the best teaching resources and arranged the finest teachers to guide the students. We also arranged field trips in Yunnan and to Beijing to further enrich their understanding of China and the country's railway development. They visited sites such as the China Railway Museum and Beijing Jiaotong University," she said.

The trainees have treasured the opportunities and overcome cultural and language barriers during their studies.

"It is a great opportunity for me. After I return to Laos, I can pass on what I learned in China to more Laotian students," said Sengsuly Basysouk, a 26-year-old trainee, who has a background in electrical engineering.

"Although I missed my home while I was in China, I thought it was worth it for my personal and career development in the future," he said.

Another trainee, Chanthavong Bouangeurn, said her schedule at school was always full.

"I got up in the morning and went to class, which usually ended at noon. After a two-hour break, I went to class again and the afternoon session often ended at 4 pm. I usually returned to the classroom to study at 6 pm. The lessons were quite challenging," the 35-year-old said, adding that she is determined to train professional railway talents in Laos, so she worked very hard.

"With the opening of the China-Laos Railway, Laos now has an advanced railway, linking it to the world. China has not only helped us to build a railway, but also assisted in building a professional technical school to train railway talents," she said.

The 1,035-kilometer China-Laos Railway, which commenced operations on Dec 3, 2021, is a landmark infrastructure project of the Belt and Road Initiative. It has turned Laos from a landlocked country into a land-linked hub.

In April, the line opened to international passengers and travelers can now commute between Kunming and Vientiane in 10 hours by train.

"I will take my mom and dad, as well as sisters and friends to visit China, especially Kunming. I will strongly recommend to my friends to take the Lancang bullet train to see my school," graduate Lamphone said.

Shi Wenzhi contributed to this story.

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Laotian students get hands-on at a high-speed rail training base in Kunming, Yunnan province, in July last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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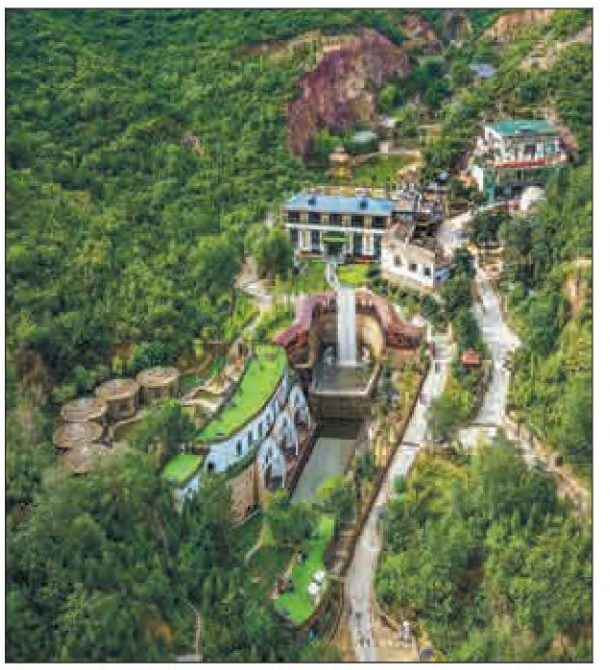
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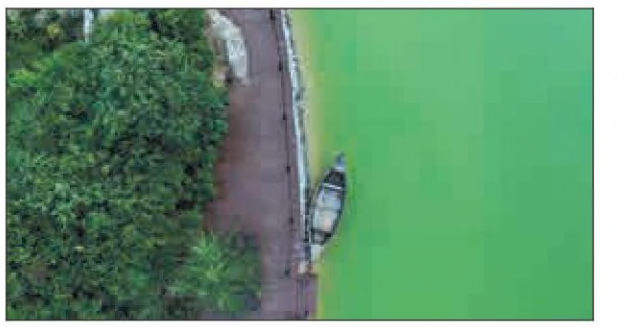
CHINA

Greening project helps residents live high life

Cleanup efforts have resulted in more jobs and higher incomes

By **SUN RUISHENG** in Taiyuan and **LI YANG** in Beijing







Clockwise from left: An aerial photo shows a new resort and homestays built in Senqi, a suburban town in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. An artificial lake is located at the center of the Senqi resort. Before the Senqi project, the mountains around Dongjiazhuang village were barren because of quarrying. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Senqi, or "Forest Life", a suburban town in Taiyuan, capital of the northern province of Shanxi, has become the only settlement in the province to be added to the list of "national forest health bases", the Chinese Forestry Industry Federation announced on July 19.

As part of an environmental restoration project covering 358 hectares and stretching across several hamlets in Dongjiazhuang village, Senqi is home to 47 families, whose ancestors lived by quarrying and farming for generations.

With a total investment of 1 billion yuan ($140 million), the project consists of homestays and farms on mountains that are being restored after years of serving as quarry sites and developed into ideal places for climbers and hikers.

The lifestyles of local farmers have changed along with their hometown. As the project is creating sufficient jobs via homestays and catering to tourists, local people no longer need to leave the villages to seek employment as migrant workers during slack farming seasons. Meanwhile, their farms are also being transformed by the cultivation of more local specialties and cash crops for tourists.

The project has won a number of national honorary titles, such as Beautiful Village of China, and the local government has named Dongjiazhuang as a model of rural vitalization for the rest of the province to follow.

That's thanks to the pioneering work it has done to advance agricultural modernization and optimize its economic potential, while striking a balance between environmental conservation and rapid development.

Liu Pingping, a farmer in her 50s, said she is content with the changes in her village. She works as a server in a restaurant, while her husband is a gardener. They both earn about 3,000 yuan a month, plus a bonus and paid vacation. "Such jobs are usually beyond the expectations of poorly educated rural women of my age," Liu said. "I have worked near my home for about three years now."

Before she was offered the job, Liu, like many other local women, received comprehensive training as a professional-level restaurant server.

Shanxi Donglinsheng Cultural Development, a local company, offers the villagers jobs according to their age, skills and work experience, and provides them with all the training required for the jobs they take, according to Wang Bin, general manager of the Senqi project.

The villagers said they not only appreciate the new opportunities, including work as forest rangers and cleaners, but also benefit directly from the improved environment and public facilities resulting from the project. As such, they have realized that a balance can be struck between environmental conservation and the improvement of their livelihoods.

Better connected

"Even though it is only about 7 kilometers from Taiyuan's urban area, the village was once connected to the outside world by just a narrow mountain path that meandered along the edge of a valley. It was difficult for people to travel, and mules and tractors often toppled into the valley," said Li Jianming, Party chief of Dongjiazhuang.

Before 2015, the villagers planted corn, potatoes and other subsistence crops. However, yields were quite low, so they basically lived a hand-to-mouth existence. Quarrying raised incomes for a while, but it proved to be a flash in the pan as the process destroyed vegetation, polluted the water and devastated the landscape. Not even wild grass grew on the mountains back then, Li said.

After the villagers realized that the "drain-the-pond-to-catch-all-the-fish" development model was unsustainable, investment from Shanxi Donglinsheng and the support of the local government enabled them to change the situation by building roads, improving water conservation and irrigation systems, and enhancing infrastructural facilities in 2015.

As a result, Dongjiazhuang is now easily accessible by car, the mountains are covered by trees and the rivers are clean once again. After a community center was opened for seniors and a square was equipped with simple leisure facilities, the villagers felt a marked change in their daily lives, especially as working the land now only takes up a small part of their time.

The company's investment has helped bring tangible benefits to the villagers by transforming the restored ecosystem and beautiful landscapes into tourist attractions, and has also formed a model of sustainable environmental restoration that features government support, enterprise investment and the residents' participation to achieve a multi-win scenario.

"In addition to earning money through our jobs, it is really good that we can rent our land to the company because the rent is a reliable source of income," said villager Han Aizhong.

The farmers can rent their land as their "share" of the business and obtain cooperative dividends accordingly. This operating model makes the farmers feel that they are the project's owners as well, rather than just company employees. Experts said it is important that Shanxi Donglinsheng allows the villagers to feel that they still own their hometown through this model so they will feel united and won't regard the company as an outsider.

After the first phase of the project finished earlier this year, Senqi entered trial operations. From the top of the surrounding mountains, an artificial lake in the center of the resort — complete with geese, ducks and other waterfowl — looks like a piece of jade embedded in the forest. It is a major draw for large numbers of weekend visitors from Taiyuan.

With 90 percent forest coverage and high levels of negative ions, which many scientists believe can increase the flow of oxygen to the brain and result in improved feelings of well-being, Senqi has received an average of more than 10,000 tourists every month so far this year.

Wang Bin, the project's deputy manager, noted that its rapid development has been inseparable from the establishment of norms and standards.

"We have formulated standards and norms in terms of the environment, services, facilities and equipment, management and healthcare products, and formed businesses such as homestays, catering, conference receptions and tearooms," he said.

Peng Ke'er in Taiyuan contributed to this story.

Contact the writers at sunruisheng@chinadaily.com.cn

Nightlife options boom in Chongqing and Guiyang

CHONGQING — As night descends, an enchanting display of light and shadow plays across the site of a century-old French Catholic church in Yuzhong district in the southwestern municipality of Chongqing.

The immersive outdoor event, called the "Magic Sound Party", allows the audience to interact with actors to the accompaniment of exciting lighting.

Known as the Ren'ai Wilderness Theater, the site comes with captivating views of the Yangtze River and Nanshan Mountain. Over time, it has blossomed into a favorite destination in the city, drawing a significant influx of young visitors with different nighttime entertainment offerings, including immersive dramas and music festivals.

Deng Yulian, 21, a university student majoring in art, was enthralled by the event. "It seemed that we were really attending a mysterious party," Deng said.

During the summer, the vibrant nightlife adds extra joy to local life. Yuzhong district in particular has nearly 30 prominent night entertainment projects in a sprawling business area of 2.05 million square meters that is home to about 5,000 establishments. This flourishing nightlife scene not only entertains people, but also employs some 11,000 people.



Visitors stroll around Qingyun market in Guiyang, Guizhou province, on July 21. YANG WENBIN / XINHUA

The vigorous development of after-dark recreation is encouraging the staging of art performances, street fairs, sports and other activities. Data show that last year, China's nighttime market was worth nearly 42.4 trillion yuan ($5.9 trillion), an increase of 16.7 percent over the previous year.

Flashing neon signs light up the night sky in the streets and alleys of Qingyun market in Guiyang, capital of Guizhou province. This vibrant market occupies the premises of a former factory building and houses three types of ventures — catering, entertainment and cultural creation — making it a bustling place at night.

Zhang Fenglan, director of investment promotion and operation at the market, said that consumption is undergoing a transformation in Guiyang. The main idea behind the market was to provide people with a platform to exhibit local culture and showcase the city's vibrancy.

Since the launch of the project on Dec 11, 2021, an average of about 30,000 people now visit the market daily, and more than 80,000 tourists visited on the first day of the Labor Day holiday alone.

Libraries, bookstores and other cultural institutions have been instrumental in fueling the growth of the city's nighttime economy.

In stark contrast to the vibrant atmosphere of Qingyun market, a serene library tucked away along the Qingyun Road Pedestrian Street offers book lovers somewhere quiet to read at night.

"We are trying to give young people another option apart from bars and nightclubs," said librarian Fang Jing, adding that the library now has many regular customers and has become a quiet spot amid the noise of the night market.

XINHUA

Once polluted lake regains its glimmer

SHIJIAZHUANG — A flock of ducks spotted in a large wetland in northern China in June has caught the media's attention.

Aythya baeri is the scientific name of the blue-headed Baer's pochard, which is categorized as critically endangered by the International Union for Conservation of Nature, and is under level-one State protection.

The ducks made their debut in July last year, attracting crowds of interested observers to Baiyangdian, the largest freshwater wetland in northern China, where the rare birds have now become regular breeders.

The discovery of these rare ducks excited Hou Jianhua, a professor at Hebei University's School of Life Sciences, who said that the Baer's pochards are the latest beneficiaries of rising environment awareness.

Baiyangdian Lake is located in Xiong'an New Area in Hebei. Touted as a "future city", Xiong'an prioritizes environmental protection, and the improved wetland is a typical example of China's efforts to pursue green, high-quality growth.

In contemporary Chinese literature, the lake is a significant landmark. Sun Li, a novelist, published *Lotus Lake — Memories of Baiyangdian* in the 1940s.

It is a story about the Communist-led resistance by peasants battling Japanese invaders.



A Baer's pochard stands on the bank of Baiyangdian in Hebei province. LIU XUN / XINHUA

One section of the book, which is required reading at middle schools, was set in Baiyangdian's wetlands. Reed beds, towering lotus fields and an abundant lake harvest distinguished this battlefield from other revolutionary battlefields.

However, the lake was severely affected by industrial pollution between the 1960s and the 1980s, when chemical-filled sewage poisoned the water and the lake bed, killing a large number of aquatic animals.

As a result of climate change in the 1990s, the lake nearly dried up, and the degradation of the habitat and human activities caused bird populations to plummet. Since Xiong'an New Area was created in 2017, the lake's rehabilitation and protection have been bolstered.

Local governments tightened control over sources of industrial and agricultural pollution by shutting down the companies responsible. They also replenished water supplies and allowed millions of hectares of agriculture to revert to wetland. The efforts have paid off. The first sign of progress was the water quality, which rose from Grade V, the lowest level in China's five-tier quality system, to Grade III.

As the water quality improves, more wild creatures are returning to Baiyangdian. The number of bird species has risen to about 254, and the lake has steadily evolved into a haven for lotus, reeds and a plethora of fish species.

Local residents have changed their attitudes, too. They now understand more than ever that conserving the lake has both economic and environmental benefits, and are working to develop tourism.

Technological support is driving environmental progress. The local bureau began deploying unmanned patrol boats equipped with real-time video feedback. The high speed and low latency of 5G, combined with virtual reality equipment, enables workers to conduct visual inspections of the lake surface and obtain real-time data.

XINHUA

Spanish mediator helps Sanya court

HAIKOU — When a middle-aged Frenchman living in Hainan province was faced with divorce, he turned to Isidro de La Cal Patino, a foreign mediator at the Second Foreign-Related Civil and Commercial Tribunal of Hainan in the city of Sanya.

"My wife wants a divorce and my visa is about to expire. I don't have enough money to hire a lawyer to fight the case," he told De La Cal Patino.

In the courtroom, the Frenchman continued to provide details of his family dispute in English. De La Cal Patino calmed him down, offering advice in English while simultaneously communicating with the judge in Chinese and then conveyed the judge's comments to the Frenchman.

After nearly two hours, Isidro and the judge were able to gain a complete understanding of the man's situation and decided to discuss a way to resolve the dispute through pre-litigation mediation with his wife.

This was one of the many cases De La Cal Patino has handled. Since becoming a foreign mediator just over a year ago, the 46-year-old Spaniard has participated in 10 mediation cases, including foreign-related tourism and family disputes.

Leveraging his proficiency in Spanish, English and Chinese, as well as his understanding of local customs and foreign cultures, he has volunteered to assist judges and foreigners with interpretation, consultation and mediation.

De La Cal Patino got his bachelor's in London and worked in the United Kingdom for a short period before moving to China 17 years ago. Over the course of his career, he has explored a variety of roles, including as an administrative worker, English teacher and culinary instructor.

However, it was during a trip to Sanya that De La Cal Patino, an avid surfer, developed a fascination for the vibrant lifestyle of this tropical coastal city. Six years ago, he decided to settle in Sanya with his wife and open a culinary training agency.

The Second Foreign-Related Civil and Commercial Tribunal of Hainan was set up for the centralized jurisdiction and trial of foreign-related civil and commercial disputes in line with the construction of the Hainan Free Trade Port, and is committed to providing fair, efficient and convenient judicial services to Chinese and foreign nationals.

When a friend told De La Cal Patino that the tribunal in Sanya needed international volunteers and foreign mediators, he decided to give it a shot and passed the interview. In 2019, he started working as an international volunteer, and last year, he received official approval to join as a foreign mediator.

"Before, I was only involved in interpretation, but now I can participate in the mediation of cases. Almost every month, a foreigner who wants to resolve a dispute judicially asks for my help," De La Cal Patino said. He said that foreign-related civil and commercial tribunals provide more comprehensive judicial protection to foreigners living in China, and is willing to participate in the work.

Being involved in the court has given him an understanding of the judicial process in China and changed his impression of courts.

"The facilities are very advanced, the staff are friendly, and the judges speak fluent English and are very professional and reliable," he said. "My family in Spain was surprised to learn that there are foreign mediators in Chinese courts, and they are very proud of me. I hope to gain more experience and do this job better."

In recent years, courts and other organizations in China have worked to create a mediation mechanism to help parties reach settlements, where possible, during the pre-litigation and litigation processes, as part of a drive toward the speedy and cost-effective resolution of disputes. Courts in many cities such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen, Guangdong province, are hiring foreign mediators to help in foreign-related civil and commercial cases.

Ma Xuetao, vice-president of the Sanya Intermediate People's Court, said that the move demonstrates the openness and inclusiveness of China's judicial system. Foreign tourists in Sanya come to the tribunal for help when they encounter disputes during their travels. Through foreign mediators, many small cases can be solved quickly, Ma said.

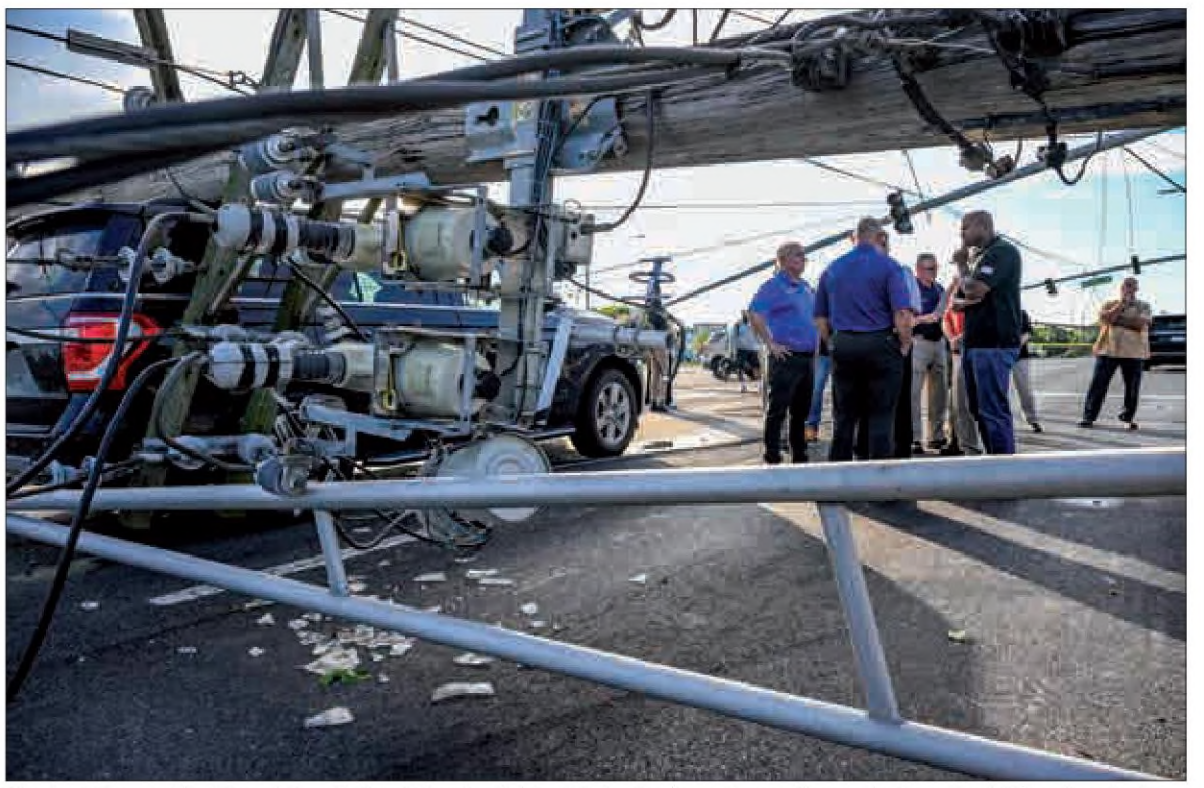
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WORLD

Powerless to storm



Maryland Governor Wes Moore talks with Carroll County officials while touring downed power lines and poles on Route 140 on Tuesday in Westminster after powerful storms went through the area Monday evening. AP

Downgrades: Latest bank woe

Interest rate hikes, commercial real estate weakness cited by Moody's

By **HENG WEILI** in New York
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The latest alarm bell for the US banking sector has been sounded with a cut in the credit ratings of several US regional lenders and the placement of some big banks on review for possible downgrades.

Ratings agency Moody's, in an announcement late Monday, warned that US banks will find it harder to make money as interest rates and funding costs increase and a recession looms. Moody's also cited some lenders' exposure to commercial real estate as a concern.

The failures of three US lenders earlier this year precipitated the biggest industry crisis since 2008 and UBS Group's government-backed takeover of Credit Suisse. Investors remain cautious even though the upheaval has relented in recent months.

"US banks continue to contend with interest rate and asset-liability management (ALM) risks with implications for liquidity and capital, as the wind-down of unconventional monetary policy drains systemwide deposits and higher interest rates depress the value of fixed-rate assets," Moody's analysts Jill Cetina and Ana Arsov said in the accompanying research note.

"Meanwhile, many banks' Q2 results showed growing profitability pressures that will reduce their ability to generate internal capital. This comes as a mild US recession is on the horizon for early 2024 and asset quality looks set to decline from solid but unsustainable levels, with particular risks in some banks' commercial real estate (CRE) portfolios."

> "There is a recognition that unless US banks start sharing some of the wealth from higher interest rates with their depositors, they're going to see money continue to flow out."
>
> **Michael Green**, chief investment strategist at Simplify Asset Management

Moody's highlighted that the elevated CRE exposure risk is primarily attributable to the Federal Reserve's interest rate hikes, reduced demand for office buildings due to remote work trends, and a reduction in the availability of CRE credit.

The firm lowered the ratings of 10 banks by one rung, while major lenders Bank of New York Mellon, US Bancorp, State Street, Truist Financial, Cullen/Frost Bankers and Northern Trust are now under review for a potential downgrade.

Moody's also changed its outlook to negative for 11 banks, including Capital One, Citizens Financial and Fifth Third Bancorp.

Among the smaller lenders receiving an official ratings downgrade were M&T Bank, Pinnacle Financial, BOK Financial and Webster Financial.

"This (the rating downgrade) is just another reminder that there are still challenges in the regional banking space. High exposure to commercial real estate, rising deposit and funding cost are some of the key concerns that the banks are facing," said Macrae Sykes, portfolio manager at Gabelli Funds.

Wall Street reacted negatively to the ratings news but pared earlier losses in the session.

The Dow Jones Industrial Average closed down 159 points to 35,314. The Nasdaq Composite dropped 110 points to 13,884, while the S&P 500 fell 19 points to 4499.

The S&P 500 Banks index has slipped 2.5 percent year to date, compared with a 17.2 percent gain by the S&P 500, and the downgrades exposed the fragility of investors' confidence towards financial stocks. The banks index slid 1.1 percent on Tuesday, while the KBW Regional Banking index dropped 1.4 percent.

Investors have scaled back their expectations for future bank earnings, and markets have already priced in some of the factors Moody's cited, said Mike Mayo, a bank analyst at Wells Fargo.

"We are probably in the later stages of this downward revision," Mayo told Reuters. "This is the toll of higher rates for longer, the potential of a recession. It's different from what happened in the March crisis; this is more an issue about rates, recession and risk."

Kathy Jones, chief fixed income strategist at Charles Schwab, said: "As banks tighten lending standards and try to shore up their capital, there is less money flowing to the economy. Credit is the lifeblood of small and medium-sized businesses, so reducing the availability could contribute to a downturn."

The Federal Reserve's ongoing push to raise interest rates to tackle inflation "continues to have a material impact on the US banking system's funding and its economic capital", Moody's said. The Fed has raised interest rates from near zero in March 2022 to above 5 percent.

Higher rates have continued to reduce the value of bonds and other assets owned by regional banks, leaving the lenders with "sizable unrealized losses" and vulnerable to share-price drops if investors get worried, Moody's said.

"There remains a significant risk that systemwide deposits will resume their decline in coming quarters," Moody's said.

The largest banks have been relatively immune from this year's crisis. JPMorgan, Wells Fargo and Bank of America all reported higher profits in the second quarter, boosted by their ability to charge more on loans.

Investors searching for high-yielding accounts has forced some banks to pay more in interest to keep their customers. That can lead to higher costs for smaller banks that don't have the diversified income streams that big ones such as JPMorgan, Wells Fargo and Bank of America do.

"There is a recognition that unless US banks start sharing some of the wealth from higher interest rates with their depositors, they're going to see money continue to flow out," said Michael Green, chief investment strategist at Simplify Asset Management.

Chris Marinac, director of research at Janney Montgomery Scott, said second-quarter results showed the sector remains sound and that the selloff in bank stocks Tuesday was a "knee-jerk reaction" to the downgrades, The Wall Street Journal reported. "There's not fabulous profitability, but they can still make money," he said. "Moody's has now shouted an alarm bell that really isn't anything new."

Agencies contributed to this story.

Norway puts pressure on Meta over privacy concerns

By **JULIAN SHEA** in London
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Norway's data regulator Datatilsynet has told Meta Platforms, the company that owns Facebook, that it will face a daily fine of 1 million kroner ($96,890) from Aug 14 until November over privacy breaches.

On July 17, the regulator ruled that Meta would be penalized if it did not deal with privacy breaches it had highlighted, relating to the harvesting of user data for targeted advertising — which is a common practice by big technology companies, and which Meta claimed was a key part of its business. The deadline has now passed.

"These data are rather potent in the sense that they will tell you everything about a person's online behavior and therefore also their interests, their personality," Datatilsynet spokesman Tobias Judin told the website Wired.com.

"Literally everything that you do on these platforms can be recorded and used for behavioral advertising purposes."

Although not a member of the European Union, Norway is part of the European single market as a member of the European Economic Area, and has gone further with its actions against Meta than the bloc has.

The wider European market is a huge source of revenue for Meta, with the company saying it generated almost one-fourth of its advertising revenue in the second quarter of this year.

Last month, the EU Court of Justice decided regulators can examine how companies use data to build up their positions of dominance, as part of continuing inquiries into the anticompetitive practices of big technology companies.

Evaluating move

After the ruling, Meta said it was "evaluating the court's decision and will have more to say in due course", and the subsequent decision of the Norwegian regulator seems to have put it under even more pressure to change its behavior.

"The Norwegians are really applying the law as it is, which a lot of other DPAs (data protection authorities) don't really do," Max Schrems, head of privacy campaign group NOYB in Vienna, told the Financial Times.

On Aug 1, following the rulings, Meta updated a blog post saying it would "change the legal basis that we use to process certain data for behavioral advertising for people in the EU, EEA and Switzerland from 'Legitimate Interests' to 'Consent'", though without confirming a date or mentioning Norway by name.

Judin from Datatilsynet said it was "very unconvincing" that Meta is trying to make this look like it was a voluntary decision.

"Asking users for consent could negatively affect the company's earnings, and historically speaking, Meta has not been willing to sacrifice profits for privacy unless forced," he said.

German right-wing rise sparks concerns in EU

By **CHEN WEIHUA** in Brussels
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Like many far-right and populist parties in Europe, Germany's Alternative for Germany, or AfD, has witnessed growing public support in recent polls but its anti-immigration and Euroskepticism stance has raised concern in some corners of the European Union.

On Monday, French Minister of State for European Affairs Laurence Boone lashed out at AfD, whose congress, which concluded over the weekend, called the EU a "failed project". She told broadcaster LCI that AfD is "founded in hatred of a scapegoat".

Boone said the 10-year-old German party will "destroy the EU with no alternative project" and is a "peril for European stability".

Boone's words came after AfD party members gathered for the last two weekends in the east German city of Magdeburg to adopt a political platform ahead of the 2024 European elections.

The platform, published on Sunday, said "we think the EU cannot be reformed and see it as a failed project" in all important areas, including migration and climate policy.

AfD has called for a "federation of EU nations" and rejected the euro as a currency. Its platform said the main tasks of the new federation should be the protection of external borders against migration, strategic autonomy in security policy and the preservation of "different identities" in Europe.

While several AfD officials had previously expressed the wish for Germany to quit the EU, also known as "Dexit", the new party platform does not call for the "orderly dissolution of the EU", which was in an earlier draft. Instead, it said AfD supports the idea of a "Europe of fatherlands, a Europe community of sovereign, democratic states".

The AfD convention finalized its list of 35 candidates for the European Parliament election next year. Maximilian Krah, an AfD Member of the European Parliament since 2019 and a lawyer by training, was named the party's top candidate in the 2024 election after winning 65.7 percent of the votes.

Systemic reform

Krah told radio station DLF a week ago that some form of political coordination is needed at the European level, but he called for a systemic reform of the EU with the aim of giving a significant amount of control back to nation-states.

"We want 80 percent less Europe and more national self-government," he said.

There is great expectation that AfD will do well in the 2024 elections given that the latest polls put the party only second after the center-right Christian Democratic Union but way ahead of German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's center-left Social Democratic Party.

Last week, AfD chairman Tino Chrupalla voiced the party's prospects of winning three state elections in eastern Germany next year. He told party delegates that "we could take on government responsibility".

Georgina Wright, director of Paris-based think tank Institut Montaigne, told BBC she believes the far-right renaissance in Europe is largely because of dissatisfaction with the political mainstream.

Agencies contributed to this story.

Briefly

UNITED STATES

Moody's downgrades ratings of 10 banks

Moody's cut credit ratings of several small to mid-sized United States banks on Monday and said it may downgrade some of the country's biggest lenders, warning the sector's credit strength will likely be tested by funding risks and weaker profitability. Moody's cut the ratings of 10 banks by one notch and placed six banking giants on review for potential downgrades. "This comes as a mild US recession is on the horizon for early 2024 and asset quality looks set to decline, with particular risks in some banks' commercial real estate portfolios," Moody's said.

Over 3,000 troops arrive in Middle East

More than 3,000 United States sailors and marines have entered the Red Sea in the Middle East aboard two warships, the US Navy said on Monday, weeks after the Department of Defense deployed additional military assets to the Strait of Hormuz in response to what Washington claimed were threats posed by Iran. Multiple US media outlets have reported the US is considering what would be an unprecedented action of putting troops on commercial ships traveling through the Strait of Hormuz to deter alleged Iranian seizures. The potential action risks further escalating the tense situation in the region. The Pentagon refused to confirm the veracity of those reports.

AUSTRALIA

Police charge 19 men with child sex abuse

Police have charged 19 men in Australia with child sex abuse offenses and rescued 13 children from further harm following tips from the United States Federal Bureau of Investigation of an international online criminal network, officials said on Tuesday. "We will allege that these men were members of a technologically sophisticated online child abuse network that was operating across the country," Australian Federal Police Commander Helen Schneider said. The 19 had been charged with a total of 138 offenses related to peer-to-peer sharing of video and images on the dark web.

SOUTH KOREA

Scouts evacuated ahead of typhoon

South Korea evacuated the majority of teenage scouts from their campsite on Tuesday ahead of an approaching typhoon, the latest disruption to the World Scout Jamboree that has been marred by illness and criticism of its organization and facilities. More than 1,000 buses were being deployed to move the scouts out of the southwest, a region that Typhoon Khanun is expected to hit as early as Wednesday. There were about 36,000 participants at the campsite, near Buan city, and more than two-thirds have already left, Interior Minister Lee Sang-min told reporters.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

Floral show



Farmers carry flower arrangements known as "Silletas" during the traditional Silleteros parade held as part of the Festival of the Flowers in Medellin, Colombia, on Monday. FREDY BUILES / AGENCE FRANCE-PRESSE

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WORLD US

Trade links 'enduring' though imports decline

Import drop blamed on lower spending by consumers, but 'indirect' trade shows strength

By **ZHAO HUANXIN**
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The sharp decline in the value of the goods that America imports from China — by 25 percent in the first half of this year — is due to a consumer spending drop, but also a result of "indirect trade" between the two countries, suggesting their economic links are "enduring" even amid tensions, analysts said.

US goods imports from China were valued at $203 billion during the first six months of 2023, a decline from $271 billion in the same period last year, while two-way goods trade fell by nearly 20 percent, according to data released by the US Commerce Department on Tuesday.

"I think the decline is mainly due to a slowdown in US household purchases of the various goods produced in China," said Gary Hufbauer, a senior fellow and trade expert at the Peterson Institute for International Economics in Washington.

The top US imports from China in 2023 include computer and electronic products, electrical equipment, appliances and components,and machinery and chemicals, according to the International Trade Administration.

Hufbauer said the impact of the massive tariffs, imposed on roughly two-thirds of Chinese goods during the Trump presidency, was "pretty well" reflected in US imports from China by 2022. Further declines in 2023 mainly reflect changes in household purchases.

The National Retail Federation, in a July economic review, said that while first-quarter consumer spending was decent, it decelerated in May, signaling that a slowdown can be expected when second-quarter results are released.

Overall, US imports of goods slumped by 1.2 percent to $253.3 billion in June, the lowest level since October 2021, according to official statistics.

"Weakening consumer demand for goods and retreating inventory growth by businesses have softened imports this year, while exports continue to trend downward as the global economic backdrop softens," Matthew Martin, a US economist at Oxford Economics, told Reuters.

Consumer spending aside, Hufbauer said that going forward, "redirected supply chains" will play a larger role in actual US imports from China.

"China is shipping more intermediate goods to countries like Mexico, Malaysia and Vietnam, and then the final products are coming to the US," Hufbauer told China Daily. "I think we will see more of these redirected supply chains in the future."

The drastic drop of Chinese imports has made headlines in the global media, but China watchers were quick to point out that it does not prove that attempts to decouple will work out.

In an article "How America is failing to break up with China" published on Tuesday, The Economist noted that China-US economic ties are "more profound than they appear at first glance".

It said the attempt to "de-risk" trade with China is the cornerstone of the White House's foreign policy, but that instead of being slashed, trade links between America and China are enduring—just in more tangled forms.

Beijing has said "de-risking" is "decoupling" in disguise, the purpose of which is to curtail China's growth.

"Given that most countries are desperate for the investment and employment that trade brings, America has been unable to convince its allies to reduce China's role in their supply chains," The Economist authors wrote.

"Many are content to play both sides—receiving Chinese investment and intermediate goods, and exporting finished products to America and the rest of the West," they wrote.

Commenting Monday on a Washington Post report titled "US companies are buying less from China as relations remain tense", Scott Kennedy, trustee chair in Chinese Business and Economics at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, noted that the article misses the fact that some of the decline is made up by Chinese companies that have invested in South East Asia.

In a post on social media, the senior adviser wrote that the results are "not US-CH (China) decoupling, but more indirect trade & investment ties".

S.L. Kanthan, a geopolitical analyst based in Bangalore, India, also wrote on Twitter on Tuesday: "Here's why US is importing less from China: US buys Chinese goods through other countries! China's exports to intermediary countries like Mexico, Vietnam, India, and Malaysia skyrocketed after 2018... when US trade war began. So, decoupling is just recoupling."

More than 37 million people live in poverty in US, data shows

By **BELINDA ROBINSON**
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More than 37.9 million people in the United States live in poverty, as many struggle to afford basic necessities such as food, healthcare and a permanent place to live, figures show, despite the country being the richest nation in the world by gross domestic product.

> When family budgets are squeezed, we tend to see neighbors seeking food assistance because food is generally their most flexible expense."
>
> **Jeff Smith**, senior manager of communications for North Texas Food Bank

The stark figures from the US Census Bureau show that in 2021, 11.6 percent of the entire population was in poverty. Out of that number, the majority, 56 percent — or 21.4 million, were women of all races, along with 16.9 percent of children.

Between the ages of 25 and 34, women are 69 percent more likely than men of the same age to live in poverty, data from The Center for American Progress, a nonpartisan policy institute found. More women than men over age 75 also face financial hardships.

While poverty affects people in towns and cities nationwide, it is particularly bad in Appalachia, the Tobacco Belt of Virginia, the Carolinas, the Cotton Belt in the South, and South Texas, where it affects multiple generations of families.

Since 1963, federal guidelines have determined poverty for a family of four as those who live off less than $25,700 a year. Among single adults, it is those who earn less than $14,580 a year. These guidelines compare a person's pretax income against three times the minimum cost of food.

Jeff Smith, senior manager of communications for North Texas Food Bank, told China Daily: "Nearly 700,000 North Texans are unsure of where their next meal will come from. Tragically, this includes more than 250,000 children ... in our region."

In 2011, the Census Bureau updated the way it identifies those impoverished to include not just the cost of food, but also their household size, cost of utilities, clothing, government programs and where people live. This new guidance is dubbed the "Supplemental Poverty Measure (SPN)".

Meanwhile, internationally, the World Bank measures poverty as those who live on less than $2.15 per day. At least 1.5 million Americans are thought be in that category, according to the 2016 book *$2.00 a Day: Living on Almost Nothing in America* by sociologists Kathryn Edin and Luke Schaefer.

In rural communities and big cities, those on fixed incomes, senior citizens and workers earning a minimum wage are among those struggling.

City Relief, an organization that was founded in 1989, provides meals from local mobile vans in several locations across New York and New Jersey for workers on low wages, for the homeless, and anyone who needs a meal.

"Often people will come to us just because the rent doesn't allow them enough money to eat," Corey Hayes, creative director for City Relief told China Daily. "Many people have less money to spend on food, many rely on these meals as their only meal of the day."

In March, cuts to the federal government's food assistance program, the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, or SNAP, squeezed budgets further — leaving eligible households with $95 less per month.

It affected more than 30 million people in 32 states and the District of Columbia, according to the US Department of Agriculture (USDA), which runs the program.

"When family budgets are squeezed, we tend to see neighbors seeking food assistance because food is generally their most flexible expense and is the most readily available form of charitable support," Smith said.

Across the country, the type of households affected vary. The rate of poverty for single-parent families with no husband present was 24.9 percent. When the single household had no wife present, it was 12.7 percent. But the poverty rate for married couples in 2018 was lower at 4.7 percent.

The highest poverty rate by race was among Native Americans at 25.4 percent, black people at 20.8 percent, Hispanic people at 17.6 percent, white people at 10.1 percent and Asian people at 10.1 percent, according to 2018 Census data.

President Joe Biden has prioritized "making historic investments to support underserved communities ... across the nation in health, education and economic opportunity", the White House said.

In March, the federal budget pledged $341 million for the Community Development Financial Institutions Fund which provides "historically underserved and often low-income communities access to credit, capital, and financial support to grow businesses, increase affordable housing, and reinforce healthy neighborhood development".

A report by the Economic Innovation Group believes that federal policy must "evolve again to support America's most left behind communities. It states that "the core economic development challenge in persistently poor communities is to stimulate private economic activity".

Now playing: Strike



A demonstrator carries a SAG-AFTRA strike sign as Los Angeles city workers hold a rally outside City Hall during a one-day walkout strike in protest over labor negotiations on Tuesday. MIKE BLAKE / REUTERS

Joint drills 'showcase' for US arms industry

By **KARL WILSON** in Sydney
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The curtain came down last week on one of the biggest military exercises held in the Southern Hemisphere — Talisman Sabre.

Some 30,000 troops, including observers from 13 countries, took part in the "war games" which began on July 22.

Talisman Sabre is part of a bigger story, said Joseph Camilleri, emeritus professor at La Trobe University, Melbourne, and a fellow of the Academy of Social Sciences in Australia.

"Joining Australia and the United States are South Korea, Japan, New Zealand, Canada, the UK, France and Germany. As US allies, they are all contributing, with varying degrees of enthusiasm, to a multilayered US-led 'Indo-Pacific strategy' whose clear aim is to contain China and preserve US regional and global dominance," he told China Daily.

"Talisman Sabre has a sobering message for the Asia-Pacific community. We are on a slippery slope which can only lead to the increasingly dangerous militarization of the region.

"We need to steer the ship in a different direction. The Asia-Pacific community, its governments, and its peoples must call for both the Pacific and Indian Oceans to be declared Zones of Peace, and for existing nuclear weapons-free zones to be strengthened and new ones to be established.

"Importantly, it is time for increasingly provocative displays of firepower to be replaced by innovative and sustained confidence-building, conflict resolution, peacekeeping, and mediation efforts," he said.

Alison Broinowski, a former diplomat and president of Australians for War Powers Reform, described the exercises as "a display of military capacity, increasingly aimed at China. It is also a showcase for the arms industries, mainly American".

Proxy target

"The US always wants a coalition for its wars, and its planned next one is against China. Australia appears to be putting our 'sovereign' territory in the line of fire if the US goes to war against China, as a proxy target. We could face the prospect of being Asia's Ukraine."

"Australia has one last chance to seek peaceful cohabitation with our Asian region. Allowing the US to choose our enemies for us will not achieve that," said Broinowski.

The joint exercises have been going on for 18 years, mainly with Australian and US troops, but this year they have involved many countries and heralded a flurry of diplomatic activity in the Pacific.

Japan's Self-Defense Force test-fired missiles from foreign soil during the joint exercises this time, although the Japanese Ministry of Defense stated on its website that "as a general rule, the Constitution does not permit armed troops to be dispatched to the land, sea, or airspace of other countries with the aim of using force".

US Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin was also in Papua New Guinea on July 27 where he reiterated Washington's claim that the US is not seeking to build a permanent base, but a signed agreement allows Washington to be free to refurbish the country's ports and airports for military and civilian use and to stage US forces and equipment.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken held bilateral talks in Tonga on July 26, the first time a US secretary of state had visited the tiny Pacific kingdom.

On July 27, Blinken was in New Zealand for talks with his counterpart Nanaia Mahuta, where the door was opened for possible New Zealand involvement in the AUKUS (Australia-United Kingdom-United States) nuclear military alliance.

It was made clear that New Zealand, due to its anti-nuclear stance, would not be involved in the nuclear submarine program, which Australia has signed up for but is now looking increasingly uncertain.

The AUKUS agreement has seen opposition in the US Congress over the sale of nuclear submarine technology to Australia, as well as in Australia.

Broinowski, the former diplomat, said Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese has "failed to listen to the growing opposition to AUKUS in Australia" and elsewhere.

"Australians are concerned that AUKUS will involve nuclear-capable submarines, aircraft, and torpedoes being based in Australia, with no control by the Australian government over what they may do," she said.

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BUSINESS

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Vale assures more capital for low-carbon solutions

By ZHENG XIN
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Brazilian mining giant Vale SA has vowed to step up investment in low-carbon solutions along the steel value chain in China, according to its top executive.

The country's demand for steel is expected to remain resilient through 2030, holding significant potential for decarbonization due to its large scale. Decarbonization, in industry parlance, refers to the reduction or elimination of carbon dioxide emissions from processes like manufacturing or energy production.

Vale said it believes China's steel demand will remain resilient and plateau at high levels supported by sound fundamentals in the long term, bringing massive opportunities to multinational mining companies such as itself, Chief Executive Eduardo Bartolomeo said.

Continued urbanization and development of the industrial sector will create fresh demand for steel and iron ore in China, Bartolomeo said during a recent news conference.

A cross-country comparison suggests that China's demand for steel and iron ore may plateau and stay at decent levels in the next few years, a process that will also accelerate the global green transition, he added.

Meanwhile, as China's top policymakers assure greater efforts to attract foreign capital, widen market access, promote further opening-up and ensure a level playing field for both domestic as well as foreign companies, Vale continues to hold a positive outlook for the Chinese economy and upholds its long-term commitment to the China market, Bartolomeo said.

The company has said previously that it is cooperating with some 50 steel companies to pursue iron-making solutions focused on fewer emissions, including many leading Chinese steel companies.

"As policymakers in China have sent more pro-growth signals since the second quarter of 2023, property sector demand may gradually bottom out, stabilizing short-term iron ore demand outlook in China," he said.

Vale has been stepping up investment and local cooperation in the country in recent years. In March, it announced seven agreements with various Chinese partners to strengthen its relationship with China, one of the largest producers and consumers of steel in the world.

The country has been actively exploring technologies in decarbonization of the steel value chain, said Zhu Yi, a senior analyst at market monitor Bloomberg Intelligence.

Multinational mining companies like Vale play crucial roles in supporting China's transition to a low-carbon steel industry, as China's steel mills rely on overseas suppliers for more than 70 percent of their iron ore needs, Zhu said.

According to Bartolomeo, China has been the company's largest market since 2006 and destination for more than 50 percent of Vale's iron ore products since 2014.

The company has supplied China with approximately 3 billion metric tons of high-quality iron ore products, as well as with high-quality base metals products such as nickel and copper.

"Vale has been operating in China for 50 years and we look forward to continuing our business as a long-term partner of China and a reliable raw material supplier of the Chinese iron and steel industry," he said. "Vale continues to hold a positive outlook for the Chinese economy."



Iron ore on display at the booth of Vale SA during an expo in Shanghai. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Briefly

Yunnan sees export boom in farm products

In the first half, the export value of agricultural products from Southwest China's Yunnan province exceeded 6.8 billion yuan ($952.6 million), ranking first in the western region of China, according to Kunming Customs. During the period, the export value of both fresh-cut flowers and coffee beans ranked tops nationwide. The export value of fruits and vegetables from Yunnan ranked third and fourth in China, respectively, and the export destinations were mainly ASEAN countries, according to Customs authorities. In the first quarter, Yunnan ranked first in the country in terms of overall export clearance time.

Marine industry posts strong recovery

The marine economy in China continued to experience strong recovery momentum in the first half, said the Ministry of Natural Resources. The country's gross marine economy output grew 6 percent year-on-year to 4.7 trillion yuan ($658.1 billion) in the first six months, accelerating from the 5.1 percent growth registered in the first quarter. The first-half output of offshore crude oil and natural gas increased by 5.1 percent and 7.2 percent from a year ago, respectively. With the decommissioning of old ships and the introduction of international mandatory emission reduction policies, demand for new ships soared during the period, buoying shipbuilding business performance.

International digital economy expo coming

An international digital economy expo will be held from Sept 6 to 8 in Shijiazhuang, the capital of North China's Hebei province. The China International Digital Economy Expo 2023 will focus on the development of the industrial internet, according to the information office of the provincial government. The expo will feature forums and international cooperation activities, and nearly 400 people will be invited from leading enterprises, venture capital funds and research organizations, among other institutions. More than 30 sideline forums will focus on sectors such as digital finance and artificial intelligence, and on specialized and sophisticated enterprises that produce new and unique products. A report on the development of China's digital economy will also be released at the expo.

XINHUA - CHINA DAILY



Export-bound cars await loading at Yantai Port, Shandong province. TANG KE / FOR CHINA DAILY

China now world's top vehicle exporter

NEVs give edge; trade body sees 2023 figure at 5m units; H1 data put Japan at No 2

By LI FUSHENG
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China surpassed Japan as the world's largest vehicle exporter in the first half of this year — and analysts attributed the achievement to the growing popularity of new energy vehicles made in the country.

Auto manufacturers in China shipped 2.34 million vehicles overseas from January to June, up almost 77 percent year-on-year, said the China Association of Automobile Manufacturers citing data from the General Administration of Customs.

Japan lagged at 2.02 million units in the same period, up 17 percent year-on-year, data from the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association showed.

China, which was the world's No 2 vehicle exporter last year, already beat Japan by the first quarter this year.

Cui Dongshu, secretary-general of the China Passenger Car Association, said demand for Chinese-made EVs has been surging in major markets such as Europe and Southeast Asia.

Cui estimates China's full-year vehicle exports may reach 5 million units, up from 3.11 million units in 2022.

China's exports of NEVs, which include EVs and plug-in hybrids, totaled 534,000 units from January to June, up 160 percent year-on-year, according to CAAM data.

They accounted for roughly 23 percent of the country's total vehicle exports in the period, and their growth rate was more than twice that of the average vehicle exports.

Tesla, whose Shanghai plant serves as a major export hub globally, shipped more than 180,000 vehicles out of China in the first half, up more than 87 percent year-on-year, with the list of destinations growing to include countries such as Thailand and South Korea.

BYD exported more than 81,000 vehicles in the same period, around 10 times that of the same period last year, as the largest NEV maker in China started to rev up its forays into overseas markets from the second half of last year.

SAIC, China's largest vehicle maker by sales, sold 115,000 MG-branded vehicles in Europe in the first half, of which over 50 percent were NEVs, said Yu De, managing director of the carmaker's international business department.

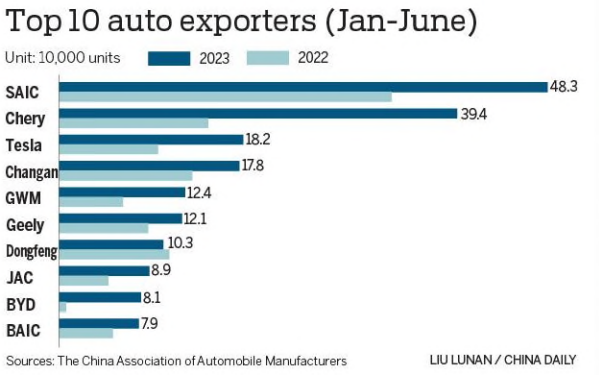
SAIC has been China's top exporter, with 483,000 units shipped overseas from January to June. It said it expects its total exports this year to reach 1.23 million units, of which MG-branded NEVs will likely exceed 200,000 units.

Zeekr, a premium Chinese EV brand under Geely Holding Group, saw its first model for the European market roll off the assembly line earlier this month. It will start deliveries in Sweden and the Netherlands later this year.

Zeekr said it will launch its vehicles in other European markets, including Denmark, Germany, France and Norway, in 2024.

Cui of the CPCA said Chinese brands' deeper inroads into Russia also helped boost China's overseas automobile sales as some international brands withdrew from that country because of its conflict with Ukraine.

Russia, Mexico and Belgium were among the top three destinations for China's total vehicle exports, according to GAC data based on exports in the first five months of the year.



Handsets send quake warnings to users

By MA SI
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Smartphone earthquake warnings have become a hot topic in China as people swarm to embrace mobile technologies for more timely safety alerts, after a magnitude-5.5 earthquake hit Pingyuan county in Dezhou, Shandong province, on Sunday morning.

In Apple's iOS China app store, for instance, multiple earthquake warning apps now rank among the top three most downloaded free apps.

Meanwhile, Chinese smartphone brands using original or modified Android systems, such as Xiaomi, Huawei, Oppo and Vivo, said the function of earthquake warnings is available on their smartphones, and users can directly turn them on, without the need to download an app.

The companies said the earthquake alert is a built-in function, and is a result of coordination with the Institute of Care-Life in Chengdu, Sichuan province, which has developed such a warning system for handsets.

The comments came after many people said on social media that they were awakened from their sleep by shrill sounds or light signals from their smartphones, as the temblor hit Pingyuan county.

Such sounds and flashes serve as warnings which indicate the epicenter, depth and magnitude of the quake along with the expected intensity smartphone owners could expect to feel at their current location. The alert also contains a countdown of when the seismic wave is expected to hit. As the countdown came to zero, tremors occurred which lasted less than a minute, they said.

Such a function first became available on Xiaomi's smartphones in June 2021 when the company partnered with the Institute of Care-Life to announce that China's first smartphone earthquake monitoring and warning network was available.

Wang Tun, head of the institute, said traditional earthquake warning networks install seismic monitoring devices, which are spaced about 15 kilometers apart, in earthquake-prone areas, providing warnings to the public several seconds to tens of seconds before potentially destructive seismic waves arrive. The mobile earthquake monitoring and warning network uses built-in sensors on mobile phones to replace traditional monitoring instruments for detection and warning.

Smartphones are equipped with built-in acceleration sensors that can sense vibrations. If the phone detects information that it believes may be an earthquake, it will send a message to the warning center server. The warning center server automatically determines whether an earthquake has occurred based on the information from many phones, and calculates the earthquake warning magnitude, epicenter location and time of occurrence in seconds when it is determined to be a temblor. It also sends warning messages to affected populations around the epicenter, Wang said.

CNPC method drives green push to oil, gas sectors

By LIU YUKUN
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Oil producer China National Petroleum Corp's "zero-carbon crude oil extraction" is driving low-carbon transformation of energy-intensive oil and gas sectors, and will help advance decarbonization technologies and production models, experts said.

On Friday, the solar thermal system of a section of CNPC's Jilin oilfield, located in Northeast China's Jilin province, was connected to the power grid, marking the completion of the largest onshore zero-carbon oil production demonstration area in Asia. This area has yielded China's first barrel of "zero-carbon crude oil".

Ma Xiaohong, executive deputy manager of new energy at Jilin oilfield, said the section had fully replaced coal-fired power with green electricity through the construction of wind and solar power generation facilities and energy storage facilities. It also partially replaced natural gas heating with geothermal, solar thermal and air-source heat, achieving a yearly replacement of 600,000 cubic meters of natural gas.

Furthermore, carbon emissions from fossil energy consumption are collected and injected into oil reservoirs to improve oil recovery and sequester greenhouse gases. With these comprehensive measures, the sector has achieved zero-carbon crude oil production.

Yang Fuqiang, a researcher at Peking University's Institute of Energy, said that each metric ton of oil extracted, processed and consumed contributes roughly 3 tons of carbon emissions. As a significant energy producer as well as consumer, the petroleum industry's pursuit of low-carbon production methods holds crucial significance for China's carbon reduction goals.

According to the National Bureau of Statistics, crude oil production remained stable in the first half of this year at 105.05 million tons, up more than 2 percent year-on-year.

Lyu Jianzhong, deputy director of CNPC Research Center of China Top Think Tanks, said energy used for onshore oil and gas production involves natural gas and coal-fired electricity, resulting in high energy consumption and carbon emissions. Promoting green oil production is crucial for the industry's sustainable development and China's decarbonization goals.

Lyu further said that at present, many oil and gas fields constructed photovoltaic and wind power generation facilities on idle land to meet their demand for electricity, thereby reducing carbon emissions.

He said the intermittent, fluctuating or unstable nature of new energy sources also poses challenges to oil and gas extraction. Technological innovations are expected to address this issue in the future.

Yang from PKU noted that operations at oil extraction and processing facilities demand stable electricity. The instability of new energy power generation can be partly mitigated through energy storage equipment.

Apart from new energy power generation, many oil and gas fields are researching and promoting carbon capture, usage and storage or CCUS technologies, as well as carbon sinks and carbon trading mechanisms, to offset carbon emissions and realize zero-carbon production, Lyu said.

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BUSINESS

Beef imports increase, satisfying many palates

NANNING — A containership carrying Brazilian beef recently arrived at China's Qinzhou Port in the Beibu Gulf after more than a month's voyage from the Port of Santos in Brazil.

After being unloaded, the goods were further transported to the populous Pearl River Delta region in South China and the provinces of Yunnan, Guizhou and Sichuan in Southwest China, before being served at restaurants or cooked in local households.

China is a major consumer of beef. In recent years, its import volume of beef has continued to rise, showing rapid growth momentum.

According to Customs data, China's beef imports have more than doubled from 1.04 million metric tons in 2018 to 2.69 million tons recorded in 2022. Last year alone, China imported nearly $17.76 billion of beef, an increase of 42.19 percent over the previous year.

In the first half of the year, China's imported beef and edible cow entrails reached 1.25 million tons, marking a cumulative increase of 6.3 percent year-on-year. China mainly imports beef from countries such as Brazil, Argentina and Uruguay.

Guangxi Free Trade Zone Linhai Supply Chain Co Ltd, located in the Qinzhou Port, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, started its business by dealing with red wine imports. Driven by market demand, it began a cold-chain import business in recent years.

The company now cooperates with JBS SA, a Brazilian meat processing company, to import Brazilian beef.

In 2022, China's beef imports from Brazil totaled $7.5 billion, accounting for 42.38 percent of China's total beef imports.

Qin Shide, deputy general manager of Guangxi Free Trade Zone Linhai Supply Chain Co Ltd, said that last year they imported 17 beef containers weighing 475 tons, all from Brazil.

As the economy and consumption gradually recover, the company plans to buy more beef from Brazil this year, with the import value expected to quadruple that of last year, Qin said.

Rice or noodles with beef toppings from street stalls are among the most popular dishes in China. Beef is a common bestseller in barbecue and hotpot restaurants, and consumers favor steak meals in Western cuisine eateries.

Zhou Yu, a resident in Guangxi's Nanning, said steaks served with a plate of pasta and broccoli are now a common main dish for her family's supper, adding that recently, imported beef is much cheaper than before, allowing her family to consume beef more frequently.

China's well-developed e-commerce industry has also fueled the beef import boom. Livestream shows have brought high-quality imported beef onto the dining tables of many Chinese families.

On the video-sharing app Douyin, the Chinese version of TikTok, consumers are willing to fork out a high amount of money for premium steak imports via livestream shows.

Many affordable steak meals can be ordered online with a few clicks on phone screens and then shipped to consumers' doorsteps without any extra delivery fees, thanks to the country's efficient cold-chain logistics.

Industry insiders believe that with the economic recovery, the catering sector is gradually picking up, and China's beef consumption will continue its growth in 2023.

XINHUA

Sparkling summer day



Employees conduct welding work at a construction site on the Hangzhou-Deqing railway in Zhejiang province in July. According to China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, which joins in the construction of the intercity railway, the project is seen on a steady track toward completion despite extreme weather recently, with the latest progress being the installation of a major railway bridge pile at the East Tiaoxi river last week. The 25.9-kilometer railway lies between Hangzhou's Yuhang district and Huzhou's Deqing county, and has nine stations.

WANG SHUCHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Diners are seen at a McDonald's quick service restaurant in Beijing in September. There are currently over 5,400 McDonald's QSRs nationwide. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

McDonald's China bullish on biz prospects in nation

Fast food chain to propel digitalization for growth, eyeing 10,000 stores by 2028

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**
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McDonald's China said it is on track to open a total of 10,000 stores by 2028, propelled by deeper localization in its expansion, digitalization and supply chains, said its top executive.

On the sixth anniversary of McDonald's China's partnership with CITIC Ltd, CITIC Capital Partners and The Carlyle Group, with McDonald's maintaining 20 percent of the Chinese unit, the company has thrived with store numbers doubling, covering more lower-tier cities, offering wider digital services and creating more local delicacies to better serve Chinese consumers, McDonald's China said.

Phyllis Cheung, CEO of McDonald's China, said in an interview with China Daily that the company has more than doubled its 2,000 outlets in five years to over 5,400 restaurants currently. This year alone, the firm will open more than 900 new stores.

The CEO said the growth potential in China is immense. "If measured by the 14,000 McDonald's in the United States, which has a population of about 332 million, it is reasonable to expect 30,000 of our stores in China," she said.

> "We are confident in the second half, which is relying on consumption stimulus including product innovations, competitive prices and expansion in both offline and online platforms."
>
> **Phyllis Cheung,** CEO of McDonald's China

"The company has invented new store formats including the M2go shops, which offer contactless pick-up lockers just by scanning a code. The format is designed to fit face-paced lifestyles in urban China, where more than 70 percent of our business is delivery and takeaways," Cheung said.

McDonald's China has also launched breakfast stalls in subway stations in Beijing. Drive-through restaurants — totaling more than 660 — are also a driving force for the company's expansion in China, Cheung added.

The growth in China in the first half of the year in terms of revenue is above pre-COVID levels, driven mostly by same-store growth and expansion.

"We are confident in the second half, which is relying on consumption stimulus including product innovations, competitive prices and expansion in both offline and online platforms," she said.

The limited-service restaurant chain market in China, which combines fast-food and 100 percent home delivery and takeaway outlets, has increased from 378.9 billion yuan ($52.54 billion) in 2018 to 430.6 billion yuan in 2022 and is forecast to exceed 705 billion yuan in 2027, according to a report by market research organization Euromonitor International.

McDonald's still lags behind KFC in terms of market share but has expanded its scale quickly in recent years following the partnership, according to the report.

"The key of localization for international catering or fast-food restaurants lies in a China-focused digital ecology that fits Chinese consumers' digital habits, as companies are required to constantly improve their internal operational efficiency, offering more convenience and a fluid and nimble user experience," said Jason Yu, general manager of Kantar Worldpanel China.

"So far, domestic catering players, such as Heytea, are faster and more flexible in digital innovations and customized services."

McDonald's China said that thanks to digitalization, developed and operated entirely by its China team of about 200 engineers, nine out of 10 orders are placed from digital devices — 80 percent from mobile phones and 10 percent from restaurant ordering screens. "It means that only 10 percent of our orders are placed face-to-face," said Cheung. Its mobile application, with more than 260 million registered members, is rated 4.9 out of 5 points.

In regards to the supply chain, Cheung said more than 90 percent of its food materials are now acquired and produced locally. A total of 14 logistics centers are under operation compared to only seven centers five years ago. For example, chickens are now supplied by Sunner and Tyson Foodstuffs China. Demand for cheese, which nearly doubled in the past years due to the popularity of the Angus Beef Burger, is supplied by Sanyuan Dairy in Beijing and a dairy producer in Shanghai.

Rising vet care gives medical device makers leg-up

By **ZHENG YIRAN**
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With rising demand for animal medical services, domestic medical device manufacturers are ramping up efforts to develop and produce medical devices for people's pets.

A 2022 White Paper on China's Pet Medical Industry, jointly issued by the National Veterinary Drug Industry Technical Innovation Alliance, China Veterinary Drug Association, Chinese Veterinary Medical Association, East and West Small Animal Veterinary Confer, and Shanghai-based pet medical platform iChong, showed that in 2022, the country's veterinary market totaled 67.5 billion yuan ($9.36 billion) in value, taking up 22.5 percent of the total pet consumption industry. The ratio has been on the rise during the past few years.

Specifically, the white paper noted that the number of human-use medical equipment manufacturers that had wafted into the veterinary industry increased year-by-year. In addition, smart diagnostic and high-end equipment for animals has been on the rise.

In June, the Development and Reform Commission of Shenzhen Municipality issued a public announcement on a key project selected for the high-end veterinary medical equipment manufacturing base in Shenzhen, Guangdong province. The company responsible for the selected project, with an estimated annual production value of 12 billion yuan, is Shenzhen Mindray Animal Medical Technology Co Ltd, a wholly owned subsidiary of Mindray Group, a domestic medical equipment manufacturer.

The subsidiary, founded in 2020, aims at taking advantage of Mindray's technical reserves in medical imaging, patient monitoring and life support, and in-vitro diagnostics to extend its presence in the animal healthcare sector.

So far, the company has launched a series of animal-use products, covering medical imaging systems, anesthesia machines, infusion systems, surgical lights, animal monitoring systems, endoscopes and hematology analyzers. It has also developed various treatment solutions for different species of animals.

"The veterinary industry is rapidly aligning with human medicine. While developing new products, we conform our proven technologies in human medicine to suit applications in the veterinary field," said Chen Xing, general manager of Mindray Animal Medical.

In Mindray's 2022 annual report, it said: "Veterinary medical service is one of our seeded business units. Specifically, based on the three major technologies — medical imaging, patient monitoring and life support, and IVD — we plan to establish a technological research platform, boost research and development, further improve product quality, enhance doctors' work efficiency, and optimize workflow in veterinary services."

In 2022, Mindray Animal Medical announced the establishment of the MindVet Academy, an academic exchange platform offering both online and offline training sessions to veterinarians at home and abroad.

Other domestic companies have also taken action. Medical imaging and radiotherapy equipment maker Shanghai United Imaging Healthcare Co developed an ultra-high-field animal magnetic resonance imaging system, which can present accurate, high-definition images of living animal tissue and generate analysis.

Beijing-based Lepu Medical Technology Ltd established a veterinary business unit, offering a series of products ranging from surgical equipment, vital sign monitoring equipment, IVD and imaging systems to interventional equipment.

According to corporate information provider Qichacha, by August, there were over 435,000 enterprises registered with veterinary-related businesses in China. Among them, some 150,000 were founded within the past year, and 97,500 were founded within the past half-year, demonstrating a rising trend.

"As pet medical devices have become a critical link for veterinary services, the growth rate of China's animal-use medical device market has outpaced that of human use," said Yao Jing, an expert in medical devices at VBData.cn, a Chongqing-based healthcare service platform.

"For years, veterinary institutions mainly made diagnoses based on experience. Hindered by the fact that animals are unable to express themselves, the misdiagnosis rate has been high. With the help of medical devices, veterinarians are able to make diagnoses more precisely. Complete medical equipment not only enhances veterinary institutions' service quality and reputation, but it also raises their revenue," he said.

Currently, pet hospitals are mainly equipped with X-ray and ultrasonic equipment. The installation rate of computerized tomography equipment and MRI equipment is low. There is huge development space for animal medical device manufacturers, he added.



A dog receives medical treatment from a vet in Shenyang, Liaoning province. The number of newly registered veterinary companies reached some 150,000 in China last year. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Smiling through the pain

Dental implant industry poised to pivot after recently announced price cuts

By ZHENG YIRAN
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China's dental implant industry is expected to undergo a major transformation amid rapidly falling prices.

The country's first bulk procurement program targeting dental implants has seen prices reduce on average by about 55 percent, according to the National Healthcare Security Administration.

The program mainly targets public hospitals, covering 72 percent of annual demand for dental implants across the country, and patients are expected to save 4 billion yuan ($554.5 million) as a result, the administration said.

The price cut took effect in late March or mid-April, depending on the region.

The dental implantation procedure to replace missing or decaying teeth incurs the cost of medical consumables, such as dental implants and crowns, as well as medical service fees.

Previously, the total cost of dental implant surgery was as high as 30,000 yuan.

According to a survey led by the administration in September 2022, about 60 percent of respondents had complained about the differential pricing and called for a centralized procurement program to make the service more affordable.

The adjusted service fee for dental implants in public 3A-grade hospitals is 4,500 yuan per tooth.

"The rapid price drop in dental implants has brought a major turning point for the dental industry," said Hu Xuan, a medical devices analyst at vbdata.cn, a Chongqing-based healthcare service platform.

"The price drop will help increase patient visits to dental institutions, especially during the basic treatment link. In addition, the bulk procurement program mainly targets public hospitals, and private institutions can still maintain autonomy, bringing a positive influence to the overall industry," he said.

Industry experts said domestic substitution will be accelerated in the upstream consumables end of the chain.

Homegrown dental implants came on the scene recently and the market share of domestic brands is relatively low.

Data from vbdata.cn showed that by the end of 2021, about 117 implant products were registered and launched in China, of which 99 were imported products. The market share of domestic brands was only 15 percent.

"Dental implants made in China lacked in technique and experience, and there was not enough clinical data support," Hu said.

In terms of technique, Chinese enterprises were merely followers.

Citing surface treatment technology as an example, Nobel Biocare and Straumann — two leading international brands — adopt fourth-generation technology of anodizing treatment and hydrophilic sandblasting acid etching treatment, respectively, which have better biocompatibility, corrosion resistance and strength.

In contrast, domestic companies still adopt second- to third-generation technology of simple coating and sandblasting acid etching treatment, he said.

"In addition, there is not enough clinical trial data going back 5-10 years for domestic dental implants. Dentists have concerns while choosing domestic dental implant brands, which also leads to the insufficient use of domestic products," Hu said.

"The bulk procurement program will promote the development of domestic dental implant brands, as it offers homegrown companies a good window period, during which two to three dark horses are expected to stand out," said Lyu Sang, a strategy consultant of Denfac, an oral medical device research and development enterprise based in Wuxi, Jiangsu province.

"The dental implant industry develops through rising orders. Once orders go up, enterprises will make more profits. Through the national-level or provincial-level bulk procurement programs, the market share of domestic dental implant enterprises is expected to rise.

"However, once enterprises win the bid, demand for production capacity, supply chain delivery and personalized clinical guidance all raise challenges for domestic brands. They should ramp up efforts to rise up to the challenges," he said.

In the downstream segment, the service quality of dentists will become a key competition focus for the market, as the bulk procurement program makes prices of consumables transparent, and for medical institutions, the only competition points are service, skill and talent, market insiders said.

"Judging from the NHSA notice, the price premium for high-quality services of dental implants is allowed, as the notice offered the example that in regions with advanced dental implant skills, the price premium rate can be up to 20 percent," Hu from vbdata.cn said.

Likewise, for the National Center of Stomatology, medical institutions with a dental implant specialty listed in national key clinical specialties and medical institutions with high success rates of dental implants, transparent service quality information, and commitment to accept supervision and inspection, the price premium rate is 10 percent, according to the notice.

"I think the current pricing of national centralized procurement is fair. A reasonable price is the guarantee of quality," said Zhu Liya, co-founder and CEO of Shanghai-based Mei Wei Dental Group.

Besides, the Matthew Effect in downstream services — where large companies are getting bigger and small ones contract — will increase, Hu said.

For small companies, rising orders may not necessarily mean a rise in profits — there may even be a profit decline. They should pay special attention to the changing demand of consumers, and adjust business strategies accordingly.

"Leading companies are suggested to take advantage of better service resources and capabilities, siphon off the majority of patients in the region and improve user stickiness with overall oral solutions, to achieve a higher premium," he added.

Ding Ning, former general manager of Rongyu Group, said the new policy on dental implants gives "full recognition to the value of medical service, making enterprises increase their efforts in recruiting high-quality dentists, to offer multidimensional dental implant services to meet the varied consumer demand".

Zhu from Mei Wei Dental Group said that going forward, the group will lay emphasis on the quality of medical service and digitalization.

"With the popularization of dental implants, the market could be better educated, making consumers gain a better understanding about oral disease prevention and periodontal maintenance, and thus promote the development of the dental industry," Hu said.

Data from the China National Committee on Aging showed that by 2022, over 50 percent of elderly people aged between 65 and 74 in China were missing more than 10 teeth due to various reasons, while 26 percent of those over 74 years old had lost all their teeth.

According to a report from market consultancy iiMedia Research, in 2021, China's dental service market totaled 146.1 billion yuan, up 16.2 percent year-on-year. The dental implant market makes up roughly 25 percent of the overall industry, adding up to 36.5 billion yuan.

At a cost of about 8,000 yuan per tooth, the number of dental implants in China in 2021 exceeded 4.5 million, the highest in the world in terms of annual dental implant numbers, according to the report.



Above: Dental surgeons treat a patient at a hospital in Fuyang, Anhui province, in June. WANG BIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY
Left: A dental implant robot is on display at the China Dental Show in Beijing in June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> "The price drop will help increase patient visits to dental institutions, especially during the basic treatment link."
>
> **Hu Xuan,** a medical devices analyst at vbdata.cn

Oral healthcare market sparkles on rising public awareness, surging demand

By ZHENG YIRAN

China's oral care market is developing rapidly, thanks to rising awareness about oral health.

Chen Yin, a 30-year-old office clerk in Beijing, buys a wide range of oral care products, including electric toothbrushes, mouthwash, oral irrigators, mouth sprays and teeth whitening strips.

"I spend around 500 yuan ($69.3) on oral care every month. Paying attention to oral hygiene not only prevents diseases, but is also a courtesy to others as it helps me maintain fresh breath," she said.

With 710 million people suffering from oral health problems, China's oral care market is expected to reach 128.5 billion yuan by the end of this year, or about 33.8 percent of the world, said a 2023 white paper on oral care released by Chinese e-commerce giant JD.

In terms of products, toothpastes and toothbrushes are the core categories, while the orthodontic category is growing rapidly, according to the report.

Brands are actively entering the online market, and the concentration of electric toothbrushes is high. Competition among oral spray, tooth powder, and manual toothbrush categories players is fierce, the white paper said.

The high consumption group, users in smaller cities, new generation parents, Generation Z (people born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s) and women are the five typical consumer groups for oral care. In addition, differentiated oral health problems, such as gum bleeding, halitosis, aphthous stomatitis, and children's tooth decay, have brought in diversified needs.

In terms of function, the white paper found that demand for fresh breath, scientific fluoride, personalized flavors, soft touch like velvet, as well as convenience, health and exquisite care has been upgraded.

In 2022, sales of independently packaged dental floss and alcohol-free mouthwash both increased by more than 12 times year-on-year.

The survey showed that 83 percent of users use professional oral products when cleaning their oral cavity. The proportion of people who choose a combination of toothbrush, toothpaste, dental floss and mouthwash is the highest, meeting the multiple needs of basic care and deep and immediate cleaning.



Visitors gather at a booth for oral care products during the China Dental Show in Beijing in June. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

> With the constant improvement of people's living standards, ... the demand for oral care is also becoming increasingly strong."
>
> **Wang Xinxue,** a medical devices analyst at vbdata.cn

Up to 42 percent of users prioritize functionality while purchasing oral care products, rather than blindly pursuing cost-effectiveness.

"Currently, the oral care market in China has gone through the 1.0 stage of basic care, and the 2.0 stage of advanced care, transitioning to the 3.0 stage of refined care," said the white paper.

"With the constant improvement of people's living standards, the public's awareness of oral care is constantly awakening, and the demand for oral care is also becoming increasingly strong," said Wang Xinxue, a medical devices analyst at vbdata.cn, a Chongqing-based healthcare service platform.

With diversified oral care demand from consumers, oral care is receiving increased attention from the capital market.

Statistics from vbdata.cn show that between 2021 and 2022, there were 23 investment deals in China's oral care market, with the total amount surpassing 1 billion yuan.

Enterprises that received this capital include new brands such as Canban, BOP and Chingchi Lab.

New products, categories, and brands are constantly emerging. Apart from well-known oral care products such as electric toothbrushes and mouthwash, new product forms such as oral irrigators, tooth cleaners, whitening pens, and mouth sprays are also coming into play.

Among them, oral irrigators' gross merchandise volume contribution rate to the oral care industry has tripled in two years, a 2021 oral care report released by e-commerce behemoth Tmall showed.

Lian Minxiu, general manager of the oral care division of Philips China, said: "With the oral care industry booming, enterprises should ensure the quality of products, as consumers who have purchased low-quality products may raise concerns about the category, affecting their experience and forming misconceptions about the product, leading them to refuse a new way of achieving dental health in the future."

Cong Jia, vice-president of investment at Bai Capital, said oral care products are in high demand.

"Currently, the market competition is incomplete, containing new trends and opportunities. Market education and industry standards should be formulated to promote the development of the industry," Cong said.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Biden administration needs to put money where mouth is to get floor under relations

In what is being widely perceived to be the first tangible signs that progress is being made in stabilizing relations, Beijing and Washington are reportedly working on opening new lines of communication to tackle contentious issues.

According to a Financial Times report, two working groups are being formed to focus on Asia-Pacific issues and maritime issues, and a third group is apparently being considered that will focus on broader areas. That could indeed be a welcome sign.

Speaking to CNN on the sidelines of the Aspen Security Forum in Colorado on July 23, after his highly anticipated trip to China, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the two sides were trying to strengthen their "lines of communication" to avoid conflict.

"We are working to put some stability into the relationship, to put a floor under the relationship, to make sure that the competition that we're in doesn't veer into conflict", which, as he correctly pointed out, "would not be in our interest, their interest, or anyone else's." His visit was followed by similar trips by other high-level Biden administration officials, including Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and US climate envoy John Kerry who also stressed the need for communication.

On its part, Beijing has made no secret of the fact that it considers sincere and candid communication to be crucial for the two sides to manage their differences. Speaking with Blinken in Jakarta, Indonesia, on the sidelines of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations Foreign Ministers' Meeting in July, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi once again stressed the importance of communication.

Wang said that consultations on the guiding principles of China-US relations needed to be advanced, the communication channels between the two sides needed to be expanded and the communication between the two sides needed to be more effective to resolutely stop "gray rhinos", properly handle "black swans" and thoroughly remove the "tigers blocking the way" for the improvement of relations.

If the two sides are indeed stepping up communication, it is to be hoped that the dialogues will be conducted with sincerity, as what has become a defining feature of the new normal of Sino-US relations is that the Joe Biden administration says it's good to talk, while reneging on what it says.

That the remits of the initial two groups concern the areas with the most powder-keg potential will hopefully enable Beijing to convince the Biden administration that it needs to stop provocatively playing with matches in these explosive areas.

The US is good at harming other nations' interests even as it offers a hand to shake. If the working groups are indeed to help "put a floor under the relationship", rather than being merely pantomimes paying lip service to that task, they in turn should be given a solid foundation on which to work. That can be provided by the Biden administration honoring the commitments President Biden has made to China on various occasions.

West's stranglehold on tech has spillover effects

Exports to China made up 6.2 percent of Germany's total exports in the first half of this year, their lowest share since 2016. Some are attributing this to the weakening of the Chinese economy, saying that this has reduced its demand for exports from Germany.

Others suggest otherwise. They believe that China is increasingly able to produce goods it previously bought from Germany, which is weighing on Germany's exports. As trade expert Vincent Stamer of Kiel Institute for the World Economy said, China is climbing up the technological ladder, and with its growing technological progress, the country is able to create an increasing percentage of the value added itself.

The fact that many in Germany worry that the weaker demand from China has had a strong impact on the German manufacturing sector speaks volumes about how trade relations have been undergoing a structural change in the past two decades with China's technological leap forward.

But despite that, the reality remains unchanged. China continues to become increasingly interconnected with the world as a major industrial manufacturing country and an important link in the global industry and supply chains. The country is the backbone for the global energy transition, for instance, which would be impossible without its exports of some critical raw materials and solar panels.

What is hindering the development of the world economy is the stranglehold some Western countries have on the exports of key technologies in some fields. Such an approach is meant to slow down the development of the Chinese economy, especially the upgrading of China's manufacturing industry, as these countries fear that China's rise poses a threat to their development.

The restrictions on exports of key technologies will undoubtedly make things hard for China's manufacturing industry, but the country is striving to make breakthroughs in developing these technologies that are urgently needed for the upgrading of its manufacturing industry.

But even after those breakthroughs are made, the country will not cut itself off from the rest of the world. China knows that it still has a lot to learn from developed countries, and even if it attains a higher status on the technological ladder in the near future, it will remain open and inclusive, which it believes will help address the common challenges facing humanity and make the world a better place.

It is natural that the composition of China's imports should change as it develops and that the West's stranglehold on key technologies should have spillover effects. China's imports are a dynamic response process to its needs. They are neither due to the weakness of its economy nor because it's closing its doors.

National compliance key to biological weapons ban

With the Ukraine crisis having led to talk about the possibility of using unconventional weapons, the second meeting of the Working Group on the Strengthening of the Biological Weapons Convention, which takes place from Monday to Aug 18 in Geneva, is an important gathering to discuss national implementations regarding the convention.

As of February this year, 185 countries have become party to the treaty that entered into force in 1975. However, it is a fact that the convention's effectiveness has been limited due to insufficient institutional support and the absence of any formal verification regime to monitor compliance.

China firmly supports the purposes and objectives of the convention, strictly fulfills its obligations under the convention, and actively participates in and supports multilateral processes to enhance the effectiveness of the convention. The country is deeply involved in global biosecurity governance, and actively contributes Chinese wisdom and offers Chinese solutions, which is aligned with the Global Security Initiative it has put forward, to promote the implementation of the convention.

Beijing advocates strengthening the convention, and vigorously promotes the establishment of a verification mechanism through multilateral negotiations to ensure compliance with the convention. It stands for the prohibition and destruction of all weapons of mass destruction, including biological weapons, and firmly opposes the proliferation of biological weapons and their technologies.

In April 2021, the Biosafety Law of China came into effect, providing stronger legal and institutional guarantees for China's implementation of the convention. The country has also actively advocated for the negotiation and formulation of an international convention on combating acts of biological and chemical terrorism to plug the loopholes in international law.

China also actively supports strengthening the review of the development of biotechnology under the framework of the convention, promoting responsible biological research, and formulating necessary voluntary codes of conduct. It has played an indispensable role in facilitating the formation and release of Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines for Codes of Conduct for Scientists in 2021.

Plus, in response to the call of developing countries for sharing the dividends of scientific and technological development in biology and other fields, China has also submitted its proposal for Promoting International Cooperation on Peaceful Uses under the Framework of the Biological Weapons Convention to the United Nations. That it has been adopted as a resolution of the UN General Assembly for two consecutive years shows the important role China plays in promoting dialogue and cooperation in the crucial field to prevent it from becoming a new area for major power contest at the cost of less-developed countries.

As such, China will continue to play a key role in the ongoing meeting in Geneva, working with the international community to promote global biosafety governance, and making greater contributions to universal security and common development.

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Luo Jie



Opinion Line

Reality of Xinjiang contrary to claims made by Western media

After concluding a five-day tour of China's Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, which took them to Kashgar, Kuqa and Urumqi to experience local customs and economic and social development, the envoys from the Dominican Republic and 23 other countries said that the Xinjiang they saw is completely different from what the Western media portrays.

The envoys had only read negative reports in the Western media before arriving in Xinjiang, where they found beautiful sceneries, warm-hearted people and a dynamic economy. They visited engineering projects, scenic spots, old streets and manufacturing enterprises, thus being exposed to a range of people and customs. After visiting water conservancy projects, agricultural projects, free trade zones, airports, tourist and cultural sites, and interacting with local people, the envoys said Xinjiang is developing well and the rights and freedoms of the local people are fully protected. "This is completely different from the human rights issue hyped up by Western media," they said.

In Xinjiang's cotton fields, cotton planters use modern technology, such as drones to spray pesticides; they have also established a modern irrigation network. To the foreign envoys, this was completely different from the reports of "forced labor" they had read. After interacting directly with Islamic clerics, the envoys felt that the Islamic institutes in Xinjiang have well protected the cultural and historical traditions of ethnic minorities.

In recent years, about 2,000 government officials, religious figures and journalists from more than 100 countries and international organizations have visited Xinjiang. The reason why Western media "demonize" Xinjiang is to use the opportunity to smear China. The Western media describe China the way they want the world to see it.

By the end of 2020, Xinjiang had eliminated absolute poverty. In the first half of this year, Xinjiang's GDP reached 854.20 billion yuan ($118.43 billion), up 5.1 percent year-on-year. From January to June, Xinjiang received 102 million tourists, a year-on-year increase of 31.49 percent, generating 92.276 billion yuan in tourism revenue, a year-on-year increase of 73.64 percent. As a frontier region in western China, Xinjiang plays an important role in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative. As of July 20, more than 8,000 China-Europe freight trains had passed through the ports of Khorgos and Alashankou in Xinjiang, carrying more than 200 types of goods. All these data defy Western lies about Xinjiang

— CHINA MEDIA GROUP

ROK must worry for its fishermen, not for Japan

A month ago, the government of the Republic of Korea said that Japan's nuclear-contaminated water release plan "meets standards". Now Yonhap News Agency has quoted ROK officials as saying that it is for Japan, and not for the ROK and Japan, to decide when it should dump the water.

It seems the ROK government has stopped bothering about Japan's discharge plan. It even released a paper saying they themselves had discharged more tritium than Japan, but the local media pulled up the government, reminding it that the ROK's data was of 2022, and Japan's of 2019. ROK Prime Minister Han Duck-soo had even said he would drink the nuclear contaminated water from Fukushima.

Ironically, that's not what his people – who have expressed concern over Japan's discharge plan and blamed the Japanese government for the plan and the ROK government for supporting it.

Even the Japanese people have expressed their anger, protesting against the Japanese government and the Tokyo Electric Power Company, which managed the nuclear power plant in Fukushima. One wonders why the ROK is speaking up for the interests of Japan, while neglecting the livelihood of its own fishermen, who will be badly hit once the contaminated water is discharged.

In contrast, China has been firmly opposing any hazardous plan of discharging nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean. China's customs department has banned imports of food from Fukushima and relevant Japanese prefectures, while the Chinese Foreign Ministry has said that those who believe they can drink or swim in nuclear-contaminated water from Fukushima should collect the same and drink or swim in it, instead of piping it into the ocean.

Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Wang Wenbin said that China has asked Japan to come to the right path of meeting the concerns of every side. It's time Japan dropped its discharge plan and conducted research to find a more appropriate way to discharge the water.

— CHANG'ANJIEZHISHI WECHAT ACCOUNT

What They Say

US can't hide its plundering under values

When describing the United States acts of plundering oil and resources in countries such as Syria, the traditional image of a masked robber fails to match its behavior. Robberies committed by the US, in essence, differ little from those of conventional bandits. The only distinction is that the US seldom bothers to wear a mask or operate with stealth.

The US forces, as Syria's state news agency SANA has reported, have stolen and illegally transported a substantial amount of wheat bran and oil from Syria's northeast province of Hasakah to its bases in Iraq.

The US military has long been using truck convoys to pilfer oil and other resources in Syria.

According to official data released by Syria, over 80 percent of the country's oil production in the first half of 2022 was plundered by the US military and its supporting forces.

Its brazen acts of resource theft in countries such as Syria serve two purposes: To reap colossal profits through the appropriation of valuable resources and deprive disobedient governments of vital resources.

According to Syria's official data released in 2022, direct losses resulting from thefts committed by the military and supporting forces on Syrian territory totaled $25.9 billion. Of these, a staggering $19.8 billion dollars can be attributed to the looting of oil, gas, and mineral resources, while an additional $3.3 billion resulted from the vandalizing and ransacking of facilities.

This deliberate resource plundering deprives what it views as disobedient governments of vital resources, denting their endeavors to upgrade infrastructure, improve the lives of their citizens, and pursue national development.

The US has also fleeced impoverished Afghanistan, freezing its overseas assets since 2021, and is scheming to redirect these resources for its own purposes. Besides, it has been seizing Iranian oil tankers on international trade routes, surreptitiously bringing Iranian oil back to the US for sale and attempting to legitimize this act of robbery as "imports". Local people are the victims as the US pursues profits and its political agenda through these blatant robberies.

Throughout the protracted Syrian crisis, the loss of life has been horrendous, with at least 350,000 casualties recorded and a significant portion of adults enduring poverty below the breadline. Two-thirds of the population relies on humanitarian aid as a lifeline, while over half lack reliable access to food, leaving them vulnerable to hunger and insecurity. Standing in front of a mirror of truth, Washington would see itself revealed as a despicable plunderer.

— XINHUA NEWS AGENCY

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COMMENT

Wang Jun and Ye Linwei

Difficult for US to rebuild rare earth supply chain

In an effort to accelerate the reconstruction of its rare earth magnet supply chain and reduce dependence on China for the supply of rare earths, the US Congress recently introduced the "Rare Earth Magnet Manufacturing Production Tax Credit Act of 2023". The bill aims to encourage localized production of rare earths and further the US' industrial "decoupling" efforts from China.

Rare earth elements are scarce strategic resources that are extensively used in emerging technologies such as renewable energy, as well as in the defense industry.

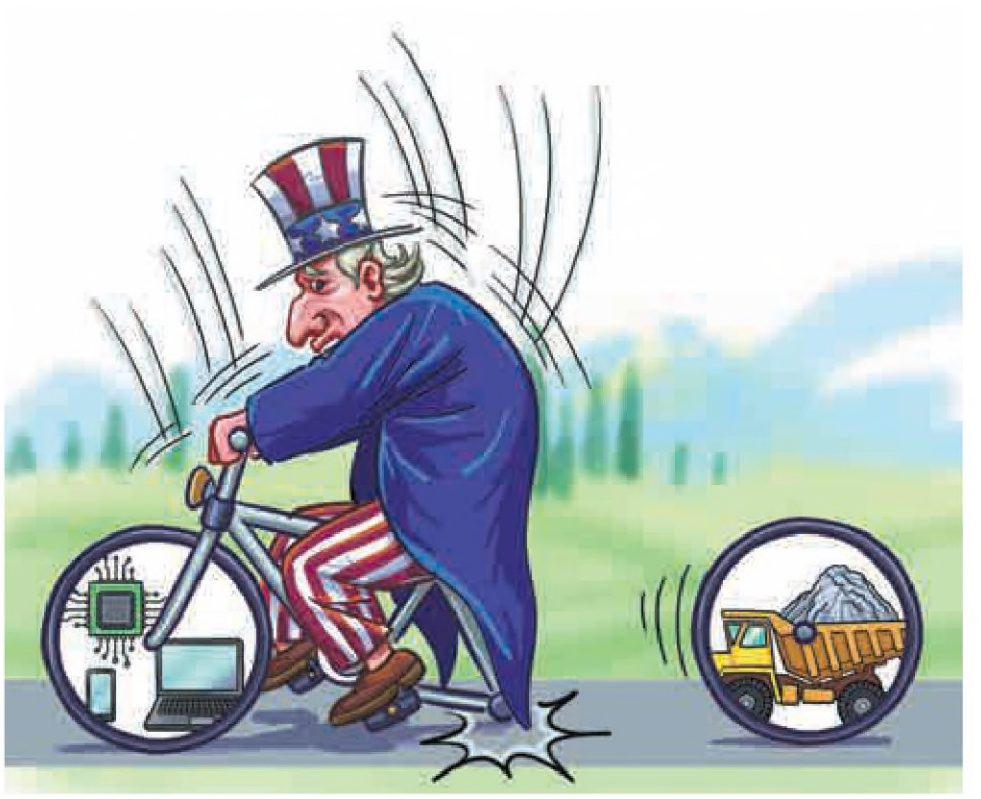
However, it is difficult for the United States to build a comprehensive rare earth magnet supply chain.

The US faces many challenges in mining rare earths, including high infrastructure development costs and lower ore grades. While China has about 33.8 percent of the world's total rare earth reserves, with an estimated stockpile of 44 million tons, the US only has an estimated 1.8 million tons of rare earth reserves. The limited reserve, coupled with a lack of returns on previous investments in rare earth mining, makes it especially challenging for the US to achieve profitable production levels.

According to Goldman Sachs' estimates, to reach China's rare earth annual production level, the West will require an investment of at least $25 billion. The high costs involved in mining and refining rare earth elements mean a relatively low profit margin.

Besides, the Mountain Pass mine is the only rare earth mine with operational capability in the US. But despite being a major source of rare earths for the world, it was closed in 2002 due to operational difficulties. And although MP Materials resumed rare earth mining operations at Mountain Pass in 2017, the initial infrastructure development costs were massive, with about $1 billion needed for mining construction and other factors. After suffering setbacks, however, the project is still not yet operational.

Rare earths are generally classified into heavy and light rare earths, with heavy rare earths having the highest quality and used as critical raw materials in the military equipment industry. While the US does have some reserves of heavy rare earths, they are generally of low quality, mainly consisting of minerals such as euxenite and gadolinite, which are difficult to mine. On the other hand, China is the only country in the world that possesses all the 17 rare earth metals, with heavy rare earth metals accounting for more than 40 percent of its reserves. This makes it even more difficult for the US to "decouple" from China.



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

Therefore, the US is forming alliances to build a rare earth magnet supply chain. However, it cannot succeed in its efforts because without China's help, the US and its allies cannot refine and purify all the rare earths they need to run their industries, including the military industry.

In June 2023, China's imports of rare earth metal ores, which were not raw materials but needed further processing, reached 7,167.8 tons, up 5.6 percent year-on-year. Among these imports, 7,117.5 tons were from the US.

China imports rare earth metal ores from the US mainly for smelting and separation before re-exporting them. It can import rare earth metal ores and re-export them because it has the most advanced rare earth refining technology globally, with purity levels reaching as high as 99 percent. In fact, China accounts for more than 80 percent of the global rare earth processing market share.

Statistics show that in 2022, rare earth-related patents in China reached a staggering 6,829, exceeding the combined total of all other countries. That's why the US administration has been providing substantial subsidies for rare earth purification technology, including a total of $45 million aid package from Pentagon to MP Materials to improve the rare earth metal purification and separation process and develop advanced rare earth refining techniques.

Moreover, the US has formed supply chain alliances with Australia and the European Union to improve rare earth separation technology. In 2019, the US-based Blue Line Corporation reached a strategic partnership agreement with Lynas Corporation, Australia's largest rare earth producer, to jointly establish a rare earth separation facility in Texas. In 2021, Energy Fuels and Neo Performance Materials announced plans to build a US-EU rare earth supply chain, with the US providing rare earth raw materials and the EU handling the rare earth separation operations.

However, the rare earth refining technologies used by Australia and the EU still lag far behind China's, and their lack of a complete industry chain, from mining and separation to refining, makes it difficult to purify rare earths on a large scale. For example, Australia's rare earth separation facilities can meet only 30 percent of Japan's domestic demand, and Japan still mainly relies on China with the remaining.

Therefore, the US is forming alliances to build a rare earth magnet supply chain. However, it cannot succeed in its efforts because without China's help, the US and its allies cannot refine and purify all the rare earths they need to run their industries, including the military industry.

Furthermore, reconstructing the rare earth civilian manufacturing system is difficult for the US. About 7 percent of global rare earth resources are used in the defense and military industries, and the rest in consumer electronics, new energy vehicles, medical devices and other civilian sectors. In recent years, the US has attempted to reduce China's influence in the international division of labor by resorting to "reshoring" and "ally-shoring" to help build countries such as Mexico as new global manufacturing hubs and achieve self-sufficiency in the rare earth supply chains.

Tesla, for example, plans to build a megafactory in Mexico so it can use US rare earth permanent magnet in its new energy vehicles (EVs), and MP Materials is willing to supply General Motors with magnetic materials for 500,000 pure EV motors.

However, the US industrial sector is no longer an integrated whole, and even with the implementation of strategies such as "reshoring" and "ally-shoring" it cannot establish a complete manufacturing system any time soon. Take new EVs for example. China's EV exports reached 310,000 in 2021, surging to 679,000 in 2022.

China's production capacity in consumer electronics, automotive components and other products is huge, thanks to its well-established manufacturing system. And it is evident that the US lacks a comprehensive manufacturing system, which will make it difficult for it to reconstruct the rare earth magnet supply chain.

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

Chi Xue

Japan, ROK could gain by boosting trade relations with China

Although China, Japan and the Republic of Korea are all optimistic about the prospects of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and their cooperation under the RCEP framework, their economic and trade cooperation faces some challenges, despite the opportunities. One such challenge comes from Japan and the ROK joining the US-led "Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity" and adopting policies to "decouple" from China and thus stoking geopolitical tensions.

Should China, Japan and the ROK deepen their cooperation in line with market rules, or should they adopt an exclusive attitude due to their different ideologies? The answer is simple: they should adhere to market rules and inject new impetus into regional and global economies.

The RCEP will promote Asia's economic integration, as it provides the first common platform for China, Japan and the ROK to boost free trade amid rising geopolitical tensions and global turmoil, and help increase global growth.

But for that to happen, the three countries will have to use the RCEP platform to communicate regularly and strengthen cooperation, make greater efforts to safeguard the multilateral trading system based on market rules and bolster the regional value and supply chains, as well as stabilize the global trade order. They also have to work together to overcome challenges, including lowering geopolitical risks and resolving the structural contradictions in industry chains.

However, Japan and the ROK seem to have chosen to "decouple" their economies from the Chinese economy due to their so-called differences in values. And some enterprises, think tanks and politicians are blindly supporting their unwise decision, negatively affecting their trade with China.



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

But if the three countries were to engage in open, mutually beneficial cooperation based on market rules, they could unleash the full potential of their respective economies. Although it is normal for an economy to be part of different trade cooperation blocs or agreements, it should not take advantage of one bloc or agreement to provoke "de-risking" or "ally-shoring" sentiments, because that will deal a blow to cooperation and increase the risks to the regional and global industry and supply chains.

After the implementation of the RCEP, Japan and the ROK had a trade deficit with China. But that was because of trade protectionism, not economic factors, with the most important reason being their restrictions on the export of semiconductors to China.

Also, Japan should support China and the ROK to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, so the three countries can promote the integrated development of the RCEP and the CPTPP.

Since the three countries were, are and will be beneficiaries of market-oriented free trade, "decoupling" will hurt open trade. Trade among the three sides has suffered a big blow because of the United States' efforts to "decouple" from China. The US imposed restrictions on the export of semiconductors to China and coerced Japan and the ROK to do the same in the name of "safeguarding" their national security.

But if Japan and the ROK do not stop blindly following the US' diktats, they will lose their competitive advantages in the chip industry, because the China-Japan-ROK trade structure shows that their complementarity in service trade has surpassed that in goods trade.

Since the three countries have huge potential for deepening cooperation in areas such as semiconductors and digitalization, Japan and the ROK should read the economic trend, and stop trying to "decouple" their economies from China's. Instead, they should try to make service trade more open and fulfill their respective commitments on trade in services, as inscribed in the RCEP agreement, to deepen trilateral cooperation in service trade.

Japan and the ROK have noticed the potential of China further opening up its services market. But rather than deepening cooperation with China, they are supporting and promoting the IPEF, thereby making it difficult to upgrade the trilateral trade structure.

It is true that Japan and the ROK are under pressure to "de-risk" if not "decouple" from China. But by trying to do so, they are promoting protectionism and violating free market rules. Some in Japan and the ROK think that dependency on China in any field is dangerous. This idea, in fact, is a kind of protectionism, because it views the regional division of labor as a source of risk when the fact is that the division of labor can make production more efficient and boost development.

Therefore, the three countries should resume their talks on a trilateral free trade agreement, and cooperate in fields such as e-commerce, logistics and environmental protection. Since an FTA among the three sides will help boost the development of the RCEP, Japan and the ROK need to abandon their polarized thinking, and instead safeguard free trade policies and establish a solid cross-border mechanism to protect their investment.

Also, Japan should support China and the ROK to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, so the three countries can promote the integrated development of the RCEP and the CPTPP.

As China has been promoting openness in the services market and upgrading its trade standards, the region as well as the world will benefit if all stakeholders put aside the geopolitical and historical issues to objectively view China's opening-up, promote dialogue and accelerate the process of China's accession to the CPTPP.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ENRIQUE DUSSEL PETERS

Invested in the future

Chinese infrastructure projects in Latin America and the Caribbean have increasingly been in renewable energy sector

The socioeconomic relationship between China and the Latin American and Caribbean countries has deepened substantially in the 21st century and particularly since the launch of China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2013 in any imaginable field: bilateral and regional institutions, exchanges between political parties, business organizations, educational and academic institutions, as well as through Confucius Institutes from the Malvinas to Tijuana. In the economic field, for example, in 2022, the total trade volume between China and the Latin American region reached $485.79 billion, exceeding $450 billion for the second consecutive year, and an increase of more than 7 percent over 2021. China has been the region's second-largest trading partner since 2014. China's outbound foreign direct investment to LAC increased from levels close to 1.44 percent of total OFDI in the period 2000 to 2004 to 8.81 percent from 2020 to 2022.

The Academic Network of Latin America and the Caribbean on China (Red ALC-China) recently published the latest edition of its annual Monitor of Chinese Infrastructure in LAC, highlighting the enormous relevance of China in infrastructure cooperation. According to regional institutions in the LAC, the region should be investing more than 5 percent of its GDP in infrastructure, but it was below 2 percent in the period 2015 to 2019 and fell even further after that as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent rise of international interest rates and pressures on social and infrastructure public spending. The Belt and Road Initiative's focus on interconnectivity and LAC's infrastructure gap presents enormous cooperation potential for both parties.

The Monitor analyzed in detail the recent Chinese infrastructure trends in LAC: The 228 effectively realized infrastructure projects by 2022 with an investment of $104.2 billion and creation of more than 721,000 jobs reflect the importance of this bilateral cooperation; in the most recent 2020-22 period, 90 infrastructure projects represented 36.89 percent of the amount of all Chinese infrastructure projects since 2005; and there has been an important increase recently. Acknowledging this important recent dynamism, financing restrictions in LAC might decrease infrastructure projects in the short run.

At least four trends are important to understand China's infrastructure projects in LAC until 2022.

First, while the number of infrastructure projects remained constant from 2020 to 2022, the amount per project declined substantially, from $457 million from 2005 through 2021 to $206 million in 2022; the generated employment has also fallen recently. This process is associated with important changes in new Chinese infrastructure projects in LAC in the more recent period, which has been in new sectors, increasingly in renewable energy.

Second, Chinese infrastructure projects in LAC have continued to diversify by country in the 21st century: Historically, Brazil was by far the largest recipient of these projects, but from 2020 to 2022 Argentina was the biggest recipient (with 37.63 percent of the amount of all projects), followed by Brazil (16.06 percent), Chile (13.71 percent), and Mexico (10.13 percent), which reflects this new trend. Employment generation by infrastructure project by country during the period 2020 to 2022 is also very heterogeneous: The average was 271 jobs per project for Peru, 959 for Mexico, and 4,756 for Brazil. This performance is important for the LAC-China cooperation and specific bilateral exchanges, i.e. China-LAC infrastructure cooperation presents specificities to be included in the future.



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

Third, sectorial changes in Chinese infrastructure projects in LAC explain several of the recent results. Between 2005 and 2009, the energy sector accounted for almost 80 percent of the amount of these infrastructure projects, but this dropped to 26.17 percent in the period from 2020 to 2022. The transportation sector has become the new pillar of Chinese infrastructure projects in the region, accounting for 62.86 percent of the amount and 84.37 percent of the employment from 2020 to 2022. At least as relevant is the importance of Chinese specialization in renewable infrastructure projects: Of the 77 energy projects in the period from 2005 to 2022, 48 were hydroelectric, solar and wind power projects accounting for 41.48 percent of the amount of total Chinese infrastructure projects in the region. These renewable energy-related projects are capital intensive and generate less employment than other projects and reflect the general employment trends examined above. However, Chinese infrastructure projects in LAC have been able to fulfill LAC's demand for renewable energy and new transportation infrastructure.

Fourth, and finally, Chinese infrastructure projects in LAC are highly concentrated among a small group of companies: Five Chinese companies, namely China Communications Construction Company, Power Construction Corporation of China, China Railway Construction Corporation, China National Petroleum Corporation and China National Nuclear Corporation, accounted for 73 projects until 2022 and for 52.81 percent of the total amount and 65.34 percent of generated employment from 2020 to 2022. The issue is of the utmost relevance for the China-LAC cooperation in terms of bilateral and regional negotiations on issues of common interest, such as technology transfer, relations with national or local suppliers and environmental issues, among others. Concentrating on these companies would allow an effective improvement in the quality of the China-LAC cooperation.

The exponential growth in the 21st century of Chinese presence in LAC and other parts of the world has been accompanied by modernization and improvement in the quality of the cooperation. Academics, business organizations and respective public sectors in LAC and China should strive to improve the modernization of bilateral and regional China-LAC institutions to counter new international challenges in development and in each of the specific fields of China-LAC cooperation.

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LI CHUNDING AND LI JUAN

Bumper harvest

Ten years in retrospect: Fruitful international agricultural cooperation along the Belt and Road

Since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative 10 years ago, China has been promoting bilateral and multilateral economic and trade cooperation along the route, promoting its agricultural cooperation with countries and regions involved in the Belt and Road Initiative and agricultural development in those countries and regions.

China's agricultural trade with the Belt and Road countries has hit new highs. From 2013 to 2022, China's agricultural trade with countries and regions along the Belt and Road increased from $67.23 billion to $141.18 billion, with an average annual increase of 8.7 percent. The structure has also been constantly improving, with a noticeable trend of more diversified imports.

China's outward foreign direct investment in Belt and Road countries' agricultural industry had accumulated to $14.02 billion by 2021, accounting for 51.7 percent of China's total outward FDI in agriculture. The investment areas are expanding toward the whole industry chain covering production, processing, logistics, storage and sales, and the investment regions are expanding from Asia and Africa to other regions.

China and other Belt and Road countries are building a multi-layer logistics network for agricultural products. The logistics arrangements such as the China-Europe Freight Train, China-Laos Railway, and the New International Land-Sea Trade Corridor have significantly promoted the orderly cross-border flow of agricultural resources and better allocation of such resources. The construction of logistics has considerably shortened the transportation time for agricultural products and reduced transportation costs, too. For instance, businesses in China's southwestern region, such as Chengdu, can save 45 days by importing meat products through the China-Europe freight trains, instead of using the sea route, while saving around 10,000 yuan per ton ($1,392.22 per ton) of transportation cost compared with air transport.

China and countries along the Belt and Road have realized leapfrog growth in agricultural technology cooperation by jointly tackling major scientific problems and carrying out R&D on new technologies and new products. By 2021, China had sent more than 2,000 agricultural experts and technicians to more than 70 countries and regions, promoted more than 1,500 agricultural technologies to many countries, increased the average output of participating projects by 40 to 70 percent, and effectively improved the efficiency, stability and resilience of local agricultural production.

The quality of cooperative industrial zones — such as the pilot agricultural opening-up zones and overseas agricultural cooperation demonstration zones — is constantly improving. For instance, the governments of China and Uganda and the United Nations Food Agriculture Organization have jointly launched the Agricultural Innovation Technology Center under the South-South Cooperation project to support Uganda's strategic transformation from self-sustaining agriculture toward commercial agriculture and to increase its capacity in ensuring food security.

China has assisted Belt and Road countries in reducing poverty and benefiting farmers. Under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, Chinese companies, through various forms of agricultural assistance, have helped the local agricultural industry make new progress in production technologies and productivity, creating job opportunities for the impoverished people.

The World Bank predicts that by 2030, the Belt and Road Initiative can help lift 7.6 million people out of extreme poverty and 32 million from moderate poverty. Research reports by McKinsey & Co and Johns Hopkins University respectively show that 89 percent and 85 percent of the employees of Chinese enterprises in Africa are local people, boosting local employment and empowering poor people in the regions to deal with food crises.

Cooperative mechanisms between China and the Belt and Road countries have been improving. By June 2023, China had signed over 200 cooperation documents on joint construction under the Belt and Road Initiative with 152 countries and 32 international organizations, with over 3,000 projects for promoting economic development and improving people's livelihoods in the Belt and Road countries. A number of long-term mechanisms for regional agricultural cooperation — such as agricultural cooperation among the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ASEAN+3), the South-South cooperation program under the framework of the Special Programme for Food Security, and the Lancang-Mekong cooperation mechanism — have been established.



WANG JUN / FOR CHINA DAILY

In the face of mounting instability, uncertainty and insecurity in agricultural development and food supplies caused by major-country competition, intensifying geopolitical tensions and climate change, China and other Belt and Road countries should join hands to press ahead with international agricultural cooperation to ensure global food security.

First, the bilateral and multilateral cooperative mechanisms on agriculture should be improved to attract more countries and regions to participate in the construction of the Belt and Road Initiative.

China and other Belt and Road countries should strengthen the exchanges and alignment of their respective agricultural development strategies, jointly formulate plans for agricultural economic and trade cooperation, push for the signing of more free trade agreements, enlarge the FTA "circle of friends" under the Belt and Road Initiative, and further advance trade policy and rules coordination on food security, animal and plant inspection and quarantine, and agricultural and fishery cooperation through World Trade Organization agriculture negotiations.

Second, the scope and channels for agricultural cooperation should be expanded to push for the integration of industry and value chains and promote high-quality development of the agricultural sector.

Based on Belt and Road countries' respective agricultural resource endowments, the warehousing and logistics networks such as the China-Europe freight trains, and diversified market demands, China and other Belt and Road countries should build an industry and supply chain for key farm produce along the Belt and Road, so as to achieve effective alignment of domestic and international supply and demand and coordinated development of supply and industry chains to strengthen the resilience of those chains.

Third, with technological cooperation as the guide, they should promote the sharing of benefits of technological progress in agriculture.

By bolstering cooperation in agricultural technologies they can activate overseas agricultural production factors to promote local agricultural development and increase local farmers' incomes. Focusing on the modern seed industry, soil health, biotechnology, and smart agriculture, they should make the utmost of the demonstrative effect of leading technologies and advance whole-industry-chain cooperation on agriculture led by technological cooperation and supported by agricultural cooperation.

Fourth, they should boost cooperation on the global governance of food security to ensure food security and regional stability.

China has accumulated rich experience and achieved remarkable progress in ensuring food security, reducing poverty, promoting rural development and advancing South-South cooperation, providing it an opportunity to help other developing nations to enhance their comprehensive production capacity for major farm produce. The Belt and Road countries have extraordinary agricultural resource endowments and huge potential in food production, laying a solid foundation for trade cooperation on farm produce.

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Z WEEKLY

All about Gen Z

Z WEEKLY

Model storytellers

At this year's China Daily Model United Nations Conference, young people from across the country gathered to enhance their global literacy skills and showcase the passion and confidence of today's youth, **Gui Qian** reports.



Students across China take part in the China Daily Model United Nations Conference, held at the Taihu International Conference Center in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, from Aug 3 to 6. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Young people play a vital role in promoting world progress and global sustainable development, and the China Daily Model United Nations Conference (CDMUN) offers a platform that helps youth grow into upcoming talents of international communication, public diplomacy and global governance," said Wang Hao, deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily, at the opening ceremony of the 2023 CDMUN on Aug 3.

The four-day event was held at the Taihu International Conference Center in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, from Aug 3 to 6. Hosted by China Daily's 21st Century English Education Media, the conference attracted more than 1,200 young participants from middle schools, high schools and universities across China.

Students play UN officials or delegates of different countries or other political entities in the model UN, an educational activity and simulation of the UN. They discuss international affairs, propose motions, try to reach consensuses and pass draft resolutions.

With the theme of "Building a safer, more peaceful and more sustainable world", the 2023 CDMUN organized 11 English language committees, six Chinese language committees and one bilingual media center. They focused on 17 important global issues, including peacekeeping, preventing nuclear proliferation, cybersecurity, eradicating rural poverty, accelerating digital transformation, women empowerment and more.

Jin Jie, a Suzhou Municipal Standing Committee member and the city's Chief of Publicity, praised the conference as a great reflection of the three initiatives put forward by Chinese President Xi Jinping. "I hope all young participants can think about the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative through CDMUN, and can develop their diplomatic literacy and communicative abilities," she said.

To achieve these goals, Wang suggested the students equip themselves with a global vision and a deeper love for the country and its people.

CDMUN invited retired diplomats to attend the conference, deliver speeches, and interact with the young participants in different committees.

Zhao Jinjun, former Chinese ambassador to France and former president of the China Foreign Affairs University, shared his experience in bridging China and France and encouraged the Gen Zers to share authentic stories of China with international friends as citizen diplomats.

Shen Guofang, former director-general of the Information Department of China's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and former Chinese ambassador to the United Nations, shared some diplomacy tips with the young participants. "Whether in a real diplomatic negotiation or at the model UN conferences, the first rule and foundation is one's competence," Shen said. "A diplomat also needs to be neither shy nor pushy and stick to his or her bottom line. Next comes one's charisma and etiquette."

"The model UN is a great opportunity for young students to know more about our own nation and others, as they play diplomats of different countries. I hope the activity can help young people grow into good storytellers of both China's stories and those of others," he continued.

> "Luckily, the young generation is riding the wave of informatization, enjoying the advantages that the era and our nation have bestowed on them. And the future will belong to the young people who possess time, vigor and curiosity."
>
> **Liu Biwei,** deputy president of the China Public Diplomacy Association and former Chinese Ambassador to Denmark

Wang Shuang, 23, a postgraduate student from Renmin University of China, emphasized on gaining a greater understanding of both China and the world at the model UN. For four years, Wang has participated in the model UN in debates on a variety of topics, such as refugees and human trafficking. This time, she took a new role other than a delegate — a dais member (a chair). To host the United Nations General Assembly First, which focuses on disarmament and international security, she wrote a roughly 40-page document to explain the issue to her committee's delegates and laid a foundation for their discussion.

"The model UN is like a window to me, through which I see the other side of the world. I get to feel the pains and struggles of other people, deepen my empathy and also my love for our motherland. I'm so lucky to live in such a peaceful and prosperous country," Wang said. "Being a dais member also enables me to possess a global vision since I need to think from positions of different countries."

Many other young participants share similar experiences and feelings with Wang. These young people show that the Chinese mindset has changed profoundly, remarked Liu Zhixian, former vice president and director-general of the United Nations Association of China. "Just as President Xi said, Chinese people now view themselves as equals with any other in the world. This means that they have become more confident, but are still modest and considerate," he explained.

Liu recalled his experience of working at the UN representing China around 30 years ago. "At that time, we were less integrated with the international society and our delegates usually didn't have much to say. I'm happy to see that today's young generation feel free and confident to make their voices heard," he said.

This year, for the first time, the CDMUN incorporated some historical committees, bringing key moments in the UN's history to life for the delegates. It allowed them to think with a historical perspective and maybe change the direction of history.

Guo Xiaohan, 23, studying ancient Chinese history at Beijing Normal University, suggested that the CDMUN simulate the San Francisco Conference of 1945, in which delegates agreed upon the Charter of the United Nations.

"Going through this big moment for the UN, the young delegates will better understand how the organization, and the world, got to where it is today. The historical committees are an innovative setting that gives participants an interactive way to learn about world history," said Guo.

"The performances of the young delegates will decide whether the Charter of the United Nations will be adopted or they may just sign a joint declaration. This cultivates their historical research skills, sense of responsibility and idealism," he continued.

Liu Biwei, deputy president of the China Public Diplomacy Association and former Chinese Ambassador to Denmark, agreed that the hope of a nation lies in the young generation and higher demands are placed on them, too.

"The model UN is a very attractive activity that can arouse the interest of young people in global issues, deepen their understanding of international relations and give a platform to practice their linguistic and social capabilities," said Liu. "Luckily, the young generation is riding the wave of informatization, enjoying the advantages that the era and our nation have bestowed on them. And the future will belong to the young people who possess time, vigor and curiosity."

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Social Media Digest

AI enters the background

HYBE, one of the largest music companies in South Korea, used AI technology to help its K-pop singer MIDNATT release his latest track *Masquerade* in six different languages — English, Korean, Spanish, Japanese, Chinese and Vietnamese.

MIDNATT, also known as Lee Hyun, only speaks limited English and Chinese in addition to Korean. He first recorded the song in each language, with his imperfect pronunciation. Then the lyrics were read and recorded by native speakers before AI technology did the rest: applying the native pronunciation to Lee's singing in an astonishingly smooth way.

The music industry isn't the only one benefiting from AI. Berlin-based director Martin Haerlin also used AI to create a remarkable video in just three days. With the help of AI technology, he transformed films taken inside his house into historical or sci-fi scenes. According to Haerlin, some production companies now intend to hire him to make videos in order to cut down on costs and the number of actors required.



Berlin-based director Martin Haerlin uses AI technology to put himself in different virtual scenes. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

In fact, the US Alliance of Motion Picture and Television Producers recently proposed using AI technology to replace background actors. As a result, 160,000 Hollywood actors have gone on protest and strike since July.

Tree therapy

Science has found long ago that hugs with people or our pets can significantly reduce stress and loneliness by boosting the oxytocin levels in our bodies. And, in fact, hugging trees also works the same and is now becoming a new craze among Chinese young people.

A young woman in Shanghai going by the name "Qishishiqi" on the Chinese social media platform Xiaohongshu first posted a picture in April of her hugging a tree by the street late at night. "When I was hugging the tree, I felt like it was the tree that was hugging me," she explained in a video in June. "Nature has the power to empower you."



A young woman in Shanghai hugs a tree for peace of mind. PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

At present, tree-hugging — together with city walking and walking dogs for other people — have become the latest ways for youngsters to heal themselves.

But Qishishiqi wouldn't call it "healing" even though she shared her experience of how her tinnitus — a symptom she got from stress at work — magically disappeared after hugging a tree. She said that it probably had more to do with her subconscious than any healing powers from the tree. She reminded people that they should seek professional medical help if troubled by mental issues.

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Z WEEKLY



Creators of *Mister Non-existence in Utopian* pose for a group photo at the 2023 Aranya Theater Festival in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Time for a bigger stage

Talent and interest is awash in the Chinese theater world, but barriers still exist for young budding theater professionals aspiring to carve out a path in this important creative industry, **Gui Qian** reports.

Just how far apart are the worlds of campus and commercial stage theater? For the theatrical show *Mister Non-existence in Utopian* by the Master of Arts Troupe of Nanjing University in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, it took two years to bring them together. And for most members of the troupe — also the inventors of the show — going from students of theater to theater professionals is an ideal that is visible, sometimes reachable, but hard to uphold.

Mister Non-existence in Utopian was displayed at this year's Aranya Theater Festival in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province, on June 16 and 17, before which it enjoyed three performance cycles at Nanjing University. It's rare for a student-made work to be a headline show at one of China's most anticipated theater events.



Han Jing

The show was first written by 23-year-old Han Jing in 2021. Like many members of the Master of Arts Troupe of Nanjing University, Han is a student of the university's Department of Theater, Film and Television Arts. The troupe is also where the 2012 theater hit *The Face of Chiang Kai-shek* was born. The play later went on tour both at home and abroad, winning various awards. And it is held up as an inspiration by next generation of students of the theater troupe.

Han's show is a satirical comedy that portrays the absurdity of four different groups of people — college students, laborers, rich and powerful people and the middle class. They meet at a theater festival in a wealthy neighborhood. While they are forming a performance, interference and conflicts emerge.

The story of *Mister Non-existence in Utopian* perfectly echoes the reality of the Aranya Theater Festival. However, for the show's creators, they observed stark differences between performing at the university and at the commercial event.



Hong Rui

According to Hong Rui, 22, one of the show's leading actors, the audiences they faced were very different. "At school, our viewers were mostly students who were interested in theater. After watching the show, they would give many detailed and constructive comments and suggestions. Here in Aranya, the audience came from all walks of life and had different tastes," he said. In order to successfully run the show in a big theater festival, Hong said that the team needed to deal with many individuals and organizations outside of school, including the festival's organizers, the neighborhood's managers and even the estate proprietors.



Jiang Zhiyuan

Jiang Zhiyuan, 27, a leading actress and the assistant director of the show, agreed that these changes were also challenges faced by theater students in their transition to becoming professional practitioners in the industry. After graduating from the same department as Han at Nanjing University, Jiang studied overseas at the University of Leeds, UK, for her second master's degree, majoring in global performance and cultural industries.

Jiang found that our domestic theater education schemes need improvements to better help with this transition. She took the role of theater producers as an example. "Being a theater producer requires you to have a sense for both the market and art. You need to know how to help directors search for gigs, manage human resources, schedules and most importantly, money," Jiang said. "But we lack a cultivation system for theater producers."

She also noted that student theater groups should be given the opportunity to run troupes independently. "It would be best if they get to practice applying commercial logic in advance. For example, they should be allowed to sell tickets, even at low prices," she said.

In the eyes of Han, the theater industry itself has its own limits at present. "It's not big or open enough to include more newcomers," she said, explaining that student theater groups can survive by applying for art funds, awards and festival projects — but only barely.

"We are already lucky as we benefit from our senior alumni's *The Face of Chiang Kai-shek*, whose commercial success has supported many later works made by our troupes."

Facing all these challenges, many theater students decide not to enter the theater industry when they finish school. Among her 25 university classmates, Han is the only one who has kept creating theater productions after graduation, and she plans to pursue further academic development in theater after getting her master's degree.

"Although I cannot support myself by making theater productions for a living, I still keep making them," she said.

It's a similar situation for Hong and Jiang. They are trying to stay close to the field they love as they prepare to apply for theater-related master's and PhD degrees, respectively.

Although they have concerns for the future of the theater industry and themselves, they don't fail to see the silver lining of this art form.

"Many people only see campus theaters as a stepping stone to creating more mature works but I don't see it this way. These theaters themselves are a genre that is defined and distinguished by young creators' rawness and passion, which are unique to a certain group," said Hong.

And according to Han, the noncommercial essence of campus theaters gives students more space to try edgy theatrical methods and lowers the threshold for young people to get a taste of theater.

"I just hope more people can be included in the world of theater, as both creators and audiences," she said.

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Chinese cultural summer camp a hit among students

By **WU YONG** in Dalian
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A special table tennis match was held at Shenyang Jianzhu University (SJU) in Shenyang, Northeast China's Liaoning province, on July 18. It was between Savin Vlad from the Transilvania University of Brasov, Romania, and Zhao Zirui, the table tennis coach of the 2023 Shenyang Jianzhu University-Romanian Transilvania University of Brasov Confucius Institute Summer Camp.

Vlad's passion for table tennis began at a young age. He was drawn to the high intensity and intricacy of the sport and spent much time practicing. So he was confident of his skills — well, compared to the other Romanian students present.

Although he didn't win the match, he regarded getting to play against a pro as a priceless experience. "My table tennis skills improved a lot after playing and learning techniques from Zhao. It also gave me a deeper understanding of Chinese table tennis culture," said Vlad, adding that he knew table tennis is China's national sport and more than just a game here — it's an integral part of Chinese national identity.

This year marks the 30th anniversary of the signing of friendly provincial relations between Liaoning province and Brasov county. And it was through the summer camp that Vlad and other Romanian students had the opportunity to come to SJU for a 13-day visit, starting from July 11.

In Shenyang, they experienced Chinese culture through Chinese language learning, trips to places of interest as well as a series of activities, including playing table tennis, making dumplings from scratch and trying out the traditional Chinese art of paper cutting.

"Through Chinese language courses and field trips to famous sites, the students from Romania were able to fully experience the profoundness of Chinese culture," said Florescu Adriana, executive dean of the Confucius Institute.

Abrudan Sara-Maria, whose 16th birthday happened to fall during the summer camp, was deeply moved by the efforts of her newly made friends. In order to make her feel welcomed in China, the summer camp volunteers decorated the classroom in advance, ordered a cake, and prepared gifts for her, including traditional Chinese headwear and a panda doll. And Wang Bing, director of the Confucius Institute in Brasov, also gave her a paper-cutting artwork representing the 56 nationalities of China.



Savin Vlad (fourth from right) makes dumplings together with other Romanian students on July 17 during the 2023 Shenyang Jianzhu University-Romanian Transilvania University of Brasov Confucius Institute Summer Camp.
PHOTO PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Ana Samira Naomi, another Romanian student, said that everything about the summer camp was incredible and was like a dream come true. She not only learned the Chinese language, of which its characters she had been interested in for a long time, but also visited Shenyang landmarks, including Shenyang Imperial Palace, where its style and architecture greatly amazed her. She also fell in love with traditional Chinese clothing and, with the help of the volunteers, she bought three *qipao* — a traditional Chinese dress considered auspicious.

Xia Baishu, vice president of SJU, said that the Belt and Road Initiative not only builds a bridge for commercial relations but also for cultural interaction and dialogue between civilizations. The friendship of different countries lies in the affinity of people, which can be greatly enhanced through cultural and educational activities as well as personnel exchanges.

"I hope that young students of the two countries will get to know each other and become ambassadors for spreading China-Romania friendship," said Xia.

According to Vlad, since his return to Romania from the summer camp, his passion for table tennis has only grown stronger, and he now dedicates three to four hours a day to practicing, which is also an opportunity for him to showcase his newly learned tricks and techniques to his friends.

Vlad is also planning to apply for a scholarship to study in China so that he can spend more time in the country and learn firsthand about it. "Since returning home, I've been immersing myself in Chinese culture. It's one of my favorite countries. I love every aspect of it — from the people to the food, from the history to the culture," said Vlad.

Yu Yue and Bai Lulu contributed to the story.

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Above: Dough figurines Lang Jiaziyu made based on the Chinese animated short film series *Yao-Chinese Folktales*. **Below:** Lang works on a dough figurine in his studio. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Crafting a world at his fingertips

Inheriting his family's renowned legacy for making dough figurines, Lang Jiaziyu is injecting new creativity and cultural elements into the craft, ensuring its popularity stays forever young, **Meng Wenjie** reports.



"Can I ask a big favor?" Prince Albert II of Monaco asked a young Chinese craftsman standing behind a booth with various dough figurines on display. The prince invited the young man to make an extra figurine so that he could present a figurine to each of his two children after being amazed by the artistry involved in molding dough figurines.

This was at a demonstration of China's intangible cultural heritage held at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing during the 2022 Winter Olympics. And the young man was Lang Jiaziyu, born in 1995, a third-generation inheritor of Beijing "Dough Figurine Lang". The surname "Lang" is attached to the figurine as a traditional way in China to convey gratitude for the family's substantial contributions to the craft.

The dough figurine initially became well-known as a typical folk art found on the streets, which required speedy production. Within three to five minutes, a craftsman could finish a piece of work. The main ingredients used are dough, honey, and salt. "What would normally be considered as food is transformed into a kind of sculpture. It is a crystallization of Chinese wisdom," Lang said.

With their simple and basic materials, quick production, and diminutive size, the dough figurines have been gaining popularity as unique cultural artworks in Beijing for many years. A great number of people have a deep appreciation for these small sculptures, which have a surprisingly long shelf life spanning multiple decades. They can be used as home decorations and as toys for children to play with.

Lang's family has been making dough figurines for three generations. His grandfather, Lang Shao'an, was known as the original creator of Dough Figurine Lang. He transformed dough figurines from a common street toy into a real work of art.

The renowned Chinese writer Xie Wanying, or Bingxin (1900-1999), once wrote in one of her articles about the realism and intricacy of the works created by Lang Shao'an. She vividly described the miniature scale of these creations: "A thumb-sized kite, a soybean-sized Peking Opera mask, a mung bean-sized bell, a small white duck the size of half a grain of rice, and a candy ball the size of a millet… I really don't know how he was able to mold these tiny and adorable figurines."

The artwork of Lang Shao'an has also been displayed at several diplomatic gatherings. "In 1956, my grandfather traveled to the UK to participate in an exhibition as a representative of China. People were astounded by the (dough figurine-making) technique," said Lang Jiaziyu, explaining that his grandfather's era marks the time when the craft of Dough Figurine Lang began to be showcased on a global platform. "It was very well received and attracted a lot of foreign media coverage," he said.

Lang Jiaziyu's father, Lang Zhichun, and his aunt, Lang Zhili, were both accomplished masters of the craft. Through the efforts of the second generation of inheritors, Dough Figurine Lang was inscribed on China's second national list of intangible cultural heritage.



Growing up in a family renowned for its expertise in the art of dough figurines, Lang Jiaziyu developed a fascination for the process of molding dough from a young age. "I was only 5 years old when I told my father that I wanted to devote myself to making dough figurines," Lang recalled. "I made a small doll in a sitting gesture, which took me two and a half hours."

However, this craft, which has been passed down through generations, is not something that a 5-year-old beginner can master overnight. "It was awful," said Lang, laughing as he reflected on his first creation. "I intended to make an adorable doll, but instead, I made an ugly, middle-aged man."

But with the support and encouragement of his father, Lang made great progress and finally got the chance to showcase his skills in the previously mentioned national demonstration.

Reflecting on this event, Lang described it as a "fantastic experience". "When national leaders bent over to look at my works closely and admired them, offering generous praise about their cultural value, I felt a great sense of pride," he said.

Nowadays, traditional craftsmanship is somewhat losing its appeal among young people. In order to be more relatable to the younger generation at home and abroad, Lang has sought to incorporate new and fresh elements into his works. For example, he has drawn inspiration from foreign characters in cartoons like *The First Slam Dunk*, *Minions*, *Doraemon*, and *Ultraman*. However, Lang didn't do that for long. "I realized that foreign stories may not be the best way to promote traditional Chinese crafts," he said.

Later, he started including his own ideas and observations about current social events in his works. For example, in honor of the female healthcare workers who fought against the COVID-19 pandemic, Lang made a piece for International Women's Day that features a figurine incorporating both the classic figure of Chinese heroine Mu Guiying as portrayed in Peking Opera and a healthcare worker in a white coat. And in 2023, Lang created a series of dough-based figurines inspired by the popular Chinese animated short film series *Yao-Chinese Folktales*, which was popular among many young people.

Recently, Lang has come up with more ideas inspired by traditional Chinese artworks. "My most recent ideas came to me on a visit to the Palace Museum in Beijing. I found that traditional aesthetics do not require much interpretation. Through art forms, one can directly perceive the ancient Chinese wisdom of the 'harmony between nature and humanity'," he said.

As a Gen Zer himself, Lang has also been putting great efforts into promoting and disseminating Dough Figurine Lang craftsmanship and other intangible cultural heritages on social media. Now, he has more than 2.6 million followers across his various platforms.

"We've received a lot of questions, for example, on where to learn the craft, where to buy the materials, and whether I can take apprentices," he said.

Seeing such feedback, Lang is encouraged to continue promoting traditional culture and he believes that young people are still drawn to traditional Chinese handicrafts.

"I always cherish the hope that my compatriots and I can continue to deepen our understanding of the essence of our own culture," he said. "How to present our narrative both at home and overseas and how to create the greatest possible platform for Chinese culture are missions that Chinese Gen Zers need to undertake."

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Online Watch the video by scanning the code.

Lighting up the Hangzhou Asian Games

By **CHEN XUE**
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In 1990, when the 11th Asian Games was going to be held in Beijing — the first time a Chinese city hosted the event — the flame was lit at the foot of the Nyainqentanglha mountain in Tibet by a 15-year-old Tibetan girl named Dawa Yangzom.

Now, 33 years later, when the 19th Asian Games is soon to kick off in September in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, there is also a Tibetan girl: Tsering Palzom, who was among the group of 19 torchbearers — "19" to commemorate the 19th Asian Games, which is the third time the event will be held in China.

"It might just be my speculation, but I do think that being a Tibetan girl was one of the reasons that I was selected to be part of the group — to pay tribute to Dawa Yangzom," said 19-year-old Tsering, a student majoring in broadcasting and hosting at Communication University of Zhejiang (CUZ) in Hangzhou.

Tsering, from Dechen county of Dechen Tibet autonomous prefecture in Southwest China's Yunnan province, first saw the recruitment information about the torchbearers in April. She had no idea whether she was going to make it through the various selection rounds, but "just to be part of it" was her initial motivation. To her, it is a once-in-a-life-time opportunity as she is studying in the city where the Asian Games will be held.



Above and right: Tsering Palzom is among the group of 19 torchbearers at the torch lighting ceremony of the Hangzhou Asian Games at Liangzhu Archaeological Ruins on June 15. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

"Of course, I would try my best, but I knew that even if I failed, I would still get to meet many outstanding people with the same goal as me," she said. "And going through the selection rounds with them was already a learning process."

Eventually, Tsering became one of 11 students from her university to make the final selection list. On June 15, at the start of the 100-day countdown to the Hangzhou Asian Games, together with eight other girls from eight other universities in the province — including Zhejiang Normal University and Zhejiang University of Technology — Tsering performed the torch lighting ceremony at Hangzhou's Liangzhu Archaeological Ruins.

And Tsering isn't the only one in the group who is from an ethnic minority. There is also a Uyghur girl from Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, who is studying at Zhejiang University, and a girl from the Yi ethnic minority from Sichuan province, who also goes to CUZ.

"The event was a good platform for people to see the ethnic diversity of China," Tsering said.

Developing an interest in broadcasting from a very young age, Tsering, whose mother tongue is Tibetan, took every opportunity she could to practice her Mandarin and her delivery. She participated in various activities, from being one of the broadcasters of her primary school's radio station to giving speeches at public speaking competitions right up to the provincial level.

After she was enrolled in CUZ last year, she is now on an even bigger stage where she can take part in grander events, including being a guide at Compilation of Classics in the Flourishing Age — one of the major exhibitions of the Zhejiang Exhibition Hall in April, and of course, serving as a member of the torchbearer squad for the upcoming Asian Games.

But to Tsering, the role of a broadcaster or host is not just presenting prepared content — he or she has to really know the information that is being delivered.

"Before the April exhibition, all the guides had to spend a month studying every painting, with each day dedicated to a different one," said Tsering. "It was a great opportunity for me to learn about ancient Chinese art in depth."

Before the torch-lighting ceremony in June, the squad also spent over two months training for the ritual and also gaining knowledge about the history of the Liangzhu Archaeological Ruins, which was added to the UNESCO World Heritage List in 2019.

"When we were little, we were all taught that China has 5,000 years of history, but to actually see proof of it left me in awe," said Tsering. "You would assume that early civilization was primitive, but Liangzhu was already a well-established city not only with houses and cemeteries but also with its own water conservancy project and even belief system."

Now Tsering is about to start her sophomore year, and she is looking to do more for the Asian Games. One of them is to be the voice of a phone application that introduces the sports involved in the Asian Games.



Being a broadcasting and hosting major, Tsering is using what she's learned at school about hosting to help Hangzhou be a hospitable host to the world.

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