

Teamwork is goal

Soccer-loving primary school girls flourish in small mountain village CHINA, PAGE 5



ROK, Philippines asked to address discharge concerns

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Innovation drive

NetDragon leverages AI to become a game changer in education sector BUSINESS, PAGE 9

CHINA DAILY

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Anger keeps growing

Above: Thousands chant slogans against Japan's discharge of radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant during a protest on Saturday in Seoul, South Korea.

KIM HONG-JI / REUTERS

Right: A fish seller arranges the products on sale at his shop on Friday in Iwaki, northeastern Japan. Auction prices of fish dipped amid uncertainty over how consumers would respond a day after Japan began discharging radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean despite protests within Japan and in neighboring countries.

EUGENE HOSHIKO / AP See story, page 3,6



Concrete efforts to build beautiful Xinjiang urged

Xi calls for united, harmonious, prosperous and culturally advanced growth of region

By CAO DESHENG

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President Xi Jinping has urged "thorough, meticulous, concrete and sustained" efforts to develop a beautiful Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region that is "united, harmonious, prosperous and culturally advanced, with healthy ecosystems and people living and working in contentment", in the process of pursuing Chinese modernization.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made the remarks on Saturday in Urumqi, the region's capital, when he was briefed by local officials about the work of the autonomous region's Party committee and government as well as the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps.

Established in 1954, the corps combines the functions of production, administration and defense, and has made contributions to the development of Xinjiang by promoting unity among all ethnic groups, maintaining social stability and guarding the border areas.

Xi was in Xinjiang after returning to China from South Africa, where he attended the 15th BRICS Summit and made a state visit.

The stability and prosperity of Xinjiang have been a matter of great importance for Xi in the overall development of the country. Since he became general secretary of the CPC Central Committee in 2012, Xi has conducted two inspections in Xinjiang, in 2014 and 2022, chaired two central

symposiums on the work related to Xinjiang, in 2014 and 2020, and proposed the Party's strategy for governing Xinjiang in the new era from a strategic and overall perspective.

At the central symposium on work related to Xinjiang in 2014, he made a significant statement highlighting the need to foster a sense of community for the Chinese nation.

At the meeting on Saturday in Urumqi, Xi reaffirmed the special importance of the efforts related to Xinjiang in the work of the Party and the country, saying it concerns the overall task of building China into a strong modern socialist country in all respects and promoting the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.

He said that maintaining social stability is a top priority, and he called for efforts to coordinate the work of maintaining stability and advancing development, with the two aspects mutually promoted.

The mechanism for forestalling and defusing major risks and potential dangers should be improved, Xi said, adding that the fight against terrorism and separatism should be integrated with the law-based and constant work of maintaining stability.

He reiterated the importance of forging a strong sense of community for the Chinese nation, and said that education on standard spoken and written Chinese must be resolutely carried out to enhance people's awareness of and capability in using it.

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Visit marks progress to fairer world

By ZHANG YUNBI

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President Xi Jinping's recent state visit to South Africa and his attendance at the 15th BRICS Summit are proof of the noticeable and fresh progress made by emerging markets and developing economies toward building a fairer and just global governance system, senior officials and experts said.

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Xi had a packed yet productive diplomatic schedule from Tuesday to Thursday in South Africa as he attended and addressed a slew of wide-ranging multilateral meetings and held bilateral talks.

In addition to his state visit to South Africa in its administrative capital, Pretoria, and attending the annual gathering of BRICS nations — Brazil, Russia, India, China and

South Africa — in Johannesburg, Xi also co-chaired the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue with South African President Cyril Ramaphosa.

Hailing the trip as "bearing strategic significance", Foreign Minister Wang Yi said the tour highlights China's consistent approach to embracing Africa and the whole world, carries forward the traditional China-Africa friendship, consolidates fresh consensus for South-South cooperation, and injects positivity into the pursuit of peace and development.

"The expansion of membership means BRICS is now embarking on a new journey. The China-Africa community with a shared future enjoys new connotations, and the strategic mutual trust between China and South Africa is reaching new heights," he added.

The visit is "another successful practice of Xi Jinping's Thought on Diplomacy" and demonstrates Chi-

na's global vision, Wang told reporters at the conclusion of the trip.

Currently, the 17-year-old BRICS represents more than 40 percent of the world's population and a quarter of the world's economic output, and this year's BRICS events engaged leaders from more than 60 countries.

Wang noted that last year, with the push from China — the rotating president of BRICS — the grouping launched its expansion process, "ushering in a major development opportunity for the BRICS mechanism".

During the South Africa trip, President Xi attended BRICS events and made several important speeches, "continuing to promote and lead the momentum of BRICS development", Wang added.

The BRICS summit on Thursday made the landmark decision to invite Saudi Arabia, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Argentina,

Iran and Ethiopia to the BRICS family as official members.

Assem Hanafi, Egyptian ambassador to China, said: "BRICS is a representation of the Global South. It is an important instrument whereby developing countries and emerging economies integrate their political and economic efforts to give themselves more voice, more representation in the current global architecture."

"The expansion of BRICS is a natural and expected one. ... China, along with other states, gives BRICS an added impact on the world scene," he said in a recent interview with People's Daily.

Wu Xinbo, dean of Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, said, "In recent years, some developed countries have worked on building up their cliques such as the Group of Seven for their own

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BRICS expansion a win for multilateralism, shared prosperity

Among the key issues at the 15th BRICS Summit, which was held in South Africa from Tuesday to Thursday, was the desire to open the group to more countries.

More than 40 countries expressed interest in joining BRICS, elevating its role as an alternative platform for inclusive dialogue on global governance and development. Six countries — Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates — were invited to join and are set to be full members effective Jan 1. This is a major win for multilateralism and South-South cooperation.

BRICS, the grouping of the major emerging economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, has become a strong galvanizing

WORLD WATCH By Adhere Cavince

force, winning the support and approval of many countries, especially in the developing Global South. The increase in the number of countries keen to join the BRICS family is driven by a number of factors.

The BRICS economies collectively account for 40 percent of the world's population and over 26 percent of the global economy. Joining the forum offers countries the potential for increased economic opportunities, trade and investment. Access to these large markets can promote export diver-

sification and stimulate the economic growth and development of emerging economies.

In an increasingly polarized world, BRICS offers a new path to fashion a more inclusive global economic and political order, rather than the order dominated by Western powers. Joining BRICS allows countries to align themselves with a group that seeks to promote multipolarity and a more equitable international system. It also provides an opportunity to enhance geopolitical influence and strengthen their voice in global decision-making forums.

BRICS has also initiated a number of mechanisms for development cooperation among its members. These include the New Development

Bank and the Contingent Reserve Arrangement. These mechanisms provide financial assistance and support for infrastructure development projects and other initiatives in BRICS countries and beyond.

The development bank has so far committed over \$33 billion to more than 96 infrastructure projects. In May, the bank announced that it will fund a greater share of the project in local currencies. Similarly, as a financial safety net, the Contingent Reserve Arrangement provides a framework for member countries to provide mutual support in times of financial crisis by offering liquidity support. Such utility and currency liberalization have

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GRADUATES TRIGGER DEBATE OVER CHOICE OF UNIVERSITY STUDIES

Selecting a particular major no guarantee of landing a well-paid job

By ZOU SHUO

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After four years of studying Russian for a bachelor's degree at a university in Shenyang, the capital of Liaoning province, and two years of postgraduate studies in journalism at a university in Russia, Ma Qi still hasn't found a suitable job. She believes this is because she chose the wrong subjects.

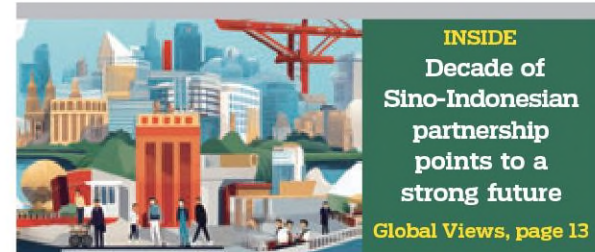
"I've been looking for jobs for three months, and the highest salary I was offered was 4,000 yuan (\$554) per month, without the guarantee of a two-day break during weekends," she said, adding that she is now considering pursuing doctoral studies.

Like Ma, a rising number of col-

lege graduates are complaining about their university majors on social media platforms, saying their studies have not helped them land satisfactory jobs.

In addition to liberal arts subjects such as foreign languages and journalism, some engineering majors, including bioengineering, chemical engineering, environmental science and materials science, have been labeled by students as poor subject choices.

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PAGE TWO

Students: Experts offer suggestions on choosing majors

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The term "super-entrapped major" has become a catchphrase on several social media platforms, with some netizens talking students out of their studies due to their own experiences.

Experts are also offering study suggestions to students who will graduate soon.

Zhang Xuefeng, founder of the education company Fengxue Weilai, made headlines recently when he said during a live-streaming broadcast that he would "knock out" his child if the child wanted to study journalism at university, as journalism graduates typically do not earn high salaries.

Zhang has also dissuaded students against choosing subjects such as philosophy, education, business management, foreign languages, finance, bioengineering, chemical engineering, environmental science, and materials science.

He believes that subjects such as law, Chinese language, politics, math and computer sciences are good because it is easy for graduates studying them to find well-paid jobs.

Ma said she chose to pursue postgraduate studies in journalism because she could not find a good job despite having a bachelor's degree in Russian. Yet a master's in journalism still cannot guarantee her a decent salary. "So, for me, both majors are entrapped ones," she said.

When she graduated from college in 2021, she could only find a job in foreign trade that paid 1,800 yuan per month. She said human resources staff members told her that if she did not want the position, plenty of others did.

Ma feels that studying Russian favors male students, as they are more likely to be sent to Russia by companies. To land a good job, she recommends studying Russian at institu-

tions with a good reputation, such as Beijing Foreign Studies University.

"If like me, you studied Russian at an ordinary university, the chances are you will also be unable to find a good job, as there are just too many students studying that language, and there is not that much demand," she said.

She added that only one of her six roommates at college chose not to pursue postgraduate studies, but despite putting in the extra work, she and the other four could not find good jobs.

Time-consuming work

Zheng Yang, who graduated from Zhejiang University with a master's in biology, also believes that his subject is not a good one.

"If you want to find a decent job in biology, you must have a doctoral degree," he said.

When he graduated in 2018, Zheng could only find work that paid 7,000 yuan to 8,000 yuan a month, while graduates with a master's in information technology can easily find jobs that offer at least double that salary.

However, he said students need to make great efforts to obtain a master's in biology, adding that during his postgraduate studies, he worked for about 14 hours a day doing experiments.

Although he worked extremely hard, he did not graduate on time, and had to defer his studies for more than a year to complete his experiments and dissertations.

Postgraduate students are considered cheap labor for university supervisors, who only offer them low pay to perform time-consuming work. As a result, students frequently defer their studies, Zheng said.

"My supervisor told us that if his children want to study biology in the future, he would beat them up, because the pains far outweigh the gains," he said.

Zheng added that he chose biology, as at that time it was commonly thought that the 21st century would be a time for biology and gene-editing technology.

"However, after I embarked on my studies, I began to realize just how boring and time-consuming the major is and how difficult it is to graduate," he said, adding that some of his classmates gave up halfway through their studies.

Zheng said many of his former classmates decided against working in the field of biology, choosing instead to use their degrees from reputable universities as stepping stones to other careers.

Rising popularity

Zhang Xuefeng's outspokenness has made him a popular figure among parents and students.

He said he is offering his advice to students from less-privileged backgrounds, because for them, a job with a high salary should be more important than pursuing their interests.

Early this month, Zhang had more than 20 million followers on his Douyin account, a rise of 7 million in less than two months.

His supporters said he has "broken the information barrier", while his detractors think Zhang's suggestions are too shortsighted and profit-driven.

As a result of his popularity, demand for the subjects he has recommended, including computer science and Chinese language, has risen significantly this year, but it has fallen greatly for majors such as journalism and management.

Li Meng, a high school graduate from Anhui province, told the Jiemi media outlet that she has benefited from the "Zhang Xuefeng effect", as despite a relatively low enrollment score, she has been accepted to study journalism at Communication University of China. The "Zhang Xuefeng

effect" refers to the comments made by the founder of the Fengxue Weilai education company.

Communication University of China has witnessed a significant drop in enrollment scores in many provincial regions.

Fresh burdens

The discussions about university subjects have added to the burden of students already studying so-called poor majors.

Xiang Yunxin, a second-year undergraduate student majoring in English education, said she is worried about her future, as both English and education are not considered by netizens to be good subjects.

She added that many students are studying English, but with a significant reduction in the number of academic tutoring institutions, competition for entry to schools to teach English has intensified.

Xiang believes that four years of undergraduate studies in English education cannot equip her with sufficient knowledge to land a good job, and that the postgraduate entrance exam has also become too competitive, with the number of applicants rising each year.

"I think English was a good major some 20 years ago, with China joining the World Trade Organization and needing lots of people who can speak that language well. But nowadays, there are just too many people who are extremely proficient in English, so students studying it have lost their competitive edge," she said.

The Ministry of Education has said some 20 percent of the university majors in China will be adjusted by 2025. Old majors will be

dropped, while new ones will be introduced that are more suitable for new technology and industry.

The ministry said majors with employment rates of less than 60 percent for two consecutive years will be accorded fewer enrollment slots, and could even be canceled.

Warnings issued

Experts have cautioned students to focus more on their interests, rather than the popularity of majors, when choosing their university.

Meanwhile, not all students are following netizens' advice in only choosing popular majors.

Zhong Fangrong, who graduated from high school in Hunan province, made headlines in 2020 when she applied to Peking University, choosing archaeology as her major after scoring 676 out of 750 in the *gaokao*, or college entrance exam.

She ranked fourth among 194,000 liberal arts students in the province, and her score allowed her to choose almost any major at any school in the country.

As Zhong comes from a less-privileged family background, some netizens began judging her decision, saying she would regret it once she entered the job market.

Others expressed admiration and support for her. Museums and archaeological research institutes nationwide rallied behind Zhong, sending her archaeological books and cultural relic products.

Zhong is not alone in choosing a university major based on personal interests and aspirations, rather than the promise of a lucrative career.

Jin Baijiang, director of the student admission office at Nankai University in Tianjin, said a major should not be labeled "good" or "bad", "popular" or "unpopular", as all of them are created to meet demands from society and serve long-term national development.

He told Guangming Daily that while new majors will likely become popular, in time they might also become outdated, so it is unwise for students to pursue the latest trends.

He Zhiwei, a director of China Agricultural University's undergraduate school, said a university education is aimed at helping students cultivate independent thinking, form correct values, and find their future development path.

Students can and must go beyond their majors, and although university majors are significant for students' development, they cannot determine their future, she said.

"No matter which major they choose, students cannot be deterred from exploring an unknown world, as at college they will enrich their knowledge and broaden their horizons," she added.

Not all popular majors are suitable for all students, and rather than considering the popularity of a subject, students need to focus more on their interests, ability and the national development trend to find a suitable major, He added.

Qiao Jingzhong, a professor of education at Beijing Normal University, said students should not be too profit-driven when choosing majors. It is easier for them to make a difference when they learn things they are interested in, he added.

To acquire broad and professional knowledge, he advises students to choose basic disciplines for undergraduate studies, and an applied or vocational major for postgraduate studies.



No matter which major they choose, students cannot be deterred from exploring an unknown world, as at college they will enrich their knowledge and broaden their horizons."

He Zhiwei, a director of China Agricultural University's undergraduate school

TOP NEWS

Panda pleasure

Giant panda Tian Tian enjoys a panda-friendly fruitsicle cake for his 26th birthday at the Smithsonian's National Zoo in Washington, DC on Sunday. It was Tian Tian's final birthday at the zoo. He and Mei Xiang, 25-year-old, and their cub Xiao Qi Ji, 3, will return to China in December. YIFAN XU / CHINA DAILY



Sales of domestic seafood surge over safety concerns

Chinese consumers are paying more attention to health, experts say

By FAN FEIFEI

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The sales of domestically produced seafood and other aquatic products have surged dramatically on major Chinese e-commerce platforms, which have vowed to step up testing for radioactive substances to ensure the quality and safety of these products, after Japan started releasing nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean on Thursday.

Data from online discounter Pinduoduo showed that the turnover of domestic sea cucumbers, shrimps, swimming crabs, freshwater fish and seafood gift boxes on its online marketplace doubled on Thursday compared with that of Wednesday.

The transaction volume of large yellow croakers and freshwater crabs, such as hairy crabs, skyrocketed 148 percent and 730 percent, respectively, during the period, according to Pinduoduo.

Sales of aquatic products on JD

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Super, the online supermarket arm of Chinese e-commerce giant JD, jumped 150 percent year-on-year on Thursday, while the figure soared 63 percent from Tuesday to Thursday compared with the period from Aug 15 to 17.

JD Super said it has strengthened testing for radioactive substances in seafood and other aquatic products, and stepped up monitoring to ensure that the seafood being sold was caught during a safe period, before Japan started releasing contaminated water.

The platform will keep checking the place of origin and the time of capture of seafood that will be sold in the future, and enrich the categories of domestic freshwater aquaculture products, JD Super added.

China suspended imports of all

aquatic products originating in Japan starting on Thursday, when Japan started releasing radioactive water from its tsunami-wrecked Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the Pacific Ocean, according to the General Administration of Customs.

Zhu Keli, founding director of the China Institute of New Economy, said that an increasing number of Chinese consumers are paying more attention to health and food safety, and they prefer domestic aquatic products in order to reduce the potential risks of radioactive contamination caused by Japan's discharge.

"However, I think stockpiling seafood and aquatic products is unnecessary," Zhu said, emphasizing that consumers should remain rational and choose credible channels to purchase the products.

Currently, central government departments have strengthened the testing and monitoring of imported aquatic products to

ensure the quality and safety of such commodities, he added.

Song Wei, a primary school teacher in Beijing and the mother of a 6-year-old boy, said she bought 2 kilograms of freshly caught swimming crabs on Friday on JD.

"These crabs are from Zhoushan, Zhejiang province, and are very fresh. Food safety is a top priority for my family, and it is important to learn about the source of the seafood, its processing and whether it went through the necessary safety checks," Song said.

Jason Yu, general manager of market research company Kantar Worldpanel China, said that in the short term, Japan's move will not only have an adverse impact on Japanese seafood exports, but will also affect the seafood processing and catering service industry in the whole Asia-Pacific region, because some consumers may opt for seafood originating in northern Europe.

The Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs said on Thursday that it will ramp up the monitoring of nuclear pollution risks involving marine products to ensure the quality and safety of all aquatic products, and safeguard the vital interests of the people.

The ministry will pay close attention to the possible harm to China's marine fisheries and protect the healthy development of marine fisheries.

Games and gifts welcome freshmen to universities

By CHEN MEILING

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From billiards and basketball to pop quizzes and treasure hunts, a host of fun activities are being organized by colleges and universities across China to welcome first-year students to campuses as the autumn semester kicks off.

Wang Yuhao, 18, never expected to be drawn into an exciting water gun fight soon after her arrival at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen in Guangdong province, in the middle of August.

The challenge organized for freshmen came with a set of tasks, such as playing a round of billiards, shooting a basket and taking pictures at a specific location, which all needed to be completed without being sprayed by an opponent's water gun. If the water hit the name tag, it turned blue and the student concerned got knocked out of the game.

"I played billiards for the first time in my life. The fight challenge was thrilling. After the game, we all dug into a spread of desserts prepared by the university," she said.

Wang, who is shy by nature, said she learned to work together with strangers during this team-building exercise, and also got familiar with the campus environment.

"I have heard the difference between high school life and studying at a university is the degree of independence one gains. ... I hope to make more friends here," she said.

Song Weijing, a first-year student at Duke Kunshan University in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, attended a special fair on the campus. The university's different departments set up pop quiz stalls, and prizes included handbags and snacks.

"The activities were fairly easy. I was asked to list three of the five most famous mountains in China. I answered the question correctly and won a fancy student ID holder," she said.

Song said that professors from different departments also fielded questions from students during an interactive session. "They spoke on course contents and future employment prospects. The information was very useful."

Duke Kunshan University started its new semester on Aug 14. Song added that she found the university president's address to first-year students very encouraging.

A treasure hunt greeted Hu Enti, 18, at the Beijing Institute of Technology. The freshmen followed clues through the campus to redeem prizes such as keychains and air humidifiers.

"Though the weather in Beijing is sultry, and riding a bike on the campus can make you sweat, I found the university atmosphere very welcoming. It feels like I belong here," she said.

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"This year's ceremony was really impressive. ... The atmosphere was cheerful ... very different from being welcomed online."

He Jiazheng, student at The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen since 2020

In Tianjin, several universities started welcoming freshmen to their autumn semester in the middle of August. Tianjin University arranged shuttle buses to ferry the students and their parents to the campus from railway stations and airports. Volunteers were assigned to help the students go through the entry procedures.

Games were organized and gifts arranged to welcome them. A Lego building, animation avatars and creative cultural products were among the top draws as the university inducted about 5,000 freshmen on Aug 17.

Gu Xianqing, 17, who joined the School of Architecture at Tianjin University, said she was happy to receive a blue-and-white star with her name on it. "Every freshman at my school has received one. I think it is a symbol of hope and encouragement. The school wants us to study diligently and become its future stars."

Gu added that she likes ancient buildings and paintings, and is looking forward to the surveying and mapping activity at the Dule Temple, a 1,000-year-old temple that has one of the country's few well-preserved wooden structures.

Dalian Maritime University in Liaoning province took the welcoming ceremony to the next level. On Aug 15, the new group of students got to ride autonomous vehicles developed by their seniors. This was the first time these vehicles were rolled out on the campus.

"It's amazing that freshmen experienced the fun of technological innovation upon arrival at the university," a netizen commented on a China Youth Daily news report on WeChat.

He Jiazheng, who joined The Chinese University of Hong Kong, Shenzhen, in 2020, said that back then, there were no fun offline events because of COVID-19 and he even listened to the principal's speech online.

"This year's ceremony was really impressive. The university also gave away merchandise such as kettles and canvas bags. Various icebreaking games were organized. ... The atmosphere was cheerful ... very different from being welcomed online," He said.

Cui Yutong contributed to this story.

Actions: China a partner that African countries can rely on

From page 1

selfish interests, while the lawful interests of developing countries have been disregarded and the role of emerging economies has been further marginalized."

"BRICS is one of the most important cooperation platforms that serves a vast number of Global South countries, and a bigger and stronger BRICS in effect helps promote and deepen South-South cooperation," Wu said.

At the summit, Xi unveiled China's planned actions for advancing BRICS cooperation, such as setting up a China-BRICS Science and Innovation Incubation Park for the New Era and jointly establishing a BRICS Framework on Industrial Cooperation for Sustainable Development.

"As the world's second-largest economy and a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, China should continue to work with other BRICS countries

to boost the voice and influence of developing countries in global economic governance," Wu said.

At the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue held on Thursday evening, President Xi announced three major moves to chart the course for China-Africa practical cooperation in the next stage and assist in Africa's integration and modernization — the Initiative on Supporting Africa's Industrialization, the Plan for China Supporting Africa's Agricultural Modernization, and the Plan for China-Africa Cooperation on Talent Development.

African leaders attending Thursday's dialogue said that China's help and cooperation have vigorously promoted the development of African countries and their integration process, and that China is a true friend of African countries and a partner they can rely on when they encounter difficulties.

At the meeting, the African

leaders voiced firm support for the Xi-proposed Global Development Initiative, Global Security Initiative and Global Civilization Initiative, and said that they will continue to actively promote the high-quality construction of the Belt and Road.

"The solid progress of Africa's integration and the desirable development of China and Africa's own modernization undertakings surely will provide fresh fuel for the world's economic growth and contribute positively to international fairness and justice," said Wang, the foreign minister.

He added that the joint statement issued by the dialogue "charts a road map for the development of China-Africa relations in the new era."

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said that what Xi has emphasized is that in China's eyes, it is the opportunities and

fruits of development that should be shared among countries.

"We have seen countries interested in the Chinese path to modernization. China is also willing and ready to share its experience in poverty reduction and the benefits brought by infrastructure construction. It inspires a lot of countries, especially developing countries," she said.

Xi's state visit to South Africa marked his fourth to the country as president as well as the only state visit arranged during this year's BRICS events.

The foreign minister said that the visit "yielded a bumper harvest", noting that the two leaders witnessed the signing of a slew of cooperation agreements.

Wang Fan, president of China Rural Affairs University, noted that the two countries are "like-minded partners who weather the storms together, and they are both striding on their own paths toward modernization".

Direction: High-quality development emphasized

From page 1

Xi made specific requirements, ranging from strengthening the protection and utilization of cultural heritage and providing young people with enhanced education on modern civilization and science, to accelerating the construction of an inclusive social structure and community environment.

During Saturday's meeting, Xi said that with the building of a new development paradigm, the promotion of high-quality development and the advancement of

Chinese modernization, Xinjiang faces new opportunities and needs to achieve new accomplishments.

Xi provided clear direction for Xinjiang's development in his speech. He urged efforts to accelerate the construction of a modern industrial system that reflects Xinjiang's characteristics and advantages, as well as to actively develop modern agriculture and industrial parks, such as for photovoltaic products.

He also called for strengthening cooperation between Xinjiang and the rest of the country in industrial

development and personnel exchanges, and accelerating the construction of the core area of the Belt and Road Initiative to make Xinjiang the gateway of China's westward opening-up.

To achieve social stability and high-quality development in Xinjiang, the most arduous task is the work in rural areas, Xi said, emphasizing efforts to consolidate and build on the achievements of poverty alleviation and promote rural revitalization.

He also stressed the need to better tell Xinjiang stories in the new era through multiple channels to show an open and confident Xinjiang, and to refute fake statements targeting it.

Xinjiang should step up development of tourism and encourage more domestic and overseas tourists to travel in the region, Xi said.

Cooperation: Platform helps global exchanges

From page 1

proved quite attractive for countries seeking developmental assistance.

BRICS represents a significant force in South-South cooperation, which refers to collaboration on and exchange of resources, technology, knowledge and culture among developing countries. BRICS countries often coordinate their positions on global issues, including trade, climate change and reform of global governance institutions. By joining BRICS, countries can engage in collective bargaining and negotiations with other major economies, giving them a platform to advocate for their interests on a global scale.

These factors collectively act as pull factors for many countries to join BRICS. It is important to note that the majority of the countries interested in joining are from Africa. Gleaming as a result of productive development cooperation with China, African economies appreciate the need to engage with countries that have similar development aspirations.

President Xi Jinping's message of seeking development through solidarity, while jointly shouldering responsibility for global peace, captured the essence of the BRICS framework. Several agreements reached during the summit will play an important role in anchoring

economies while fostering amity among countries.

BRICS has created momentum for a more inclusive development. It has won hearts across the world. Many of the development concerns of emerging economies can be addressed through strong and functional BRICS leadership. This is particularly important as many countries face economic reconstruction after the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, the climate crisis and hostilities in Eastern Europe.

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

CHINA

Over the past three years, Ma Liangdong, who serves as a village cadre, has become accustomed to keeping his phone on around the clock. That way, he can respond promptly to messages and calls, and quickly mediate in disputes thanks to his knowledge of the law.

The 26-year-old is deputy secretary of the village Party committee in Huanzhuang, a village in Shandan county, Gansu province. He is also a member of the village mediation committee.

In addition to attending training sessions on village management, provided by the township and county governments, and fulfilling his official duties, he can be found in the village committee's office most days.

Though he often deals with minor disputes among villagers, such as when one person's animals eat a neighbor's crops or when adjustments are required to land rental agreements, he finds his role fulfilling. He believes that the process of legal mediation has helped greatly improve his range of skills.

In March 2020, the Central Commission for Law-based Governance, overseen by the Communist Party of China Central Committee, issued a document emphasizing the need to strengthen the rule of law in the rural areas. It detailed improvements to the comprehensive mechanism for the prevention, mediation and resolution of social conflicts to resolve disputes at the grassroots level.

Moreover, governments at all levels were ordered to cultivate teams of dedicated mediators in rural areas and train them in legal knowledge and the relevant skills, harnessing their primary role in resolving grassroots conflicts and disputes.

According to data from the Ministry of Justice, there are about 492,000 village-level mediation committees nationwide, comprising around 2.1 million mediators. Last year, mediation organizations dealt with about 8.9 million disputes across the country, including 3 million that were handled by village mediation committees. The ministry noted that this effectively resolved grassroots conflicts and addressed people's urgent concerns.

Young people like Ma are playing increasingly vital roles in the process of promoting the rule of law in rural areas. Numerous young village cadres study the law and government policies in order to take on roles as mediators and promote effective village management.

Professional approach

Having graduated with a degree in hotel management from Lanzhou Vocational Technical College in Lanzhou, Gansu's capital, in 2016, Ma returned to Huanzhuang, his hometown, to start a business and take part in village affairs. In 2019, he was elected deputy director of the village residential committee, becoming deputy Party chief two years later.

For Ma, transitioning between roles and adapting to changing work requirements have underscored the significance of communication skills and deep legal knowledge when interacting with villagers.

"As a village cadre, when people approach me with questions I can't answer, I seek other ways to understand their concerns, explain matters in a way that is easily understandable and address the issues," he said.

Ma often receives calls from villagers early in the morning. For example, he assists in ensuring that the tap water supply for villagers is reconnected when it has been cut off or in resolving disputes arising from land boundary conflicts. "Times such as spring plowing, autumn harvest and the period around Chinese New Year often see heightened conflicts and disputes in the village. Of these, family conflicts and disputes about adjustments to land rentals are particularly prominent," he said.

Ma said that there are no major conflicts among the villagers because many are relatives or old friends. However, when disputes do arise,



Judges and officials discuss a dispute in a cornfield in Zhangye, Gansu province, on May 17. The mobile tribunal was formed by the Ganzhou District People's Court of Zhangye to resolve issues and teach people about the law. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Each village has its own set of conventions, formed by gathering input from all the residents and votes on matters. These conventions play a pragmatic role in practice. I think these village conventions have a stronger emotional impact than the law when handling village issues."

At 36 years old, Wang Lingyun is chair of the women's federation in Ruolian, a village in Lanzhou's Honggu district, and also a member of the mediation committee. She said that ways of raising awareness of the law and undertaking dispute mediation in rural areas cannot be learned overnight.

She recalled the first time she and her colleagues visited villagers' homes for interviews: some people were initially resistant and felt that their agricultural work was being disrupted by the visit.

"I've learned that it's important to engage in some casual small talk first, getting to know the people a little before moving onto work-related topics. Or during their breaks, I join them for a chat and introduce legal awareness into our conversation. To truly gain the villagers' trust, you have to get into their hearts," she said.

In the past two years, Wang has seen a significant decline in the number of disputes in the village, mainly due to diligent implementation of local conventions and the dissemination of legal knowledge.

"The village's legal advisers also regularly explain points of law based on the residents' needs. As the villagers begin to understand the regulations, they become more conscious of the legality of their actions, thus reducing disputes," she said.

Youthful vigor

As the majority of rural residents are in their 50s or 60s, it can be challenging to gain their assent during the mediation process. The mediators need to patiently inquire about the details from the older villagers and then explain their reasoning and the legal basis for their advice.

Before her present role, Wang ran a beauty salon in Lanzhou's downtown. However, she left to return home to care for her two children, who were studying there. In 2020, she was hired to work as a secretary for the village committee, and by the end of the following year she was appointed as the chairwoman of its women's federation.

Her family was initially not very supportive of her becoming a village cadre, mainly due to the lower income that increased the family's financial burden, but the progress of her work and the positive changes she brought to the village meant that she gradually won her relatives' support. Her children are proud of her work and the changes she's made to the village.

"I gradually fell in love with my current job through practice. I've discovered that the villagers have down-to-earth needs and they expect local cadres to address their practical disputes and difficulties. Participating in village management has allowed me to make significant strides, which will benefit me for a lifetime," she said.

The growing demands of rural management mean many places are nurturing young people to undertake village management and service work, aiming to improve the concept of the rule of law among residents and promote the integrated management of rural areas, she added.

Contact the writer at yangzekun@chinadaily.com.cn

Young cadres overseeing rural mediation, legal advice

A new generation of professional advisers is handling issues related to village management and residents' disputes. **Yang Zekun** reports.



Clockwise from top left: Police officers promote legal knowledge in a greenhouse in Pingliang, Gansu province, on March 27. ZHENG BING / FOR CHINA DAILY



Volunteers answer questions from villagers at a rule-of-law publicity activity in Suzhan village, Gansu. YANG ZEKUN / CHINA DAILY



mediators can usually resolve them through commonsense methods and also by explaining the law and possible legal consequences. As long as the mediation is done correctly, there won't be any estrangement between the parties, he said.

Ma acquires legal knowledge in many ways. In addition to reading related literature and studying the popularization of legal platforms launched by government departments, he and his colleagues join police officers and judicial staff on visits to villagers' homes to raise their awareness of the law. This process

allows both cadres and residents to gain a robust understanding of fundamental legal knowledge.

Occasionally, villagers may unwittingly engage in illegal behaviors. In such cases, local cadres need to promptly inform them of the relevant legal regulations. For instance, when villagers go to the local public complaints and proposal bureau to protest against perceived inadequate compensation for house demolition, they sometimes leave their elderly parents and toddlers in the bureau's office as a form of pressure, Ma said. "Through my studies, I've come to

understand that such behavior could potentially amount to abandoning the elderly and children. Law enforcement agencies can take action against such individuals. Thus, we approach the people involved, inform them of the legal implications of their actions and encourage them to seek resolution through lawful channels," Ma said.

Convention, pragmatism

He said village cadres are constantly shifting between different roles — such as villager, manager and mediator — and they have to

adapt their thinking to that particular role, instead of only using their status to order people to do certain things or constrain others. He thinks that village cadres and mediators should acquire a wide range of knowledge, including the law, and take practical steps to help villagers resolve any issues they encounter.

"I firmly believe that the law is the bottom line for all behaviors. By the time villagers confront each other in court, a considerable gap has already opened between them. As the old saying goes, 'Anything beyond the scope of the law is a matter of sentiment,'" he

Officials helping to drive countryside developments

By YANG ZEKUN

Village legal advisers are playing a pivotal role in driving the rapid development of China's rural areas.

They not only offer legal safeguards for the growth of village industries, such as seed production, livestock breeding and cultural tourism, but also address residents' law-related demands, said Wang Xin, director of the village committee of Suzhan village in Zhangye, Gansu province.

"It is inevitable that a range of

legal issues arise amid the process of village development. As village cadres, we are not legal experts. Sometimes, actions may seem reasonable based on experience, but they may not be legal. Legal advisers can help us review the relevant content and provide professional suggestions, especially in matters related to contract agreements and specialized terminology," he said.

Wang said that in the past, officials handled a range of conflicts and disputes based on village traditions, experience and the influence

of a mediator, rather than following strict legal procedures.

This approach had its drawbacks: some villagers may have agreed with the results of mediation in a financial dispute one day, but regretted it the next, wasting cadres' time and efforts.

Now, however, legal advisers provide free services: they tell the villagers how to avoid such disputes in the early stages and explain how people can defend their rights via legal channels if disputes occur, he said. Through years of providing villagers

with legal knowledge, the advisers' awareness of the law has grown. For example, they now require labor contracts to be signed before working in village enterprises, fully safeguarding their rights and avoiding potential time-wasting issues and disputes later, he said.

According to the department of justice in Gansu, the province has 15,035 rural public legal service stations, while legal advisers cover all 17,494 villages and communities in the province, providing legal consultations about land disputes,

environmental pollution, marriage and family, and food and drugs.

In February, the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council, China's Cabinet, issued a document underlining the key tasks to comprehensively promote rural revitalization this year.

The measures included the strengthening of legal education and services in rural areas, as well as improvements to a wide-ranging mechanism for preventing, mediating and resolving social conflicts and disputes.

In March 2020, the Central Commission for Law-based Governance released a document that stressed the provision of inclusive, efficient

and high-quality legal services for rural areas. It also implemented the policy of "one village, one legal adviser" with standardized service content and innovative methods to help grassroots organizations and people deal with law-related affairs.

The Ministry of Justice said that 600,000 villages and communities across the country have appointed advisers, with 180,000 legal professionals, including lawyers and grassroots personnel, participating in the work.

With the exception of a few remote villages in the central and western regions, full coverage has been achieved, it added.

CHINA



Members of the Zhaozhuang Primary School's girls' soccer team practice on the school's field in Yuezhuang township, Yiyuan county, Shandong province. PHOTOS BY ZHAO DONGSHAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

GIRLS HAVING A GO AT THE GOALS



From left: Two members of the team wash clothes for their families by a river in Xixiaoshui village of Yuezhuang township after training. Two members of the team play soccer in the public square in Xixiaoshui village.



From left: Members of the soccer team train at the school. Team member Song Zihan is soaked in sweat during a training session.



Female primary students flourish on soccer fields in a small village in Shandong

By CHINA DAILY

In the small mountain village of Zhaozhuang in Yiyuan county, Shandong province, there is a group of soccer-loving girls.

In 2019, the Zhaozhuang Primary School in Yuezhuang township introduced a soccer program that sparked these girls' interest in the sport.

The school selected over 20 girls who were physically fit and hard-working to form a soccer team. They trained an average of five times a week and participated in more than 20 matches each school year.

After several years of training and competing, the girls realized that soccer was not just a simple game, but a sport that requires teamwork to be successful. They soon became more disciplined in their training.

The girls often trained after school or during holidays, but since there is no soccer field in their village, some of them trained in the village's public square, while others used relatively smooth grassland.

Their hard work has paid off. The team has won championships in the Yuezhuang Town Primary School Football Tournament over the past several years. In the 2022 and 2023 Yiyuan County Primary and Secondary School Sports Games, it took second and third place, respectively, in the girls' soccer competitions.

The players became small "stars" in the eyes of their classmates. "These girls are not only hardworking but also have a genuine passion for soccer," said Zheng Min, their coach.

In recent years, both boys' and girls' soccer teams have been established in the various towns and villages in Yiyuan, and soccer courses have been introduced. Girls in particular have begun picking up the sport.



From left: Two players train in the woods near Xixiaoshui village. Two members of the team read during a break in their training in Xixiaoshui.



WORLD

Editor's note: The release of nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the Pacific Ocean began last week despite strong international opposition. China Daily looks at the reactions from the local community, its neighbors and the Pacific Island countries, and examines the far-reaching impact of the discharge.



A staff member of Mothers' Radiation Lab Fukushima tests a sample of seawater taken near the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant, damaged by a March 11, 2011, earthquake and tsunami, in Iwaki, northeastern Japan, on Friday. EUGENE HOSHINO / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Japan's move sparks furor

Citizens' groups demand halt to nuclear water release, slamming govt decision

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo
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Japanese protesters are continuing to urge the government to halt the release of nuclear-contaminated water from the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear power plant into the ocean, which began on Thursday.

Citizens' groups held a protest rally near the Prime Minister's Office in Tokyo again on Friday, strongly opposing the government's go-ahead for the Tokyo Electric Power Company to begin releasing contaminated water from the wrecked Fukushima nuclear plant into the ocean.

Protesters said the government had chosen the least expensive and easiest method of disposing of Fukushima's radioactive water, ignoring strong opposition from Fukushima residents and the Japanese public. This also disregards international legal obligations, they said.

Mizuho Fukushima, leader of the Social Democratic Party and a member of the House of Councilors, the upper house of the National Diet, said at the rally that the Japanese government's decision allows the discharge of radioactive substances into natural environments and such a move is an "atrocious".

A lot of political manipulation is behind the move, she said.

Similar protests were staged by civic groups in other Japanese cities. Among their appeals was one saying, "Don't spread any more poison in the sea."

Hirofumi Kokubun, secretary-general of the Iwate Prefectural Association for a Peaceful, Democratic and Progressive Japan, emphasized that the release of contaminated water is a unilateral breach of promises made to fishers and the public, and constitutes a reckless act that undermines democracy.

Kyoko Yoshida, vice-chairman of the Japanese Communist Party's Iwate Prefectural Committee, said policymakers should not be allowed to ignore the lessons of the nuclear accident and to give priority to the profits of the Tokyo Electric Power Company over the safety of citizens.

Citing concerns over food safety and pollution of the ocean, China suspended the imports of all aquatic products originating from Japan from Thursday.

Mami Moriya, a teacher of children with intellectual disabilities, said: "When it comes to potential dangers like this, there's no such thing as being too cautious. So if people from other countries say they don't want to import Japanese seafood products, that's understandable. It's only natural for other countries to give priority to the health and safety of their own people."

Tokyo Electric Power Company has been unable to accurately determine the amount of radioactive substances to be discharged. Beginning the ocean discharge is thus certain to damage the natural environment, disrupt the livelihoods of fishers and threaten food safety for the public, Moriya said.

She urged the government and the power company to pass on accurate data related to nuclear-contaminated water to other countries because, she said, the ocean discharge affects the future of all life on Earth.

Masashi Tani, secretary-general of the Japan Congress Against A and H-Bombs (Gensuikin), said: "After the government and the company accurately disclose the information, judging whether the ocean discharge is safe or not is up to us. It's not for the business promotion side to say whether it's safe or not."

Li Ruoyu, a visiting research fellow with the Institute of Japanese and Korean Studies at Sichuan Normal University in Chengdu, said: "As a researcher of Japanese issues, what concerns me the most is the risk of the Japanese government's categorization of all questioning of the ocean discharge as politically unfriendly toward Japan. While such an approach may cater to domestic nationalist sentiments in Japan, it hinders the resolution of the issue and fails to effectively mitigate potential contamination risks."

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Protests erupt as concerns rise in ROK, Philippines

By YANG HAN and PRIME SARMIENTO in Hong Kong

Protesters in the Republic of Korea and the Philippines voiced against Japan's release of the nuclear-contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean over the weekend as concerns about its environmental impact are mounting.

Tens of thousands of ROK citizens gathered on Saturday and called on the government to take retaliatory action. In Manila, fisherfolk expressed solidarity with Japanese fishers in protest against the Japanese government's "ill-conceived action".

The massive rally in Seoul was held near City Hall, with the participation of some 90 civic groups and members of four opposition parties, including the main opposition Democratic Party of Korea, or DP, Yonhap News Agency said.

Addressing the protesters, DP leader Lee Jae-myung said Japan should immediately stop releasing nuclear water that threatens the health of people all over the world.

Lee said Japan is starting another Pacific war by conducting environmental crimes and it should apologize to the ROK, the nearest country suffering the most damage.

About 50,000 people participated in the rally, the organizers said. Police put the number at around 7,000.

Kim Young-bok, vice-chairman of the National Fisheries Federation, urged the government to ban the import of Japanese marine products and protect the lives of people by filing a complaint with the international maritime court.

The ROK has banned seafood imports from eight Japanese prefectures near Fukushima since 2013.

The DP has launched a petition to call for an end to the toxic water release.

More than 660,000 people had

signed the online petition by Sunday noon, leaving comments like "Let us protect our children together", "I oppose the release of nuclear-contaminated water", and "Please stop the release of the nuclear water".

In a briefing on Sunday, Kwon Chil-seung, DP chief spokesperson, said ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol should respond to the people's request to ask Japan to stop its toxic water release.

The ROK sent a team of three experts from the Korea Institute of Nuclear Safety on Sunday to the Fukushima office of the International Atomic Energy Agency. On the same day, four ROK lawmakers attended a protest in Fukushima organized by the Social Democratic Party of Japan.

Falling consumption

A statement by people working in the fisheries industry in the ROK, which was published on the National Federation of Fisheries Cooperatives' website on Friday, said seafood consumption had fallen rapidly even before the release of nuclear-contaminated water.

In Manila on Saturday, Philippine fisherfolk, youth and environmental groups protested in front of the Japanese embassy to oppose the discharge.

In a joint statement, the National Federation of Small Fisherfolk Organizations in the Philippines, the Earth Island Institute and the Youth Advocates for Climate Action Philippines, said the Japanese move is "simply unacceptable".

Rommel Arambulo, a national spokesperson of the fisherfolk organization, said it will continue to reach out to the international community to pressure Japan to suspend its water discharge and seek alternative ways to dispose of its nuclear waste.

Contact the writers at kelly@chinadailyjapac.com.



ROK fishers are worried about their seafood products, as seen in this picture on Friday, after Japan went ahead with the discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the Pacific. YONHAP NEWS AGENCY

Tokyo must put end to discharge, envoy says

By MINLU ZHANG at the United Nations
minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com

Japan is "selfish and irresponsible" and should stop releasing nuclear-contaminated water into the Pacific Ocean, Geng Shuang, China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, has said.

Japan's actions are "in disregard of the global public interest" and "transfer the risk of nuclear pollution to the entire world, including Pacific Island countries", Geng said on Friday. He was addressing the UN General Assembly on collaboration between the UN and the Pacific Islands Forum.

"This is an extremely selfish and irresponsible act. The disposal of the Fukushima nuclear-contaminated water is a major transnational issue and is by no means a private matter for Japan."

The Fukushima nuclear accident had already caused the leakage of large amounts of radioactive substances into the ocean, Geng said, and Japan's actions could bring a man-made secondary disaster to local people and the whole world.

There is no precedent or any uni-



Geng Shuang (center), China's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations, speaks at the UN General Assembly in New York on Friday. XIE E / XINHUA

versally recognized standards for discharging nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean, he said.

There have long been serious concerns about the impact of discharging the contaminated water into the marine environment and on food safety and human health, Geng said.

The legitimacy, legality and safety of Japan's ocean discharge plan have repeatedly been questioned internationally, he said. Japan has yet to address concerns such as about the long-term reliability of the purification facility, he said.

"China calls on the international community to jointly urge Japan to stop its wrongdoing, cancel the ocean discharge plan, communicate with neighboring countries with sincerity and goodwill, dispose of the nuclear-contaminated water in a responsible manner to prevent damage to the global marine environment and avoid unpredictable harm to the health and well-being of people around the world."

Pacific islands need to wage united fight, experts say

By XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong
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As Japan allows nuclear-contaminated water to be dumped into the Pacific Ocean, Pacific islands and South Asian regions must unite in vigilance, advocating transparent information-sharing, rigorous monitoring and coordinated action, experts say.

"The international community, in solidarity, must hold nations accountable for responsible environmental stewardship," said Anjal Prakash, clinical associate professor in research at the Bharti Institute of Public Policy, Indian School of Business, in Hyderabad.

"As custodians of our shared planet, we must ensure that decisions today do not imperil the sustainability and well-being of future generations."

In the wake of Japan's decision to release toxic water into the ocean, the world watches with heightened concern as ripples of environmental impact extend far beyond its shores, he said.

The move raises questions about the consequences for South Asia and the Pacific islands, Prakash said. "The delicate balance of marine ecosystems, already under stress from climate change and pollution, faces a new challenge that demands global attention."

Kalinga Seneviratne, a media analyst at the University of the South Pacific in Fiji, said dumping radioactive water into the ocean is

not about science but respect. Across the Pacific there are fears that the ocean will be polluted and that fish could become too toxic to consume, he said.

"Japan has shown an arrogance that does not respect regional concerns. Japan and its allies have said the waters will be scientifically monitored. What if they find it contaminated at some stage? Has science got an answer? The International Atomic Energy Agency and Japan have no scientific answer to it sadly."

The Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission in Fiji has condemned Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean, urging Pacific Island leaders to stand in solidarity to oppose it, Xinhua News Agency reported on Sunday.

The right to a clean and healthy environment is linked to other fundamental human rights such as the right to life, health, food, water and sanitation among others, the commission said.

It implored the Fijian government to uphold its constitutional obligations to protect the rights of everybody in the country.

Hundreds of protesters took to the streets of Fiji's capital, Suva, on Friday to vent their anger over Japan's dumping of nuclear waste.

“

This is a horrendous and horrible move by Japan. It's a disrespect to our rights as human beings. Although we are from small island countries, we still deserve to have our rights, our dignity and our freedoms respected."

Lusia Lagilevo, Fiji protester

have our rights, our dignity and our freedoms respected."

The Chinese embassy in Suva said the discharge will spread the risks of nuclear contamination to Pacific rim countries including China and the rest of the world.

"The ocean sustains humanity. The blue Pacific is home to all human beings including Chinese and Fijian people."

Huge impact

The Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands Manasseh Sogavare condemned the start of releasing the toxic water into the Pacific Ocean.

It "has an impact on our people,

ocean, economy and livelihood", he said.

The release of nuclear-contaminated water could have far-reaching ecological ramifications, Prakash said. "Marine life, integral to the livelihoods and food security of many coastal communities, may be endangered, affecting not only Japan but also neighboring regions. The currents of the Pacific Ocean could carry pollutants across vast distances, affecting marine biodiversity, fisheries and even human health."

Lavetanalagi Seru, co-founder of the Fijian group Alliance for Future Generations, said the Pacific has had a history of nuclear testing, and Marshall Islanders are still grappling with the enduring aftermath of nuclear contamination.

"We can't allow history to repeat itself, as we depend on the ocean for our livelihood. It's a source of economic opportunities for many of us," Xinhua quoted Seru as saying.

According to Fiji's constitution, every person has the right to a clean and healthy environment, which includes the right to have the natural world protected for the benefit of present and future generations through legislative and other measures, the Human Rights and Anti-Discrimination Commission said.

"The UN General Assembly has already adopted a resolution declaring that the right to a healthy, clean and sustainable environment is a universal human right. It is the duty of everyone to protect that right."

WORLD



Chinese President Xi Jinping (center) poses for a group photo with other leaders attending the BRICS-Africa Outreach and BRICS Plus Dialogue in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Thursday. The event was hosted by South African President Cyril Ramaphosa, and also attended by Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Russian President Vladimir Putin participated online. More than 60 leaders and representatives of African countries and other emerging markets and developing countries, as well as UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres, President of the New Development Bank Dilma Rousseff, and leaders of other international and regional organizations, also attended the event. LI XUEN / XINHUA

Platform key to improving economy, observers say

CAIRO — The BRICS is increasingly serving as a crucial platform that can lead a broad global development process, improve the current global economic system and address its problems and crises, global experts and senior officials have said.

"BRICS, with its economic, financial and technological capabilities and clear future vision, has the power and ability to lead the world toward a broad development process and make the global economic system more just and equitable," said Abdel-Sattar Eshrah, secretary-general of the Egyptian-Chinese Business Council in Cairo.

"The global economic system, with its crises and challenges, has negatively affected the lives of people worldwide, which highlights the importance of BRICS to restore a great deal of global economic stability," Eshrah said.

Eshrah, also a counselor of the Federation of Egyptian Chambers of Commerce, stressed that BRICS can help many emerging economies achieve higher rates of growth and development.

At the BRICS Summit last week, six countries, namely Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, were invited to join the BRICS. Their membership will take effect on Jan 1, 2024.

On Friday, Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi said BRICS has been formed to promote cooperation among countries to help them progress while respecting their independence. Raisi made the remarks upon arrival in Teheran from Johannesburg, where he took part in the BRICS Summit, according to a statement released by the president's office.

"The global hegemonic system" seeks to prevent independent states, including Iran, from growing through relations with other independent countries, Raisi said, adding that BRICS plays an effective role in promoting trade and economic cooperation among countries "in a major part of the world".

Multilateralism hailed

Pakistan's Foreign Ministry said the group has a cooperation mechanism based on openness to inclusive multilateralism, according to the ministry's spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch.

In an op-ed published on Thursday in *The National*, a news outlet based in Abu Dhabi, Nikolay Mladenov, director-general of the Anwar Gargash Diplomatic Academy, said the expansion of BRICS enhances global economic diplomacy and political reconciliation in a rapidly changing global landscape.

"The transition from a unipolar or bipolar world to a multipolar one has thrust middle powers into a pivotal role," said Mladenov, who served as a senior United Nations official and as Bulgaria's foreign minister and defense minister.

According to data released earlier this year from Acorn Macro Consulting, a British economic research company, the BRICS group accounts for 41 percent of the global population and accounts for 16 percent of world trade. The five BRICS countries now contribute about a quarter of global GDP.

XINHUA



Journalists gather at the media center of the 15th BRICS Summit in Johannesburg, South Africa, on Wednesday. GRIGORY SYSOEV / SPUTNIK

Expanded BRICS seen as antidote to conflict

Six new members welcomed into group, bringing countries closer

By JAN YUMUL and XU WEIWEI in Hong Kong

Experts have hailed the entry of Middle Eastern countries into the BRICS bloc of developing nations, seeing it as bringing national shared interests closer together in a region long constrained by conflict.

With the long-term interests of Iran and Saudi Arabia expected to intertwine, BRICS could help secure stability in the region, create a balance in world energy markets and improve regional and food security, they said.

Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, along with Argentina and Ethiopia, were invited to become new BRICS members, joining the original members Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, with their membership to take effect from Jan 1 next year.

"The most significant part in my opinion is that four of the six countries invited as full members are from the Middle East," said Furkan Halit Yölcü, a researcher at Sakarya University Middle East Institute in Turkey.

BRICS membership boosts the prestige of Egypt, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which are struggling under current US foreign policy, he said.

Mehmood Ul Hassan Khan, executive director of the Center for South Asia and International Studies in Islamabad, said the policymakers at the BRICS Summit in Johannesburg last week had achieved one of their biggest goals by inviting the six developing countries and signaling a "drastic change in global geopolitics and geoeconomics".

Expanding BRICS will also improve regional and food security, he said.

The ministries of foreign affairs of Iran, Saudi Arabia and the UAE separately issued statements on being invited to join BRICS.

Iran's Foreign Ministry said the country's "great success in joining

BRICS" will not only strengthen multilateralism but "can pave the way for pursuing the objectives of this administration", and expand other grand strategies to implement Iran's dynamic diplomacy.

Sayed Mostafa Khoshcheshm, former professor at the Iranian Foreign Ministry's Faculty of International Relations, said the country's accession to BRICS was a "setback for the United States" in its attempts to stifle the country.

"Now Iran is taking very wide jumps after joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and now the BRICS group of countries, showing that the US push for isolating Iran has failed."

On a larger scale, he said, this shows that "the world is changing now", as has been acknowledged by Western intellectuals, politicians and officials for the past two or three years. Global power, he said, was "on a transition from the West to the East".

"On a different dimension, this will also have very positive outcomes for the West Asian states, for the Persian Gulf states. Iran and Saudi Arabia started a rapprochement with the help of the Chinese."

In addition to China-brokered rapprochement and the enhancement of bilateral ties, Khoshcheshm said, relations between the two Middle Eastern powers will be more intimate under the BRICS grouping.

Shared interests

"When shared interests are intertwined and intermingled with each other, then there will be more stability and more security in the Persian Gulf region and for West Asia because the two can find more grounds for economic cooperation than hostility and rivalry."

Saudi Arabia's Minister of Foreign Affairs Prince Faisal bin Farhan said at the summit that the kingdom is the largest BRICS trading partner in the Middle East, with the value of its bilateral trade with the countries of the group exceeding \$160 billion last year.

Prince Faisal expressed appreciation for the invitation extended by the BRICS group and said Riyadh would be studying it, adding that Saudi foreign policy focuses on building economic partnerships, according to a report by the newspaper *Saudi Gazette*.

The UAE Foreign Ministry said the country has been "a long-term partner of the BRICS group".

The UAE Minister of Foreign Affairs Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan expressed his appreciation to the founding countries of BRICS and said the invitation forms part of the UAE's commitment to promote constructive dialogue through active platforms that represent developing and emerging economies.

The UAE Minister of State for International Cooperation Reem Al Hashimi said the UAE recognizes BRICS "as a mechanism to promote global peace, stability and prosperity".

Khan in Islamabad said the UAE has become the biggest country for the re-export of numerous goods and essential food items, a connecting hub for investment and innovation, and a bridge between the Gulf and Southeast Asia, the Middle East and North Africa.

Given the overwhelming interest shown by many countries in joining BRICS, the success in building consensus in inviting as many as six new members is a reflection of both the bloc's self-confidence in opening itself to new members just as it underlines its growing credibility, said Swaran Singh, professor of diplomacy and disarmament at Jawaharlal Nehru University in New Delhi, India.

What is even more interesting is how all five national leaders indicated this to be only a beginning and that many more aspirant nations are likely to be added to the bloc in coming years, Singh said. This has implications for most of the conventional post-World War II global governance structures that have failed to accommodate these emerging economies, he said.

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Bloc people-centered, comprehensive: Expert

By EDITH MUTETHYA in Johannesburg, South Africa
edithmutethya@chinadaily.com.cn

A leading China expert in South Africa said the current BRICS is people-centered, not market-centered, hoping that the bloc is structured in a way that members agree on common issues.

David Monyae, director of the Center for Africa-China Studies at the University of Johannesburg Confucius Institute, said the bloc, in its present form, lays emphasis on development.

Jim O'Neil created the acronym BRIC in 2001 when he was working for Goldman Sachs as a chief economist. He found Brazil, Russia, India and China to be on a similar stage as emerging economies.

Leaders of the four countries held their first summit in 2009. South Africa joined the group in 2010.

Monyae said the "current BRICS is people-centered, not market-centered". BRICS is much more comprehensive, he said, adding: "You cannot have BRICS as an elite club of the Global South."

Monyae said he wishes that BRICS would think beyond elites, open to others and be structured in a way that members agree on common issues.

"We need to be very clear and understand what we are doing. The moment we understand these concepts and think them through, it becomes easier to find criteria in which to admit (new) members," he said.

Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates were invited at the just-concluded Johannesburg summit to join BRICS as full members from Jan 1 next year.

Monyae said it is a question of sharpening the areas of convergence such as fighting poverty, increasing trade, infrastructure connectivity, understanding pandemics and peace-building.

Monyae said Chinese President Xi Jinping's speech at the summit was historic and unlike the rest, it offered practical solutions.

President Xi suggested ensuring the global value chain is not biased toward a particular country, but is shared by all, Monyae said. This is in addition to ensuring the currency system is democratic and inclusive.

President Xi looks at the entire Global South, he said.

"BRICS is playing a catalytic role in bringing to life the wishes and aspirations of the Global South."

Monyae said the idea proposed by President Xi on digital education and innovation as well as sharing satellite sensing is critical. "Satellite

sensing will give the Global South early warnings on disasters, help them in agriculture and other areas, including trade," he said.

Monyae said: "When it comes to sea and space among other areas, it's the wild, wild West — it's the he or she who has a big gun who dictates everyone else."

"This is not the international relations we want. We want one where there is consensus, inclusivity. You bring everyone on board, and this is a good start by President Xi," he said.

"I think it will gain momentum, particularly in Africa, where we wish our people should also go to space and learn. We can't be left behind because we are poor."

Spirit of inclusiveness

Monyae lauded President Xi's call for BRICS countries to champion the spirit of inclusiveness, advocate peaceful coexistence and harmony between civilizations, and promote respect for all countries who independently choose their modernization paths.

Within the BRICS setting, it is just a question of uniting, and bringing together universities, he said. "People carry with them their traditions, values and civilizations. So, for you to have harmony, you need to learn from other civilizations," he said.

Monyae praised President Xi's call for international rules to be written and upheld jointly by all countries based on the purposes and principles of the UN Charter, rather than be dictated by those with the strongest muscle or loudest voice.

What's happening currently, he said, is a selective way of applying international law.

Monyae said many countries are unhappy with the current world order. When it was born in 1945, the bulk of countries in Africa were not part of the United Nations system.

"We are not anti-America, we are not anti-West, we are anti-bully, we are anti-hegemonic. We are not anti-dollar, we are for more currencies so that we have a choice," he said.

"We need much more representation, we need more democratization of institutions of global governance, reform of the UN Security Council and the UN agencies. It can't be that the presidents of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank are Americans and Europeans, we need a shift and fair change."



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BUSINESS

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Catching up, eyeing edge in chatbot niches

China's AIGC products shine at home and abroad, and narrow gap with US rivals

By CHENG YU
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Miaoya Camera, an artificial intelligence-powered digital product for generating self-portraits online with a twist, was launched as a mini program on China's all-in-one killer app WeChat on July 17, just five months after a founding team of six Chinese software professionals conceptualized and developed the product. In contrast, top-end talent at OpenAI, a startup backed by, among others, Microsoft, took several years to develop ChatGPT.

During peak times, when over 6,000 people could line up online at the same time for their turn, some users wait for more than 15 hours to get their digital clone from Miaoya Camera.

Within a month of its launch, the market declared Miaoya Camera to be a potential disruptor of the niche AIGC market.

Zhang Yueguang, product manager of Miaoya Camera, said, "The market performance (of the portrait generator) is definitely far beyond our expectation."

Wang Peng, a senior researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences, said though Miaoya Camera and ChatGPT are different types of digital products, the former's success shows China has an edge in developing AI-generated content or AIGC.

"The US may have wrestled lead with ChatGPT in the AIGC race, but Miaoya Camera offers a glimpse of China's potential to catch up with the US," Wang said.

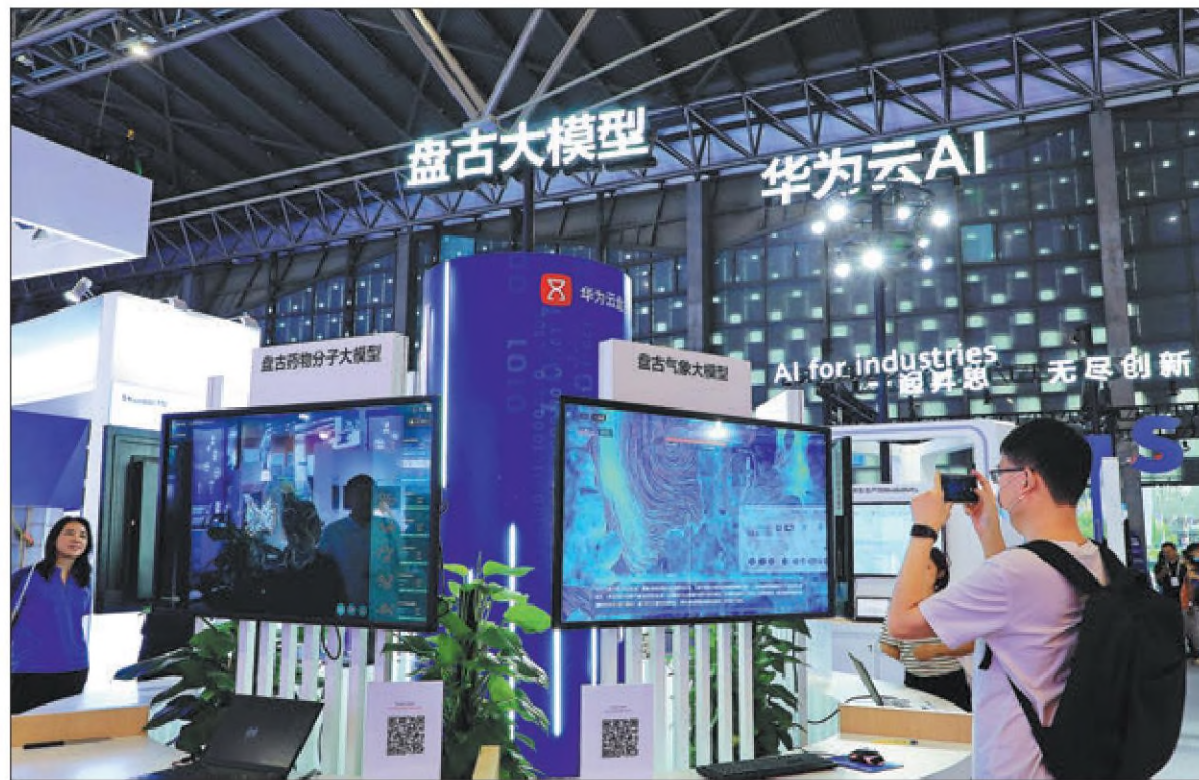
The product's success, industry experts said, shows China can not only catch up with the United States in mobile apps and enterprise applications, but create its own edge in certain niches of generative AI, besides hoping to lead the market that consultancy IDC expects will be worth \$26 billion by 2026.

That figure refers to just the China market. A Goldman Sachs Research report stated that breakthroughs in generative AI have the potential to bring about sweeping changes to the global economy, and could drive a 7 percent, or almost \$7 trillion, increase in global GDP, lifting productivity growth by 1.5 percentage points over the next 10 years.

Given that the stakes are high, China and the US appear to be using different approaches to the development of large language models that drive generative AI, said Zhou Yu, chairman of Beijing Fanyu Technology Co Ltd, a leading provider of natural language processing products and services.

Zhou said: "The US puts more emphasis on the research and development of underlying technology and its groundbreaking innovations. The US is a world leader in both hardware and deep learning frameworks."

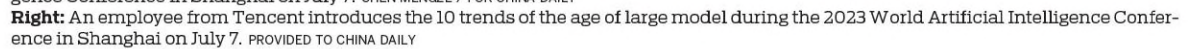
"China, on the other hand, focuses more on applications. And Chi-



Visitors check out and take pictures of Huawei Pangu meteorological model during the 2023 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai on July 8. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left: Visitors check out the display screens of the AI-generated content solution from Ant Group during the 2023 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai on July 7. CHEN MENGZE / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: An employee from Tencent introduces the 10 trends of the age of large model during the 2023 World Artificial Intelligence Conference in Shanghai on July 7. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

nese companies are better at adapting technology to various industries and commercializing its various applications. They are more flexible in creating personalized products and innovations, especially in niche sectors."

Proof of the emerging trend is that Chinese tech heavyweights such as Baidu Inc, Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, Tencent Holdings Ltd and JD have all forayed into this field already. Data from the Internet Society of China showed the country has already developed more than 80 LLMs, all potential rivals to ChatGPT.

Besides supportive policies, what is driving the trend in China is "a well-rounded mobile internet market and ecosystem, where a large number of users are willing to try new technologies and can be easily attracted via social media like WeChat," said Wang.

Sensing the potential for high growth, Tencent Cloud, a subsidiary of WeChat owner Tencent, launched its industry-specific LLM in June. The next month, Chinese e-com-

merce giant JD unveiled its own industry-specific LLM called ChatRhino that is said to be capable of serving a wide range of fields, including retail, logistics, finance and health.

Compared with universal LLMs like ChatGPT, industry-specific LLMs refer to industrial versions of ChatGPT focused on niche sectors. They can better leverage industry data to offer more targeted solutions.

"General or universal LLMs are mostly trained using information in the public domain that may contain errors, rumors and biases, and lack the professional know-how and industry data," said Dowson Tong, Tencent's senior executive vice-president and CEO of the company's cloud and smart industries group.

Data from such models contain too much "noise" and are likely to cause huge legal liabilities or public relations crises. Thus, companies need more industry-specific models, Tong said.

He said Tencent's LLM has cov-

ered 10 major areas, including finance, culture, tourism, government affairs, media and education, and is able to offer 50 different kinds of solutions.

"In addition, the larger the model, the higher its cost of training. Companies also tend to choose a suitable model at a reasonable cost," Tong said.

In China, efforts to develop rivals to ChatGPT receive support from even local governments. According to Dai Qionghai, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering, recent months have seen real money, in the form of investments by local governments, flow into AIGC, LLMs and related sectors.

This aspect is a potential game-changer that could deepen the tech competition between China and the US, Dai said.

According to a report by the Institute of Scientific and Technical Information of China, which is affiliated with the Ministry of Technology, more than 14 provincial regions have contributed to the R&D of LLMs. And 38 LLMs are from Bei-

jing, followed by 20 from Guangdong province.

Beijing has launched a package of supportive policies to drive the innovative development of AIGC. The municipal government has also encouraged local companies and government departments to "purchase and use safe LLMs and related services," Dai said.

For their part, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Hangzhou, Nanjing, Suzhou and Chengdu have all unveiled supportive policies to drive LLM development, in terms of computing power, data and ecosystem.

Shanghai, for instance, will provide support for the companies' computer power investment to drive the R&D of LLMs. Shenzhen plans to launch a guideline for open-source apps and sharing of public data by the end of this year.

There is a good reason, or concern, behind such policymaking. "The US continues to move forward. If China can't make its own universal LLM in the second half of this year, we might not even be able to see the 'taillights of cars' in the



China ... focuses more on applications. And Chinese companies are better at adapting technology to various industries and commercializing its various applications."

Zhou Yu, chairman of natural language processing products and services provider Beijing Fanyu Technology Co Ltd

future," said Yu Linwei, deputy head of Shanghai's Xuhui district, at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference held in Shanghai in July.

The China Electronics Standardization Institute, which is part of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the country's top regulator of industries, said a national standard for LLMs would be implemented soon.

It has enlisted internet search leader Baidu Inc, telecom giant Huawei Technologies Co, cybersecurity firm 360 Security Technology and e-commerce company Alibaba Group, to lead in the development of the LLM standard.

"More efforts are needed from the government to increase investment so that China can truly stand at the forefront," Dai said.

Chinese tech heavyweights' chatbots launched to rival ChatGPT have higher requirements for computing capacity for LLM training, he said.

In a report, HSBC analysts said a model at the level of OpenAI's GPT-3 requires at least 1,000 AI chips of Nvidia to complete one 23-day round of training; so, demand for AI graphics processing units, which can process many pieces of data simultaneously, will likely grow by more than 40 percent in China this year.

But high-performance computer chips, or semiconductors, are now at the center of tension between Washington and Beijing. The US government in October announced export bans aimed at restricting China's access to high-end chips.

"US companies like Nvidia currently have the lead in developing AI chips and few Chinese companies can compete against ChatGPT given the export restrictions," said Pascale Fung, director of the Center for Artificial Intelligence Research at the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology, in an interview.

Given the complex scenario, what will the future LLM landscape look like? At the annual conference of the Beijing Academy of Artificial Intelligence in June, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman emphasized the importance of collaboration between US and Chinese researchers.

Such collaboration, Altman said, can help mitigate the risks of AI systems, against a backdrop of escalating competition between Washington and Beijing in technology. "China has some of the best AI talent in the world and, fundamentally, given the difficulties in solving alignment for advanced AI systems, this requires the best minds, from around the world."

AI's on a roll, but miles to go before tech could replace humans

REPORTER'S LOG

By Cheng Yu

With the explosion of chatbots like ChatGPT driving the current tech boom, many minds have been gripped by a fear: will AI replace human beings?

Discourse in the global media would have us believe that such fears may be unfounded. Yet, the runaway success of a Chinese AI-powered digital portrait generator has reignited such fears, especially among social media users.

Users of the mobile app need to pay 9.9 yuan (\$1.4) and upload at least 20 recent portraits each to

get a digital clone, which can then be used to create different types of portraits fit for ID purposes, formal occasions like business meetings or even lifestyle casuals. Care for a portrait of self draped in various traditional Chinese costumes?

According to a poll on lifestyle platform Xiaohongshu, 72 percent of the respondents preferred the profile photo created by the portrait generator to those created by a prominent professional portrait photography chain in China.

My experience with the product showed the quality of its AI-generated images is very impressive, perhaps better than that of photographs taken at offline photo studios. Facial expressions, bearing, lighting, overall appearance ... the whole gamut of technical aspects seemed superior.

Notably, users can train the app to generate their portraits that are lifelike. AI industry experts said generative AI can do the trick.

Most importantly, I didn't need to spend time and more money in dressing up and striking unnatural poses in front of a group of unfamiliar people. I could get various photos at the price of, say, a Bee Select coffee, without having to step out of my home.

So, in the next step, will photographers, videographers, image specialists and their ilk lose their jobs? Unlikely, if the emerging AI tech is managed and regulated well, with a firm grip on the direction of its evolution.

Tech without the human touch — consciousness, if you will — has its own pitfalls. To reiterate, the quality of my AI-generated portraits was

good. But, I soon discovered that many of my friends also tried out the app, and their portraits had the same or similar poses, costumes and angles — a kind of one-size-fits-all scenario.

Which is to say that homogenization makes offline photo studios a necessity still. They offer more personalized services and can better showcase an individual's unique personality.

"It's too early to say that AI portrait apps will replace offline photo studios. Firms that own such apps don't yet have a clear business model. It'd be hard for them to get repeat payments from users after the first try," said Wang Peng, a senior researcher at the Beijing Academy of Social Sciences.

One concern continued to linger in my mind. I had uploaded 20

images of mine on to the app. Will they be safe?

"As AIGC rises, data security problems can arise. Illegal data acquisition, data leakage and malicious abuse of data are concerns now that need to be tackled," said Zhang Tianyi, senior product manager of RealAI, a Tsinghua University-backed Beijing-based AI security company.

"There could be content compliance issues as well, like deceptive content, deep fakes and diffusion models, which can mislead users and create nuisance," Zhang said.

But not everyone is overly concerned. Some, in fact, feel AIGC may be just a passing tech fad. A real-world assessment took place between AI doctors and human doctors in June. The livestreamed evaluation involved 120 real

patients and 10 attending physicians from West China Hospital, Sichuan University.

To everyone's surprise, human doctors scored an average of 7.5 out of 10, while AI doctors scored 7.2. AI doctors' recommendations, however, were found to be 96 percent as good as those of top-level physicians.

Ma Ting, a professor of neuroinformatics at the Shenzhen, Guangdong province branch of Harbin Institute of Technology, said that AI indeed makes a huge difference in the healthcare industry, but when doctors make decisions based on patients' diagnoses, they consider multidimensional data.

"Multidimensional data are difficult for AI to access and assess. To fully allow AI to move from its current perceptual intelligence to cognitive intelligence, we still need more research, more data and more intelligent algorithms," Ma said.

BUSINESS



A visitor experiences virtual reality equipment at the tech experience center of NetDragon in Fuzhou, Fujian province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

NetDragon leverages AI to transform education sector

GOING GLOBAL |
Top education provider seeks bigger overseas presence with innovative learning solutions

By CHENG YU
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

NetDragon Websoft Holdings Ltd, a leading Chinese education and gaming provider, is looking to leverage artificial intelligence to gain more presence in the overseas market and transform the global education sector, said Simon Leung, the company's vice-chairman.

"We will definitely invest in AI, as the technology will change the entire education sector, despite short-term pressure to profit," said Leung, a telecommunications veteran and former CEO of Microsoft Corp Greater China.

NetDragon was founded in 1999. It used to be a leading dedicated online gaming provider, but has transformed in the past decade into a diversified business with a



Simon Leung, vice-chairman of NetDragon Websoft Holdings Ltd

focus on education since 2010. The company has expanded its businesses into over 190 countries and regions across the world, including Russia, Egypt, Nigeria and Malaysia.

The company has developed and launched a string of integrated educational devices, including smart boards and panels as well as feedback and evaluation systems, with many of its products and services being sold to public schools and governments.

The Fuzhou, Fujian province-based company has been actively promoting its AI products and solutions in emerging markets, such as Thailand, Malaysia, Pakistan and Ghana, this year after winning a deal in Egypt by offering 94,000 Promethean interactive displays to local schools.

The Promethean interactive display, the company's most popular product overseas, is an interactive, touch-sensitive whiteboard that allows students to engage with the displayed content through different tools and software.

Leung said the product currently occupies a top market share in nine markets including the United Kingdom, Italy and Australia. The United States is its largest market. The company's financial report showed that its shipments hit 253,000 units last year, up 37.5 percent year-on-year.

But the development of hardware is limited and the company has been transforming to be a well-rounded provider of digital education solutions, Leung said, adding that is why AI is very important to the company.

His logic is forward-looking: AI can be embedded into its hardware to help teachers prepare and teach lessons, which is equivalent to a software as a service model, where NetDragon can use the model to charge subscription fees.

"The emergence of the current AI large model and generative AI offers greater room of imagination, which may redefine SaaS services and accelerate the transformation of SaaS from tool-based and business-oriented to an enabler," he said.

Leung denied that NetDragon would build a large-scale model by itself, but said that the company will seek external cooperation in the sector, with Microsoft and Google being potential partners.

To fully release the value of its

overseas business, NetDragon announced earlier this year it would spin off its overseas education business and go public in New York through a backdoor listing through a merger with Gravitas Education. The merged entity will be renamed MYND.AI with an estimated valuation of \$750 million.

"As we execute our plan to transform education with AI, this spin-off transaction will provide the right platform for the MYND.AI team to pursue our goal to become the category-dominant leader in the AI-enabled classroom technology space," he added.

"We are confident that AI will help more overseas students to learn at their own pace or be able to utilize personalized learning," Leung said.

Tarek Shawki, Egypt's former minister of education and technical education, said: "The unprecedented times that we have found ourselves in mean that all governments around the world need to find innovative solutions to ensure the continued education of all learners.

"We find ourselves well-positioned to be able to support distance learning and the rapid implementation of the company's products, to ensure that teachers, students and parents can collaborate and learn."

China boosts efforts for foreign investment

BELJING — In a recent development, China has intensified its policy support aimed at attracting foreign investment and catering to the needs of international firms.

These robust efforts send clear and resounding signals of the country's commitment to further opening up, thereby solidifying its position as one of the world's most appealing consumer and manufacturing markets.

Targeted support

The country's State Council on Aug 13 unveiled guidelines containing 24 specific measures to further optimize China's foreign investment environment and beef up foreign investment inflow.

These measures include expanding pilot areas to open wider in terms of services, encouraging foreign firms and their R&D centers to undertake major sci-tech projects, facilitating the travel of senior executives, technicians and their families, and enhancing the expertise of personnel in local government offices handling foreign investment.

Foreign firms are encouraged to participate in setting standards in a law-based and fair manner and develop globally leading products in China, according to the guidelines.

"These measures address specific concerns of foreign firms and highlight the focus of China's further reform and opening-up," said Nie Pingxiang, a researcher with the Ministry of Commerce's think tank.

The guidelines are in line with the country's constant pursuit of a more market-oriented, law-based and internationalized business environment. Earlier this year, China rolled out policies to boost foreign trade, widen institutional opening-up in free trade areas and free trade ports, and encourage foreign firms to set up R&D centers in China.

The MOC will work with relevant departments to shorten the country's negative list for foreign investment access. In the meantime, it will continue to ease restrictions on foreign strategic investment in listed companies in

China, Chen Chunjiang, assistant minister of commerce, said at a news conference on Aug 14.

Promising market

Despite a sluggish global economy, China has managed to keep foreign investment relatively stable.

In the first half, China saw a 35.7 percent year-on-year increase in the number of new foreign enterprises despite a slight dip in actual utilized foreign investment. In particular, actual utilized foreign investment flowing to the high-tech manufacturing industry expanded by 28.8 percent from a year ago.

The MOC has set 2023 as "Invest in China Year", featuring over 20 foreign investment-related events, including the China Beijing International Fair for Trade in Services and China International Fair for Investment and Trade.

"We are very pleased to see the State Council's latest policy to further optimize the foreign investment environment and increasing efforts to attract foreign investment, especially the clear mention of accelerating the landing and operation of foreign investment projects in the field of biopharmaceuticals," said Leon Wang, executive vice-president and international and China president of AstraZeneca.

Upbeat on the potential of China's innovative biopharmaceutical industry, the United Kingdom-based global pharmaceutical company on Aug 14 inked a Memorandum of Understanding with the Qingdao National High-tech Industrial Development Zone located in East China's Shandong province.

According to the MOU, AstraZeneca will further invest \$250 million in its Qingdao pMDI inhalation manufacturing and supply site.

"AstraZeneca will continue to stay true to its original intention and actively pursue development in China," Wang said.

XINHUA



Visitors check out the exhibition area of AstraZeneca during the 2022 China International Import Expo in Shanghai on Nov 5. TANG YANJUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



The Belt and Road Initiative

Making the world a better place

The Belt and Road Initiative will help tap market potential in these regions, promote investment and consumption, generate demand and job opportunities, enhance people-to-people and cultural exchanges among the peoples of involved countries and enable them to understand, trust and respect each other and live in harmony, peace and prosperity.

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BUSINESSINSIGHT

How to unlock long-term growth potential

EAGLE EYE

By Liu Qiao

Growth of China's total factor productivity, a major measure of economic productive efficiency, slowed from more than 4 percent between 1980 and 2009 to 1.8 percent in the 2010-2019 period. However, there are still many structural factors that can drive a V-shaped rebound in TFP growth.

Our calculations show that future growth of the Chinese economy depends on whether TFP growth can be kept at 2.5 percent or even higher.

Unlike industrialized countries like the United States that face a lack of large-scale investment opportunities and relatively insufficient investment — which have combined to constrain productivity growth — China still provides abundant potential investment opportunities.

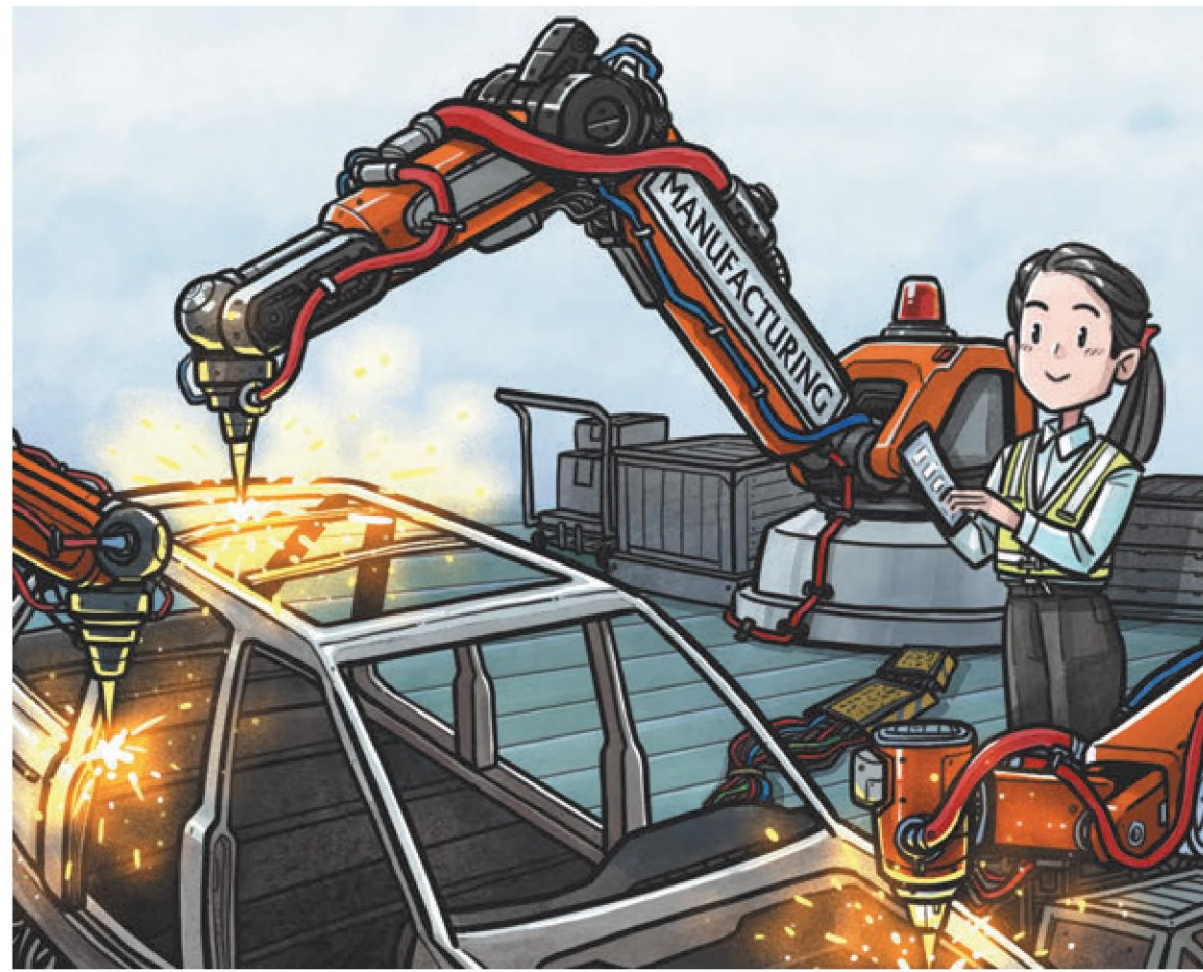
China's development remains uneven and unbalanced. For instance, it is still at the midrange to low end of the global value chain. It faces challenges in satisfying people's desire for better lives. The development disparities between urban and rural areas and among regions persist. These structural issues need to be addressed to provide further space for productivity growth.

China still has ample room to improve resource allocation efficiency, an important source of TFP growth.

Over the past 20 years, the average return on investment capital for listed companies has been only 3 to 4 percent, far lower than the average of 10 percent for listed companies in the US over the past century.

China's financial sector has seen its contribution to GDP surpass that in major Western industrialized countries, yet the costs of financial intermediation remain high, and high financing costs have yet to be resolved.

Through top-level design and industrial policies, maintaining investment intensity and even arranging in-advance investments in key areas to guide resource allocation toward sectors with greater social returns will help form new driving forces for productivity growth, and address long-standing structural issues in high-quality economic and social development. Once government investment and policy incentives play a guiding role during this process, it will effectively promote private investment, boost innovation, stimulate market vitality and leverage the decisive role of the market in resource allocation. Thus China's productivity growth



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

challenges may be resolved, and the potential for long-term economic growth can be unleashed in a smooth fashion.

Sector investment key

Facing mounting downward pressure, it becomes even more necessary to increase investment intensity in critical sectors and industries. Such investments can support China's economic transformation and contribute to an increase in TFP growth, thus making some forward-looking investments advisable.

To maintain long-term economic growth, investment intensity must be sustained. Sectors such as expressways, high-speed railways, automobiles and real estate may even require in-advance investments.

With the widespread and growing use of clean energy and further development of digital technologies such as artificial intelligence and big data, human civilization could enter a new phase. In this process, new industries will emerge, fresh ideas will surface,

and nearly all existing industries can undergo carbon neutrality and digitalization processes.

For example, carbon neutrality is not only a technological issue, but also an economic and management matter. Achieving China's dual-carbon goals requires an estimated investment of nearly 300 trillion yuan (\$41.2 trillion) before 2050. If this investment is evenly distributed over the next 30 years, it means China's annual investment in carbon neutrality will be about 8 percent of GDP. Such investments will become one of the main driving forces for China's economic transformation. Investment and innovation surrounding key sectors, technological changes, industrial policies and innovative business models will determine China's path to achieving carbon neutrality.

5G and 6G, as core components of China's industrialization infrastructure, represent essential areas for investment. In the baseline scenario, the introduction of 5G into various industries will contribute about 31.21 trillion yuan to GDP.

The value brought by 5G will be concentrated mainly between 2026 and 2030, and by then China will enter the era of 6G.

Manufacturing still leads

The share of China's manufacturing output in GDP is higher than that of major developed countries and the global average.

As economic development progresses, the share of manufacturing output in GDP generally declines due to changes in demand structure. However, it's necessary for China to maintain a certain share of manufacturing output in GDP, such as 23 percent, as a strategic goal for economic and social development.

On the one hand, China still needs to accelerate industrial upgrading and quality optimization, consolidating its competitiveness and advantages in manufacturing. On the other hand, achieving high-quality development requires maintaining a high growth rate of TFP. Manufacturing — especially high-end manufactur-

ing, equipment manufacturing and intelligent manufacturing — plays a significant role in this endeavor.

According to World Bank data (2019), the proportion of midrange to high-end manufacturing in the sector is 41.5 percent in China, 47.1 percent in the US, 56.6 percent in Japan and 60.7 percent in Germany. By the time China basically realizes socialist modernization by 2035, we can significantly increase the proportion from the current 41.5 percent to 55 percent?

Moving up value chain

We need to increase investment in innovation, not only by increasing the share of spending on R&D in GDP, but also by optimizing the structure of R&D and significantly increasing the share of basic research in overall R&D expenditure. Our analysis shows that over the past 30 years, there has been a correlation of over 90 percent between China's R&D intensity and TFP.

China's R&D expenditure ratio to

GDP had rapidly grown from less than 0.6 percent in 1995 to 2.4 percent in 2020, reaching the average level of industrialized countries. In 2022, China's R&D expenditure surpassed 3 trillion yuan for the first time, and R&D intensity reached a historic high of 2.55 percent. However, it still lags behind the levels in the US (3.45 percent), Japan (3.26 percent) and Germany (3.14 percent) over the same period.

Since major country competition ultimately revolves around technological innovation, would it be possible for China to raise its R&D spending ratio to over 3 percent?

The structure of R&D deserves more attention. In 2021, China's ratio of R&D expenditure focused on basic research to total R&D spending was only 6.5 percent. By comparison, developed regions and countries like Europe and the US maintain a ratio of 12 percent or higher, with the US at around 15 percent, according to 2019 data.

The 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25) has set the goal of increasing the proportion of basic research spending in overall R&D expenditure to over 8 percent by 2025. If we can further increase the basic research spending ratio — such as 12 percent or even 15 percent — it will strongly promote China's high-level scientific and technological self-reliance, enhance the country's position in the global value chain, and create favorable conditions for sustained TFP growth in the new development stage.

Boost research spending

Increasing spending on basic research requires stronger support for basic research centers at universities and research institutions, with long-term public funding being particularly crucial. China has the conditions and policy space for large-scale issuance of government bonds. It is advisable to issue long-term special treasury bonds, and the funds obtained can be directly used to support basic research centers and increase the proportion of basic research in overall R&D expenditure.

To increase investment in basic research, related market forces also need to be fully mobilized.

The government can provide incentives for market entities such as tax incentives and a more efficient patent system. More importantly, we need to reshape the valuation system of the capital market, incorporate enterprise investments in basic research and reflect them in market valuations through premiums.

The writer is dean of the Guanghua School of Management at Peking University.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Policy rate cuts foreshadow greater transmission, economic rebound

MAIN STREET

By Wen Bin

China's central bank leveraged several policy rate tools earlier this month to inject momentum into the economy and shore up its ongoing recovery.

On Aug 15, the People's Bank of China conducted open market operations worth 204 billion yuan (\$28 billion) through reverse repos and 401 billion yuan through the medium-term lending facility.

It lowered the one-year MLF rate to 2.5 percent from 2.65 percent, and the seven-day reverse repo rate to 1.8 percent from 1.9 percent.

The one-year loan prime rate, a market-based benchmark lending rate and a reflection of MLF readings, was also cut to 3.45 percent on Aug 21, from 3.55 percent earlier, according to the National Interbank Funding Center.

However, the over five-year LPR, on which lenders base their mortgage rates, has been kept unchanged at 4.2 percent.

A second wave of policy rate cuts within three months has demonstrated the pressing necessity to coordinate efforts for stabilizing economic growth and reinforcing

countercyclical controls amid mounting economic pressures.

The policy rate adjustments have come at a good time and help provide ample stimulus. They have also sent out a positive signal — that market rates will trend downward and finally be transmitted to the real economy, thereby reducing costs, boosting confidence, stabilizing expectations and propelling a positive economic rebound.

Reasons for reductions

First, interest rate reduction is a powerful tool in dealing with weak economic momentum and insufficient demand — it strengthens countercyclical adjustments and consolidates growth.

Key performance indicators in the first half, such as purchasing managers index, consumer price index, exports, investment, consumption, employment and social financing all suggest that China's recovery momentum is decelerating.

China's manufacturing PMI, for instance, has remained below the 50 percent threshold since April, while the growth rate of nonmanufacturing PMI has shown a declining trend.

When PMI stays below the threshold for two consecutive months, the central bank usually resorts to reserve requirement ratio cuts and interest rate reductions.

In terms of CPI, the year-on-year reading in July shifted from flat to a

0.3 percent fall. Sluggish prices have led to relatively higher real interest rates, adding pressure to financing costs for the real economy.

RMB loans under the social financing sector reached a historical low in July, indicating inadequate operational vitality and investment impetus among enterprises. Sluggish household consumption and the evident weakness in real financing demand have also posed challenges to boosting domestic demand and stabilizing growth.

Second, interest rate cuts help expand investment and the scale of consumption, while reducing financing costs for the real economy. The central bank's policy rate cuts can stimulate the downward adjustment of market rates, covering currencies, bonds and medium- to long-term credit, and transmit these changes to the real economy.

This helps to effectively reduce financing costs for the real economy, stimulate investment and consumption, stabilize employment and invigorate the private sector.

Furthermore, rate cuts can also enhance coordination between monetary and fiscal policies, ensure the sustainability of government debt, boost the circular economy and create a favorable financial environment for stable domestic growth in the second half.

Third, since insufficient confidence is a key factor in limiting eco-

nomical recovery and operational efficiency, the timely implementation of interest rate cuts — seen as an appetizer for continued and intensified stabilizing policies in the future — holds great significance in boosting confidence and anchoring expectations by optimizing investment and financing preferences of enterprises and households and improving resource allocation. These will eventually promote a virtuous cycle in the economy.

Last, with a shift to negative CPI readings in July, the actual interest rates for financing in the real economy are rising, accentuating the need for rate reductions.

Simultaneously, inflation retreating from high levels, nonfarm payrolls remaining below expectations, a likely end to the US Federal Reserve's interest rate hike cycle and a potentially weakened spillover effect have all provided a rationale for the interest rate cuts.

RRR may be lowered

There is a possibility that the reserve requirement ratio may see another comprehensive cut — potentially ranging from 0.25 to 0.5 percentage points — within the year, most likely in the fourth quarter.

A stable recovery of the economy in the second half requires a gradual process.

By implementing RRR cuts, the central bank can provide long-term liquidity to the banking system,

optimize capital structures, and reduce funding costs, which play a significant role in the real economy.

Heavy MLF maturity in the second half, coupled with accelerated government debt issuances, also make it more likely that MLF rate cuts would be replaced by a cut in the RRR, so as to maintain reasonable and ample market liquidity, and reduce liability costs.

Since the net interest margin of banks will face more pressure due to lowered interest rates, a cut in the RRR is required to push down the funding costs of financial institutions and maintain low-cost market rates against the backdrop of stable and ample liquidity.

Besides, a favorable and relaxed financial environment brought on by rate cuts is also important to defuse debt risks.

The PBOC provides long-term stable funds to the banking system and releases liquidity via RRR cuts, usually about every six months. Since the last RRR cut happened at the end of March, the chances of another cut in the fourth quarter are relatively high.

Market impact

Following the central bank's recent policy rate cuts, the bond market has ticked up, with yields on key interbank bonds declining significantly.

Under the combined effect of the overall downward shift in rates, sufficient liquidity and a slow econom-

ic recovery, it might be easier for bond rates to go down than up.

Moreover, the onshore and offshore yuan have slid to around 7.28 and 7.31, respectively, after the rate cuts. This is more proof of China's determination to prioritize internal balance, stabilize growth and stimulate domestic demand.

However, an interest rate cut does not necessarily imply RMB depreciation. Future trends will continue to depend primarily on domestic economic recovery and changes in the international liquidity environment.

Nevertheless, the short-term impact of the second wave of interest rate cuts on the A-share market remains limited.

It is favorable for cyclical industries closely linked to interest rates, as well as the insurance and brokerage sectors.

For commercial banks, a reduction in their net interest margin is likely, but whether higher trade volumes can make up for a loss in yields is still unclear.

As for listed small- and medium-sized enterprises, and technology-oriented ones — which tend to have a strong relation with market liquidity — a future RRR cut will certainly facilitate growth.

The writer is chief economist at China Minsheng Bank.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

COMMENT

Editorials

Japan should immediately slam on the brakes before its wrongdoing does any more harm

In future years, Aug 24 should be observed as an international memorial day to raise the world's vigilance against a single country shifting its own nuclear pollution risks onto others.

That's the nature of the irresponsible, reckless and selfish move Japan unilaterally took on Thursday when it started a 30-year project to discharge nuclear-contaminated water from the Tsunami-destroyed Fukushima nuclear power plant into the sea despite worldwide concerns.

The water discharge project means that Japan is gambling with the global marine environment and people's health. By doing that, the Japanese government has technically put the country in the defendant's dock and its shortsighted practices will surely be condemned by the international community for a long time.

Japan is a party to a number of international conventions, including the Convention on the High Seas, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea, the Convention on Early Notification of a Nuclear Accident and the London Convention on the Prevention of Marine Pollution by Dumping of Wastes and Other Matter. Under these, Japan has the obligation to take all measures to avoid environmental pollution, notify and fully consult with potentially affected countries, assess and monitor the environmental impacts, take preventive measures to minimize risks, ensure the transparency of information and carry out international cooperation.

It is doing none of these things.

Since Japan proposed the plan in April 2021, its legitimacy, legality and safety have been continuously questioned by the international com-

munity. The Japanese side has so far failed to address the major concerns of other countries on the long-term effects of the move, the authenticity and accuracy of its data on the nuclear-contaminated water, as well as the effectiveness of the monitoring arrangements. The Pacific countries have every reason to take up legal weapons to claim compensation against Japan and defend their own rights and interests.

The disposal of the toxic water should have been carried out with a highly responsible attitude and in the interests of humanity as a whole. But Japan has never answered the doubts and objections at home and abroad, and never communicated with its neighbors on the issue in good faith.

The Fukushima nuclear accident 12 years ago released huge amounts of radioactive material into the ocean. The Japanese government is causing secondary harm by discharging the nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean.

The Japanese side should understand that its false propaganda cannot whitewash its wrongdoing. Japan had the mandate of the International Atomic Energy Agency working group from the very beginning by not allowing the assessment of other disposal options, and by not allowing the IAEA to evaluate the effectiveness and reliability of nuclear-contaminated water purification devices. Under such circumstances, the IAEA report does not legitimize Japan's discharging of the nuclear-contaminated water into the sea.

Japan should immediately stop the release of the water into the sea, communicate with its neighbors in good faith and handle the matter in a responsible manner.

Golden era for China-Africa relations ahead

China has proved to be a true and trustworthy friend of Africa, and the country remains committed to helping the continent address the major issues it is facing in its efforts to shake off poverty and realize economic and social development.

At the China-Africa Leaders' Dialogue on Thursday, China announced a number of new measures to promote China-Africa cooperation and help the continent with its economic integration and modernization efforts.

To help promote the stability, development and prosperity of the continent and improve the well-being of the African people, China's latest pledges of assistance are aimed at helping Africa with the three key tasks of transforming its manufacturing sector, securing food self-sufficiency and training high-caliber talents.

The concrete steps President Xi Jinping proposed include an initiative to support Africa's industrialization, as well as a plan to support Africa's agricultural modernization and a plan to support bilateral talent development.

The industrialization initiative will channel more assistance, investment and financing to the continent. Under the agricultural plan, China will help Africa expand its grain planting and encourage Chinese companies to increase agricultural investment in Africa; while the talent

plan seeks to train 500 principals and high-caliber teachers for vocational colleges in Africa every year, as well as 10,000 technical personnel with both Chinese language and vocational skills.

Despite the vicissitudes of the times, China-Africa ties have emerged tall and strong. China has been Africa's largest trading partner over the past decade and the largest destination for African exports; statistics indicate bilateral trade grew 11 percent to \$282 billion in 2022.

But in a world undergoing transformation and turbulence, both sides need stronger solidarity and cooperation more than ever.

The developing world needs to join hands so as to safeguard their common interests and development space and amplify their voice in global governance.

As members of the Global South, China and African countries share similar views on today's world order and global governance. During the dialogue on Thursday, China reiterated its pledge to support the African Union to gain full membership of the G20 and to support special arrangements for UN Security Council reform to meet Africa's modernization aspiration.

Building upon the current strong momentum in bilateral ties paves the way for a golden era of China-Africa cooperation.

Bans on Chinese buying land badges of dishonor

In a report published on Saturday, NBC News asked "Is China really buying up US farmland?"

Citing fears that Chinese entities are creating a national security risk by buying swathes of US farmland, some of which is supposedly near sensitive sites, State and federal lawmakers in the United States are pushing to regulate foreign ownership of US land.

Yet after reviewing thousands of documents filed with the US Department of Agriculture, NBC News found that very few agricultural land purchases were by Chinese buyers in the past year and a half — "fewer than 1,400 acres (566.55 hectares) in a country with 1.3 billion acres of agricultural land".

And it pointed out that the total amount of US agricultural land owned by Chinese interests is less than three-hundredths of 1 percent.

According to the National Agricultural Law Center, the states of Florida, Virginia, North Dakota, Montana and Arkansas are stepping up efforts to prevent foreign purchases of US agricultural land, and more than 20 states are considering similar measures. There is also a bill in the US Congress that seeks to "federalize" the issue.

Claiming that the state was "taking action to

stand against the United States' greatest geopolitical threat"; Florida Governor Ron DeSantis for instance, signed a series of bills in May banning Chinese nationals from buying land in the state unless they are also US citizens or permanent residents.

After the bill was passed, some Chinese citizens living in Florida sued the state to overturn the ban. However, on Aug 17, a US District Judge ruled against the plaintiffs on the grounds that since it was "based on citizenship, not race or national origin", the ban did not constitute discrimination and did not violate the US Constitution.

The National Asian Pacific American Bar Association begged to differ with that decision, calling the Florida law a "textbook example of unfair discrimination". Such land purchase bans reveal how deep the cancer of "Sinophobia" has infected US lawmakers. Canadians have bought 30 times more land than Chinese, yet no US lawmaker has proposed a ban on land purchases by Canadians.

The ban on Chinese buying lands is both a joke and a tragedy. In seeking to erect high walls around plots of land like castellated enclosures of old, the US lawmakers are showing the extent to which they have been emboldened to demonstrate their racial prejudices as badges of honor.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

Agricultural modernization, arable land protection key to food security

Data of the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations shows that the global rice price index rose by 2.8 percent month-on-month in July to 129.7 points, the highest level in nearly 12 years, raising concerns about global food security.

On July 17, Russia announced the termination of the Black Sea Grain Initiative, and on July 20, India announced a ban on exports of rice, except for parboiled rice. In addition, the recurring El Niño phenomenon this year has led to periodic droughts, heavy rains, and flooding that have significantly impacted food production. So how does this wave of rising rice prices affect China, and should we be concerned about China's food security?

It should be noted that food security has always been a key consideration for China's policymakers. China implements a strict arable land protection system, firmly maintaining a redline of 1.8 billion mu (120 million hectares) of arable land to ensure the foundation of food security. So far, a comprehensive grain emergency support system covering storage, transportation, processing, distribu-

tion and supply has been established, providing strong support for ensuring national food security.

Furthermore, market-oriented enterprises are playing an active role and have become another important support for food security. According to data previously released by the National Food and Strategic Reserves Administration, by the end of 2022, there were a total of 6,584 grain emergency processing enterprises, 4,846 emergency storage and transportation enterprises, 3,542 emergency distribution centers, and 56,495 emergency supply points nationwide. The emergency processing capacity can reach 1.64 million tons per day.

China is the world's largest rice-producing country, with rice production consistently exceeding 200 million tons annually, accounting for about 28 percent of the global rice production. China's rice production has typically exceeded its domestic consumption, resulting in ample reserves and a self-sufficiency rate of over 100 percent. Even in the past two years, when China's rice imports have grown considerably, the sources of rice imports have been diverse and

relatively stable. Although this year's summer grain production has slightly decreased compared to previous years, it is still at a relatively high level and represents a good harvest season.

However, as officials from the UN FAO have pointed out, the continuous rise in rice prices has brought global food security to a "turning point". In the face of the complex international situation, it is necessary to make every effort to safeguard national food security.

Ensuring a bumper autumn grain harvest this year by effectively responding to agricultural disasters, assisting recovery, and protecting food security is currently a top priority. In the long run, it is also necessary to continuously strengthen the competitiveness of the agricultural industry. Ultimately, the competition in food production is a competition within the modern agricultural industry. This requires joint efforts from academia and the industry to strengthen innovation, break through technological barriers and improve the level of original innovation.

— THEPAPER.CN

Rippling effect of toxic water discharge felt

Many Chinese cities reportedly witnessed a rush of people buying up salt after Japan began releasing nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean on Thursday. People are concerned that the salt produced from now on will be contaminated with the radioactive water. However, salt companies and the government have been quick to reassure the public. Within hours, Yunnan Salt, a State-owned salt company of Yunnan province, clarified that its salt, sourced from deep wells in the plateau and formed in the Jurassic Period (199.6 million to 145.5 million years ago), was safe. They could supply 1.7 million tons of such salt annually. Yexian county in Henan province also said that it had 330 billion tons of rock salt mineral,

enough to supply the entire nation for 33,000 years.

The swift release of the information helped quickly end the salt rush.

However, it is important to note that the situation with salt may not apply to all countries and products. In June, the Republic of Korea witnessed a rush on salt that led to a nearly 27 percent increase in local salt prices due to similar concerns. Visitors to the livestream rooms of some seafood businesses have been questioning whether their products are safe. As the nuclear-contaminated water can spread to half of the Pacific Ocean within 57 days, a rush for other products, especially seafood and aquatic products, might be on the horizon, not only in the ROK, but also in Southeast Asia, the United

States, and Japan itself.

It is crucial for Japan to recognize the severe harm it is causing to the world by recklessly dumping its nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean. As the entire ocean is interconnected, no water body will be unaffected by Japan's reckless action, and the global aquatic industry will suffer from this disaster. This is only the beginning, and the consequences after 30 years are unpredictable. That is how long it is expected to take to release all the radioactive nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean.

The only way to prevent a possible nightmare from unfolding is for Japan to take immediate action and stop its irresponsible ocean discharge.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Yoon government at odds with public opinion

Sixteen university students in the Republic of Korea who were protesting against Japan's discharge of nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean were arrested on Thursday, according to Yonhap News Agency.

In stark contrast to the growing opposition to the move among the public in the ROK, there is an ambiguous stance from President Yoon Suk-yeol and his cabinet, which has softened its tone toward Japan.

But the public in the ROK does not buy the government's claims. As the nuclear-contaminated water was officially discharged into the sea, Jagalchi Market in Busan, the country's most famous seafood market, and the nearby famous sashimi restaurant gathering place Minedong Sashimi Street were hardly visited; the south of Jeju Island Dongmen Fish Market also had few customers. Some seafood vendors bluntly said, "Business during the

epidemic was better than now".

The Yoon government released a statement saying that it "believes that Japan's plan to discharge water from the Fukushima nuclear power plant has no scientific or technical problems".

Some analysts have suggested that the intense opposition to Japan's decision, especially among the public in China and the ROK, is largely rooted in the long-standing perception that the Japanese government cannot be trusted. This deep-seated distrust, passed down through generations, is not something a few public relations efforts by the Japanese government can erase, especially given the Fumio Kishida government's lack of transparency on the issue of the nuclear-contaminated water.

In fact, both the opposition party in the ROK and the general public are no longer hiding their dissatisfac-

tion with Yoon's Cabinet regarding the issue of Japan's nuclear-contaminated water discharge.

Of course, it is well known why Yoon persists in disregarding domestic public opinion and the government's declining support.

As observers have pointed out, Yoon's purpose is to please the United States, which is focused on consolidating the "iron triangle" of the US, Japan, and the ROK. The US has been trying to narrow the distance between Japan and the ROK so that they can serve the US hegemony better. The recent Camp David talks were part of this calculation.

In order to please the US, Yoon is willing to endorse the Japanese government rushing ahead with the discharge of the nuclear-contaminated water into the ocean. In return, the US offered the vague prospect of supply chain cooperation.

— BEIJING NEWS

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | Extreme Weather

Editor's note: Extreme weather events such as heat waves and more destructive storms are likely to become more frequent due to rising temperatures, which is worsening climate change. Many countries have been taking measures to mitigate climate change, so as to protect people from the wrath of the climate. Four experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Li Wanxin

Aiming for sustainable development

The extreme weather events across the world are just some of the consequences of climate change. To mitigate climate change, the 21st United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris pledged to limit the increase in average global temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and make efforts to limit it to 1.5 C. This, along with other pledges and commitments, became part of the Paris Agreement in 2015.

In 2020, the UN Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, in its Sixth Assessment Report, painted a grim picture of the disastrous consequences of rising global temperatures, and urged UN member states to limit global temperature rise to below 1.5 C.



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Since then, many developed and developing economies have pledged to achieve net-zero emissions. More than 70 economies, including China, the United States and the European Union, which account for about 76 percent of global emissions, have set their respective net-zero targets, while over 3,000 businesses and financial institutions have joined hands with the Science Based Targets initiative

to reduce their emissions. And more than 1,000 cities, and over 1,000 educational and 400 financial institutions have joined the "race to zero", pledging to take rigorous measures to halve global emissions by 2030.

The energy sector is the largest carbon emitter, and the demand for energy continues to increase because of economic and population growth. No wonder experts say the conservative estimate for the world to achieve net-zero emissions is 2060 and the ambitious estimate 2050.

But to achieve that, according to the International Energy Agency, emerging market and developing economies will need an

annual investment of \$2.2 trillion to \$2.8 trillion from the early 2030s to 2050.

China has been a global leader in developing and using clean energy technologies, and accounts for about two-thirds of the total investment in clean energy by emerging market and developing economies. However, Southeast Asian countries will have to increase their annual investment by 7.13 times, India and other Asian countries by 4.7 times, Africa by 7.28 times, Latin America by 4.03 times, and the Middle East and Eurasia by 9.58 times to achieve the ambitious net-zero emission target by 2050.

Due to their economic and social situations, these economies have to bridge a wide financial and technological gap in order to transition to clean energy, with some of them having to invest more than the others. For instance, low and middle-income countries are home to more than 40 percent of the world's population but account for only 7 percent of global spending on clean energy, while some emerging market and developing economies that are major resource owners, including oil and gas producers and exporters, have to transition away from their high dependence on fossil fuel revenues.

And contrary to popular belief, public funding alone won't help the emerging market and developing economies to achieve net-zero. But how can the private sector be persuaded to provide \$900 billion to \$1.1 trillion, up from only \$135 billion today, a year for

investment in clean energy from the early 2030s to at least 2050?

There is more than \$2.5 trillion in environmental, social and governance-related investment funds, but almost nothing from those flows into developing economies. Green, social, sustainable and sustainability-linked bonds could potentially attract some institutional investors and ESG funds. But unfortunately, a couple of weeks ago, S&P Global decided to stop using ESG scores when assessing the quality of credit and debt, dealing a blow to ESG investments by leading financial institutions.

Last year, a total of \$136 billion green, social, sustainable and sustainability-linked bonds were issued by the emerging market and developing economies, with China accounting for more than half of them. In actual terms, the value of such Chinese bonds was \$69.31 billion, up 53 percent year-on-year.

Furthermore, all the 775 million people around the world who don't have access to electricity and the 2.4 billion people who lack access to clean cooking fuel live in emerging market and developing economies. But despite the cost of making electricity and clean cooking fuel universally accessible by 2030 being less than 2 percent of the overall spending on

clean energy, a lot needs to be done to realize SDG 7 — ensuring access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all — by 2030.

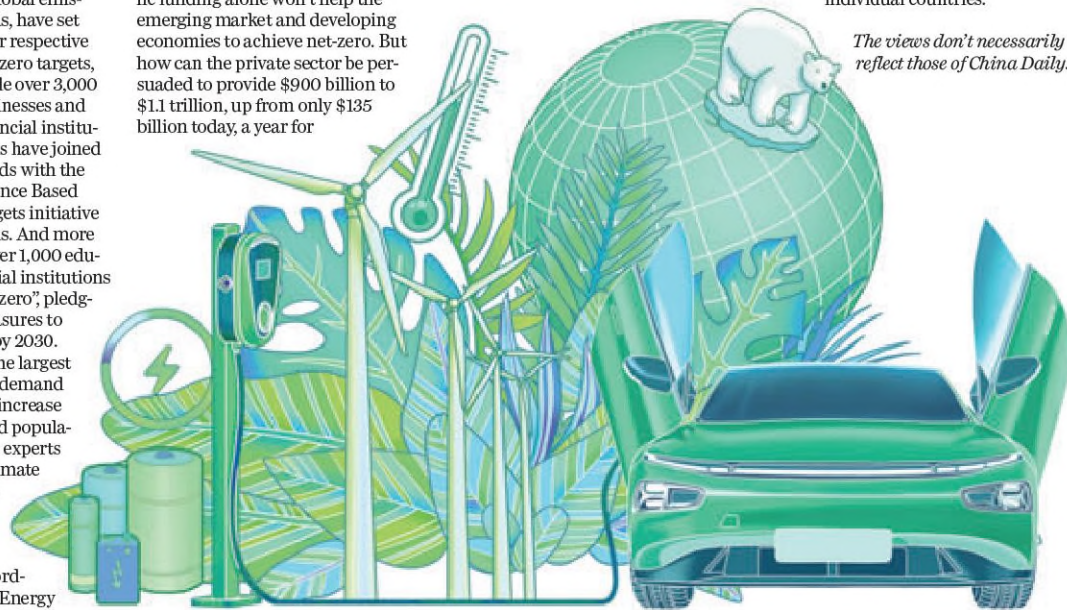
The commitment by advanced economies to mobilize \$100 billion per year to help developing countries mitigate and adapt to climate change should have been fulfilled in 2020, but is likely to be met only in 2023, which might help the emerging market and developing economies to mitigate climate change to some extent.

Financing clean energy was already a challenge for the emerging market and developing economies. It has become a bigger challenge now due to the economic downturn and increasing difficulty in attracting capital.

Addressing the COP24 at Katowice, Poland, in 2018, youth climate activist Greta Thunberg said: "Our civilization is being sacrificed for the opportunity of a very small number of people to continue making enormous amounts of money. Our biosphere is being sacrificed so that rich people in countries like mine can live in luxury. It is the sufferings of the many which pay for the luxuries of the few."

Indeed, the fight against climate change is tough, and to win it, we need global efforts. Accordingly, the transition to clean energy has to be achieved globally, not separately by individual countries.

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



JIN DING / CHINA DAILY

OP Rana

Will we ever see real climate action?

While the world's attention was focused on the Maui wildfires in Hawaii, and rightly so given the high death toll (115 with about 1,000 people reported missing) and scale of devastation (economic loss of about \$6 billion), the Canadian, Greek and Spanish governments were also struggling to control wildfires in different parts of their countries.

The wildfires in Canada (about 1,000 in number) are especially destructive, having already scorched more than 15 million hectares in Quebec, Ontario and other regions. And while Spain has evacuated thousands of people from the island of Tenerife to save them from the wrath of raging infernos, Greece has seen 35 people falling victims to conflagrations.

Blame the wildfires, if you will, on El Niño, which according to the US National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration is likely to remain strong for the next six months because of sizzling ocean temperatures in the east-central tropical Pacific in July. The world, except for the climate skeptics and vested interests, knows why the east-central tropical Pacific has been sizzling.

As a consequence of global warming, more than half of the oceans have become greener in the past two decades, the peer-review science journal Nature reported in July.

The warming of the Earth, however, is not only about heat waves, melting glaciers and drying water bodies, which, not to be mistaken, are more

than alarming. Global warming also results in erratic and unusually heavy rainfall, and floods. China has experienced both forms climate-related devastation this year. While June and July saw many parts of China in the grip of extreme heat, with temperatures reaching record highs in Beijing, early August saw the opening up of the sky, with Beijing experiencing the heaviest downpour in 140 years and parts of Hebei province encountering devastating floods. True, Typhoon Doksuri in late July was responsible for the deluge, but typhoons rarely were so destructive earlier. By the way, July was the hottest month on record.

This month has also seen the mountainous Indian province of Himachal Pradesh being battered by record downpours and landslides. With rain continuing to wreak havoc in Himachal Pradesh, comes the latest weather forecast of more, heavier downpours, posing flooding threats to the neighboring province of Punjab, which has already suffered two major floods in the past month. The tragedy which has already claimed 238 lives in Himachal is being blamed on melting glaciers, shrinking snow cover and increasing rain, all because of climate change.

If the developed countries and emerging market economies are struggling to adapt to climate change, we cannot even imagine what the condition of the least-developed and Pacific island countries is like. The least said about the people native to these countries the better. Their plight is manifested in the waves of refugees

making their way to Europe's coasts, braving dangerous currents in decrepit ferries and steamers. These people, exploited by human traffickers, are not only fleeing poverty and wars in African countries; they are also trying to escape the wrath of climate change. They are, first of all, climate refugees.

And yet world leaders, especially leaders of the developed world, continue to pay lip service to climate action. They are, it seems, guided, if not controlled, by big business, which in turn is guided by the profit mantra. As long as the dollars keep flowing, it will be business as usual.

The world leaders are expected to meet at the 28th United Nations Climate Change Conference (COP28) in Dubai, United Arab Emirates, from Nov 30 to Dec 12, and resume from where they left in Sharm el-Sheikh in Egypt in 2022. They will again, like they did at COP26 in Glasgow, Scotland, in 2021, reaffirm the Paris Agreement goal of limiting the average increase in the global temperature to well below 2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels and pursuing efforts to limit it to 1.5 C. The same commitments will be made, the same negotiations will reverberate in Dubai Expo City, the venue of the confer-



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ence, and the same hopes will be raised only to be forgotten.

Had our world leaders been even half as serious as they pretend to be, they wouldn't have allowed \$1.4 trillion of public money, according to the International Institute for Sustainable Development, to be pumped into fossil fuels last year. Or, if you believe the International Monetary Fund, allowed fossil fuels to enjoy subsidies worth \$13 million per minute in 2022, which adds up to an astronomical \$7 trillion for the whole year.

Perhaps a better way of fighting climate change is the one chosen by six Portuguese children and young adults. The young guns have moved the European Court of Human Rights against 32 European countries, accusing their leaders of not doing enough to combat climate change. Such is their determination and so strong is their case that the ECHR has referred the matter to the 17-judge Grand Chamber. For the record, the ECHR has referred only 0.03 percent of the cases to the Grand Chamber in its history.

If the six young climate activists are successful, the 32 European countries will be legally bound to ramp up emissions cuts as well as reduce their overall contribution to climate change including their exports, especially fossil fuel exports.

The world belongs to young activists, and only they can save it from doom.

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

Bjorn Lomborg and Jordan B. Peterson

More urgent tasks need more attention

The meaningful exchange of truly diverse ideas and perspectives has withered over recent decades. Unorthodox thinking is increasingly trashed or disregarded, even as the chattering class's fear- and force-predicated approaches repeatedly prove inadequate to cope with the true complexities and crises of the modern world.

Therefore, we need to foster and promote critical thinking and constructive discussions. We (at Copenhagen Consensus) are making every effort to ensure that our new Alliance for Responsible Citizenship, an international coalition of politicians, business leaders, public intellectuals and cultural commentators, helps ensure that a broader range of perspectives can be heard globally.

After the COVID-19 pandemic, we saw an increase in inequality in income distribution and wealth, widespread loss of employment, substantive declines in spending, and general deterioration in economic conditions; serious declines in mental health and well-being, delayed and diminished access to healthcare, and record high levels of domestic violence.

The education of children was particularly affected: school closures on average robbed children of more than seven months of education. The huge impact on children's knowledge could end up costing \$17 trillion in lifetime earnings according to research by the World Bank, UNESCO and UNICEF. Children from poor families, and children, especially girls, with disabilities suffered the biggest losses.

The international community needs to have a serious conversation on our manner of response before the next crisis — pandemic or otherwise — to ensure that the cure is not worse than the disease.

Consider the alarmist treatment of climate change, for instance. Campaigners and news organizations play up fear, in the form of floods, storms and droughts, while neglecting to mention that reduction in poverty and increase in resiliency mean that climate-related disasters kill ever fewer people: over the past century, deaths have declined by 97 percent.

Heat waves capture the headlines. Globally, however, cold kills nine times more people. The higher temperatures arguably characterizing this century have resulted in 166,000 fewer high temperature-related deaths overall.

Fear-mongering and the suppression of truly inconvenient truths are pushing us dangerously toward the wrong solutions: politicians and pundits call en masse for net-zero policies that will cost far beyond \$100 trillion, while producing benefits of a fraction.

We need to have an honest discussion on costs and benefits — a true reckoning with the facts to find the best solutions.

We also need to conduct a more mature conversation on how to better help the 4 billion people who live in the poorer half of the world. The United Nations promises everything imaginable in the form of its Sustainable Development Goals: the end to extreme poverty, hunger, and disease; reduction of inequality and corruption; cessation of war; amelioration of climate change; universalization of education — even ease of access to urban parks. But a plan that makes of all the problems the same compelling crisis without prioritization is no plan at all, merely a recipe for the appearance of action and virtue.

This year sits at the midpoint between the start of the goals in 2016, and their hypothetical attainment in 2030. We are now at the halfway mark, but nowhere near close to halfway there. Even UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres admits that the SDGs are "far off track".

We must zero in on the most efficient solutions first. More than 100 economists and several Nobel laureates working with the Copenhagen Consensus think tank have identified the most promising and effective SDG targets. We could, for example, virtually eliminate tuberculosis, which still kills more than 1 million people every year, by spending an additional \$6.2 billion a year. We could invest \$5.5 billion more in agricultural research and development in low-income countries to increase crop yield, help farmers produce more and consumers pay less, reducing the number of hungry people by more than 100 million per year.

There are a dozen areas where much could be done by spending comparatively little money. We could efficiently and quickly boost learning in schools — vital after the pandemic-induced lockdowns — save mothers' and newborns' lives, tackle malaria, make government procurement much more efficient, improve nutrition, increase land tenure security, turbo-charge the effects of trade, advance skilled migration, and increase child immunization rates.

These 12 sensible and implementable policies could save more than 4 million lives per year, and generate economic benefits worth over \$1 trillion (primarily in poorer countries) for an outlay of \$35 billion a year for the next seven years.

The Alliance for Responsible Citizenship can help us envision the future in a positive manner, emphasizing the ability of the properly competing and cooperating people of the world to solve whatever problems confront us, as we have so often and often so effectively done in the past.

We can focus on what is truly important and attainable, initiate and reward a more nuanced global discussion on the problems that will always beset us, and look forward to a world more abundant, more laden with opportunities, more sustainable, and more hopeful.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

ZOU ZHIQIANG

Riyadh's look east
policy explainedWhile Western countries challenge its core interests,
China is helping Saudi Arabia
achieve greater strategic autonomy

As great power competition intensifies, many smaller countries, particularly those in the Middle East, face the pressure to pick sides. But most countries in the region want to maintain their strategic independence. The growing consciousness of strategic autonomy shared by Middle Eastern countries reflects their desire to reduce dependence on foreign powers, protect their own national interests and realize their goals of building strong nations.

As the central country in Arab and Islamic worlds, Saudi Arabia has long harbored the ambition of wielding global influence. The country's Vision 2030 aims to turn it into the heart of the Arab and Islamic worlds and become a global investment powerhouse and a global hub connecting Asia, Europe and Africa.

Against the backdrop of the United States withdrawing its troops from the Middle East and its declining influence in the region, the relationship between Saudi Arabia and the US is on a downward spiral, with Saudi Arabia displaying growing mistrust toward the US and no longer tying itself fully and unconditionally to the US' agenda. Rather, it is seeking maximum benefits for itself by maintaining a balanced diplomatic policy.

One reason why Saudi-US ties are souring is because of Riyadh's discontent with the pressure from the US on issues such as human rights, security and foreign affairs. Saudi Arabia has refused to toe the US line on the Ukraine crisis, or to impose sanctions on Russia. Instead, it has stuck to an independent diplomatic agenda.

Saudi Arabia also ignored the US' request to increase oil production to curb inflation and cripple the Russian economy. On the contrary, it cut its oil output and maintained energy cooperation with Russia under the framework of the OPEC+ mechanism, displaying great policy independence.

Meanwhile, China's stature and influence in the Middle East and the world at large is growing. Saudi Arabia expects China to play a greater role in regional affairs, and help Saudi Arabia realize its economic transition and regional diplomatic goals.

In December 2022, the China-Arab States Summit, China-Gulf Cooperation Council Summit and a bilateral summit between China and Saudi Arabia were held in

Riyadh, greatly enhancing mutual strategic trust between the two nations.

In March, China brokered a detente between Iran and Saudi Arabia, which saw the two "archrivals" resuming diplomatic ties. The rapprochement greatly improved Saudi Arabia's regional and global political environment.

In its pursuit of greater strategic autonomy, Saudi Arabia has been diversifying its diplomatic agenda, and is increasingly looking to the East. From a strategic point of view, Saudi Arabia's "shift to the East" is a countermeasure to the challenges posed by Western countries to its core interests, and also because the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative can help it achieve economic transformation. Therefore, Saudi Arabia pins high hopes on the comprehensive partnership with China, and has enhanced its economic, political and diplomatic ties with China.

Saudi Arabia has strengthened cooperation with China in investment and trade. In addition to bilateral trade, Saudi Arabia also expects China to give support to its economic transformation. China is Saudi Arabia's largest trading partner, with their bilateral trade hitting a record high of \$116 billion last year. Meanwhile, it wants to attract more Chinese investment and technologies to develop areas key to its economic diversification strategy including infrastructure, digital economy, tourism and logistics.

Saudi Arabia has elevated the level of political mutual trust with China. It has established a comprehensive strategic partnership with China and has been continuously enriching the relationship. The rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia under China's mediation has triggered a wave of reconciliation in the region, reflecting the high level of trust Saudi Arabia places on China. With China's growing influence in the Middle East, the popularity of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has also grown in the region. When Iran was admitted as a full member of the SCO last year, Saudi Arabia, Qatar and Egypt also became dialogue partners of the organization.

As China-Saudi Arabia ties deepen, Chinese enterprises have been flocking to the Middle Eastern country to seek investment opportunities. On June 11, the 10th Arab-China Business Conference in Riyadh saw 30 investment agree-

ments worth over \$10 billion being inked in sectors such as technology, renewable energy and healthcare.

At the opening ceremony of the conference, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Affairs Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said that China-Saudi Arabia trade and economic ties enjoy huge potential. Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman Al Saud dismissed the so-called concerns expressed by the West and said Saudi Arabia sought cooperation instead of competition with China.

Currently, China and Saudi Arabia enjoy new development opportunities.

In addition to traditional energy trade, investment is expected to become a new driver of bilateral economic cooperation. Saudi Arabia also wants to increase interaction with China in emerging multilateral mechanisms. As members of the G20, both countries are maintaining close cooperation in global economic governance.

Saudi Arabia is a founding member of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and has led other countries in the region to become major stakeholders of the bank. Saudi Arabia has recently expressed strong interest in joining the BRICS and is in negotiations to become a member of the New Development Bank. As such, Saudi Arabia is expected to cooperate with other emerging countries under the BRICS+ framework.

China-Saudi Arabia collaboration in political and security areas will also be bolstered.

On the one hand, China and Saudi Arabia have strengthened mediation endeavors on major regional issues. On the other hand, the two countries support each other in the global arena, and jointly oppose the interference by Western countries. Going forward, the two countries can expand cooperation in political and security areas under the framework of the SCO to express demands in this new multilateral mechanism, and coordinate the interests and relations of various parties, thus making more contributions to maintaining regional peace.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

FAJAR B. HIRAWAN

A decade of
economic partnershipAs Indonesia and China build on past successes, the future
promises further strengthening of ties, and meaningful
contributions to regional and global development

Over the past 10 years, the partnership between Indonesia and China has been undergoing a remarkable transformation through Indonesia's participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, aiming to enhance its economic connectivity and foster cooperation between the two nations. The initiative has woven a tapestry of collaboration between two of Asia's most influential economies. As we reflect on this decade-long journey, it becomes evident that the Indonesia-China partnership has brought forth significant economic advancements.

The Belt and Road Initiative's inception marked a turning point in Indonesia-China relations, catalyzing a renewed focus on business and economic synergy. Endowed with abundant natural resources and a growing consumer market, Indonesia has become an attractive partner for China's vision of cross-border connectivity.

At the heart of the Indonesia-China economic partnership lies infrastructure development. The Belt and Road Initiative's core principle of infrastructure development resonated strongly with Indonesia's aspiration to bridge its infrastructure gap and foster economic growth, especially during the first term of Joko Widodo's presidency (2014-19). Chinese investments have facilitated several crucial infrastructure projects, such as ports, highways, railways and energy facilities. The Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, a flagship project, is set to redefine travel and trade between the two nations, promising to reduce travel time and enhance logistics efficiency.

The Belt and Road Initiative has also enabled Indonesia to strengthen its position as a regional trade hub. Enhanced connectivity through upgraded ports and transportation networks has expedited the movement of goods, thus benefiting businesses and consumers alike. China's vast market and Indonesia's strategic geographic location have paved the way for increased trade and investment, promoting economic integration within the Southeast Asian region and the Asia Pacific.

Beyond economic benefits, the Indonesia-China partnership has fostered cultural exchanges and people-to-people connectivity, including a human capacity-building program that aligns with the main focus of the second term of Widodo's presidency (2019-24). Various initiatives, such as student

exchange programs, cultural festivals, and joint research projects, have deepened mutual understanding, friendship, and capacity enhancement between the two nations. These cultural ties can potentially form lasting bonds that transcend economic interests.

Indonesia and China should notably invest in capacity-building endeavors to empower their use of economic cooperation advantages. This might encompass bolstering businesses, particularly small- and medium-sized enterprises, through training and guidance, aiding them in comprehending and navigating the novel trade regulations and prospects stemming from the accord. The implementation of technical assistance programs can further refine customs processes and streamline trade protocols.

While the Indonesia-China partnership has undeniably yielded substantial benefits, it has also given rise to challenges. Ensuring the equitable distribution of benefits, addressing environmental concerns, and upholding transparency in project execution stand as pivotal considerations. Addressing these challenges collectively will enable both countries to unlock the full potential of their partnership. Embracing environmental concerns is crucial to sustainable development. Thus, the Indonesia-China partnership should champion joint efforts in renewable energy projects and green infrastructure development, underlining a commitment to balancing economic growth with ecological preservation.

Against this backdrop, two fundamental pillars warrant attention to expedite the benefits of the Indonesia-China economic partnership.

First, outreach and communication play a paramount role. A proactive approach to outreach and communication between the two countries is pivotal to raising awareness about the advantages of economic cooperation, specifically regarding the Belt and Road Initiative and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, among diverse stakeholders ranging from businesses to consumers. Hosting platforms such as workshops, seminars, and trade expos can effectively highlight the opportunities generated by this partnership. Maintaining continuous, accessible communication channels will prove indispensable in disseminating information and providing updates on the unfolding narrative of the Indonesia-China partnership.

Second, implementation and compliance hold paramount significance. The urgency lies in promptly implementing the tenets of economic cooperation and the two countries adhering unwaveringly to their commitments. This obligation necessitates dismantling trade barriers, rationalizing tariffs, and harmonizing regulations. To ensure accountability, establishing vigilant monitoring mechanisms and structured reporting systems can track progress while highlighting areas ripe for enhancement.

Indonesia's role as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations' chairman this year, particularly its earnest commitment to advancing RCEP, instills optimism for accelerated regional progress. Unlocking the latent gains of RCEP and propelling economic growth mandate member states' intensified outreach, communication, implementation, and compliance efforts. Upholding these foundational principles will pave a smoother path for heightened collaboration and cooperation between Indonesia and China.

As we commemorate a decade of the Indonesia-China partnership, it is clear that the journey has been transformative. The partnership has gone beyond mere infrastructure development. It has also nurtured mutual respect, cultural exchanges, and economic growth. With new opportunities on the horizon, including digital connectivity and sustainable development, the next decade promises even more significant strides.

The Indonesia-China partnership stands as a testament to the power of international cooperation in shaping the destiny of nations. The past 10 years have seen Indonesia and China moving hand in hand toward a future of shared prosperity, underlining the significance of sustained dialogue, mutual trust, and collaborative efforts. As both countries continue to build on past successes, the next decade holds the promise of further strengthening their ties and making meaningful contributions to regional and global development.

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WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

LIFE



ORCHESTRA CELEBRATES THE NATION'S MUSICAL YOUTH

The China Philharmonic Orchestra opens its 2023-24 season under the baton of conductor Yu Long, with a three-day marathon featuring five young Chinese pianists, playing four piano concertos; *Symphonic Dances, Op 45*; and *Rhapsody on a Theme of Paganini, Op 43*, by Russian composer Sergei Rachmaninoff.

Between Saturday and Sept 4, three concerts will be staged at the National Centre for the Performing Arts in Beijing. The five pianists will be Zuo Zhang, Bao Yang, Wang Zhiren, Ju Xiaofu and Wang Yalun.

"This year marks the 150th anniversary of Rachmaninoff's birth and the three-day marathon will bring an end to our yearlong celebration of the composer, and is the first such marathon in the orchestra's 23-year history," Yu said in the rehearsal room in Beijing on Aug 14. "These five talented young pianists will kick off the upcoming season, which is dedicated to young musicians."

For its 23rd season, the China Philharmonic Orchestra has a schedule of 21 concerts.

Laufey Lin, whose Chinese name is Lin Bing, will join the orchestra for a jazz concert on Sept 26, under the baton of Jin Yukuang. Both are 23 years old, and they both will be performing with the orchestra for the first time.

Born into a musical family, Lin's grandfather was the renowned violin educator Lin Yaoji (1937-2009) and her mother is a violinist with the Iceland Symphony Orchestra. Laufey Lin composes, sings and plays cello, and has a large online fan base. She recorded her first song, *Street by Street*, on campus at the Berklee College of Music in the winter of 2020. Since then, she has released an EP, *Typical of Me*, and a debut album, *Everything I Know About Love*. A sec-

After years of COVID disruption, the China Philharmonic roars back to life with marathon opening concert, **Chen Nan** reports.



Top: Conductor Yu Long, co-founder of the China Philharmonic Orchestra, conducts a concert for the opening of the national Golden Bell Award, in Chengdu, Sichuan province, in 2021. WANG XIAO / FOR CHINA DAILY

Above, from left: Singer-songwriter and cellist Laufey Lin, cellist Mo Mo, violinist Mei Diyang and conductor Jin Yukuang will perform as part of the new season of the China Philharmonic Orchestra. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ond album, *Bewitched*, will be released on Sept 8.

Other young musicians will also be playing with the China Philharmonic Orchestra for the first time. Zhou Ying, who was born in 1993 and won the second Shanghai Isaac Stern International Violin Competition in 2018, will perform in a concert on March 3, 2024, featuring Johannes Brahms' *Violin Concerto in D Major, Op 77*, and *Symphony No 2 in D Major, Op 73*, under the baton of conductor Chen Lin, at the Forbidden City Concert Hall in Beijing.

Pianists and twin sisters Shi Wei and Shi Rong will play Mozart's *The Marriage of Figaro Overture, Concerto for Two Pianos and Piano Concerto No 10 in E-Flat Major, K365*, as well as Tchaikovsky's *Manfred Symphony, Op 58*, under the baton of Xia Xiaotang in a concert on April 7, 2024, at the same venue.

"These young musicians have matured quickly, and their performances really impressed me. During the COVID-19 pandemic, they performed on social media platforms and reached wider audiences around the world," says Yu.

"Unlike the musicians of my generation, they received professional music training as children, pursued their studies at top music schools around the world, and won prizes at international competitions. They have demonstrated their potential and ability," Yu adds.

In 2000, Yu co-founded the China Philharmonic Orchestra, which has become one of the top symphony orchestras in the country, and which is dedicated to supporting young musicians.

Although it often had to reschedule over the past three years due to the pandemic, the orchestra has been working hard to present audiences

with a diversity of programming.

"I am very grateful that I have been evolving as a musician along with the China Philharmonic Orchestra, which is an important step in my career," says Yu, who is also artistic director of the troupe.

On Jan 13, 2024, a concert of art songs will be performed under the baton of conductor Huang Yi, featuring music by the late Chinese composer and pianist Ding Shande (1911-95), who was Yu's grandfather and introduced him to music as a child.

This year, with the music scene back in full swing, international musicians will join the China Philharmonic Orchestra for its new season.

German conductor Christoph Eschenbach will return for a performance featuring *Symphony No 1 in D Major* by Gustav Mahler and Russian composer Alfred Schnittke's *Viola Con-*

certo. Viola player Mei Diyang, 29, the first Chinese principal viola at the Berliner Philharmoniker, will also play in the concert. In 2022, he became the first Chinese musician to be given the position at the troupe.

On Oct 29, British pianist Stephen Hough will make his debut with the orchestra, playing Beethoven's *Piano Concerto No 3 in C Minor, Op 37*, and Brahms' *Piano Concerto No 1, Op 15*, under the baton of Yu.

Other highlights in the new season include Greek violinist Leonidas Kavakos, British violinist Daniel Hope, and German baritone Matthias Goerne.

On Oct 6, violinist Hope, pianist Sun Jiayi, and cellist Nie Jiapeng will perform music from award-winning composer Tan Dun's Martial Arts Trilogy, a cycle of pieces for soloists and orchestra based on Tan's famous film scores: *The Crouching Tiger Concerto*, *The Banquet Concerto*, *Hero Concerto* and *The Triple Resurrection*. Tan will conduct.

On May 25, 2024, the orchestra will give a concert at Beijing's Poly Theatre, where it was founded in 2000. In celebration of the China Philharmonic Orchestra's 24th birthday, the concert will feature established artists like actor-director Pu Cunxin, pianist Chen Sa, violinist Lyu Siqing and cellist Wang Jian.

According to Li Nan, president of the China Philharmonic Orchestra, the new season will be the last before the opening of its new headquarters. The new China Philharmonic Orchestra Hall was scheduled for completion on June 30, 2022, but was postponed due to the pandemic. It will be the orchestra's first permanent venue, and is located on the southern side of the Beijing Workers' Stadium.

Contact the writer at chenan@chinadaily.com.cn

What's on

Burst of vitality



The roaring Yellow River meets the high mountains in northern Shaanbei province, an area referred to as Shaanbei, resulting in breathtaking views. The landscape and climate have given birth to a diversity of folk culture and art which, with its rich colors and lively patterns, is an eruption of vitality, a powerful demonstration of existence, and a philosophical exploration of yin and yang. Art and crafts from Yan'an, in Shaanbei, are among the earliest and most important items in the collection of the National Art Museum of China, and range from paper-cuts

and clay figurines, to cloth toys and ceramics. A selection of Shaanbei folk art is currently on show at the National Art Museum of China until Nov 15. Some of the objects were gifted by folk artists, mostly farmers, and have been introduced to the public through exhibitions curated by the museum, beginning with two shows dedicated to Shaanxi art and crafts in 1980 and 1981, which garnered wide acclaim. There are also pieces by artists who journeyed to Yan'an in the 1930s and '40s to join the Communist Party of China. While there, they were inspired by the area's history and culture to create new works.

9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 1 Wusi Dajie, Dongcheng district, Beijing. 010-6400-1476.

Modern spirit

The 19th century witnessed Shanghai's gradual rise to becoming the economic center on the lower reaches of the Yangtze River. The city's prosperity nurtured a dynam-



ic, open and diverse cultural scene. The proliferation of artists, scholars and buyers gave rise to the formation of the Shanghai School, a style of classical Chinese painting that breathed new life into the centuries-old tradition. Until the early 20th century, the Shanghai School, or *haipai* as it is known in Chinese, was predominant in artistic circles, expounded by loose groups of artists active in Shanghai and neighboring cities. *The Breeze From the Sea*, an exhibition now running at the He Xiangning Art Museum in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, investigates the progress of this influential modern Chinese school of art. Some 200 works from the collections of several important museums, including the Nanjing Museum, the Suzhou Museum and the Tianjin Museum, are on display until Oct 22. The exhibition surveys the contribution of the Shanghai School, not only in geographical terms but also in terms of its pioneering spirit, which reformed the old rules of art

and embraced new, advanced ideas. 9 am-5 pm, closed on Mondays. 9013 Shennan Dadao, Nanshan district, Shenzhen, Guangdong province. 0755-2660-4540.

Cosmos of art

The work of Pu Ru (1896-1963) reflects his lengthy accumulation of culture and art. His youth was a fruitful time during which he read classical texts and poems in the traditional Chinese manner for cultivating an intellectual. He led a secluded life in western Beijing, for a dozen years, to focus on reading, writing, painting and practicing calligraphy. Pu Ru emphasized the importance of copying the works of ancient masters as a primary means of improvement, and also attributed his accomplishments to his consistent study of calligraphy. He was highly regarded as a master of painting, calligraphy and poetry, the three "sisters" of classical Chinese art. A show at the Long Museum in Shang-



hai places dozens of Pu Ru's works on display, providing a glimpse into his wide-ranging ability. The exhibition runs until Oct 29. 10 am-6 pm, closed on Mondays. 3398 Longteng Avenue, Xuhui district, Shanghai. 021-6422-7636.

LIFE

Looking to land an idyll job

More young people are quitting the city to try their hand at tilling the soil, with varying degrees of success, **Wang Qian** reports.

It is the eighth time this summer that Guo Xiunan has failed to grow vegetables without chemical pesticides. After trying various homemade bug sprays, such as plant ash, mixtures of pepper, vinegar and water, and rubbing alcohol, there are still plenty of holes chewed by flea beetles in the leaves.

"I will not give up trying and next time, I shall experiment with mustard oil," the 29-year-old accountant-turned-farmer says.

Covering 0.67 hectares of farmland and 1.33 hectares of woodland and wetland, his farm is located on the outskirts of Hefei, East China's Anhui province. He is trying to turn it into an organic farm, cultivating fruits and vegetables with the same flavor of those from his childhood memories.

"Growing tasty and healthy food has been my dream since I was a teenager. I know how difficult it can be, but if you take the soil seriously, I believe it will pay off," Guo says.

He adds that farming is not a business that can make money in a short time, but for him, it became an urgent issue when his father was diagnosed with stomach cancer last year, ringing an alarm bell over food safety.

Recalling spending time on the farm with his parents as a child, Guo says overuse of pesticides and chemical fertilizers is changing the face of farming, which does not only damage the soil, but also people's health.

After investing more than 100,000 yuan (\$13,700) since he rented the farmland last year, and reading many books on agriculture, Guo is in the early stages of navigating the various challenges through trial and error. In other words, his farm is still losing money, even though he only hires one villager to help tend the land.

Unlike a conventional farm, Guo is learning to manage soil nutrients without fertilizer and tackle weeds and insects without herbicides and insecticides.

As well as figuring out different strategies for cultivation on the farm himself, he has to develop marketing channels for his products. In March, he uploaded his first post on short-video platform Douyin to introduce his business. His account now has nearly 6,000 followers, which is way above his expectations. As people around him questioned his decision to till the land instead of riding a desk at some lucrative city job, his followers were there to encourage him, just like they did through hard times on the farm.

"Maybe it is because I've realized their dream life, one that they dare not pursue," Guo says.

Against the decadeslong trend of people migrating to cities, there is a new phenomenon, as seen on social media, a counterflow among the young generation, like Guo, who are moving to the countryside to adopt an agricultural lifestyle.

Data from Douyin shows that content related to farming garnered about 12.9 billion likes last year, with 54 percent of their creators being young people who used to work or study in cities.

Although still small in number, this group of young, educated people introduce the latest agricultural technology and bring fresh perspective to local economic development, indicating the potential for rural revitalization, according to a report released by the Rural Development Institute, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences.

Fish out of water

However, farming is far from a simple task for those who are new to it and imagine it is all about pastoral scenes, fresh air and a quiet life communing with nature.

When Liao Lijun felt exhausted at her reporter's job in Shanghai last year, her father offered her an attractive invitation: to run a farm with him.

While working in the real estate development sector in the early 2010s, Liao's father secured a 133.3-hectare parcel through farmland transfer at a low cost.

The 25-year-old is familiar with



Guo Xiunan, 29, works in a vegetable greenhouse on his organic farm located on the outskirts of Hefei, East China's Anhui province. He wants to cultivate fruits and vegetables with the same flavor of those from his childhood memories. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



With investment from a company, Niu Xiaoxin and his wife Xu Yan started up their chrysanthemum farm in Zhangjiaweizi village, Linyi, Shandong province, but left the business in 2021 and have rented land to plant succulents as a new starting point.



Quitting her job in Shanghai last year, Liao Lijun, 25, went back to her hometown to run a farm with her father. On their 133.3-hectare farm, they keep a variety of animals, including pigs and sheep.

the internet and has always wanted to be a social media creator. Producing content related to farming taps into the current online zeitgeist.

When she arrived at her father's farm, located in a village in Huaihua, Central China's Hunan province, in October, it quickly dawned on her that running a farm is nothing like the idyllic pastoral lifestyle she envisioned it would be.

"The key problem is our agricultural inexperience," Liao says, adding

that farm life is not as "beautiful as it looks", and that farming is a business full of challenges and difficulties.

Sharing her agricultural endeavors on video platform Bilibili, her posts are reminiscent of *Clarkson's Farm*, a hugely popular British docuseries on Amazon Prime that follows former motoring journalist and TV presenter Jeremy Clarkson as he attempts to run his Cotswolds farm himself following the retirement of his veteran land manager. "After all," he asks in the first episode, "how hard can it be?"

Liao certainly knows the answer. "Our farm has encountered various unexpected obstacles, which is indicated by my delay in uploading my videos," she says. So far, she has managed to post 10 videos to her Bilibili channel.

The third day after she arrived at the farm, the temperature in Hunan dropped dramatically, from 38 C to 18 C. Overnight, more than 100 fish in her pond died, and she had no idea why. After consulting an expert on the farmers' assistant hotline, by dialing 12356, low oxy-

aquaculture, such as its salinity, hardness and nitrite content.

As well as facing a lack of aquaculture knowledge and technology, their pig-rearing business also plunged into the red due to the decline in pig prices. Liao and her father bought 20 piglets for 12,546 yuan earlier this year when the price was over 25 yuan per kilogram, but now that value has nosedived to about 16 yuan.

"Usually a pig will be sold after being raised for half a year, but now the low prices mean that our efforts are in vain. It is a lesson about the market that we have learned the hard way," Liao says.

From the perspective of making money, Liao doesn't think farming is a wise option for young people, because it is a long-term business which requires a lot of knowledge and hard work, but also a lot of upfront capital, for which there will be little return in the first few years.

"There is a profitable method that I think is viable for young people who are interested in the countryside. They can use their knowledge of technology like the internet, to help local farmers or companies run their businesses," she says, adding that young people with such skills usually have better choices.

Cooperative farmers

This method of cooperation is the one Niu Xiaoxin and his wife Xu Yan adopted when setting up their farm to produce chrysanthemum tea in Zhangjiaweizi village, Linyi, East China's Shandong province, when they were seniors in horticulture at the Shandong Agricultural University in 2016.

Following their teachers' recommendation, and with years of research in chrysanthemum cultivation, their agricultural career started smoothly when a company invested in their business plan.

Although quite familiar with modern farming practices, they still encountered various challenges they couldn't find solutions for in textbooks or classrooms.

"At school, everything is there, but building a farm means starting from scratch on barren land," 31-year-old Niu says, adding that every detail has to be designed, such as where to install water pipes and how long they need to be.

After four-and-a-half years of building up their farm, which covers about 6 hectares, they have cultivated 10 kinds of edible chrysanthemum for use in tea and have provided jobs for more than 40 villagers. To help promote their chrysanthemum tea, they took to Douyin, and their account has attracted more than 112,000 followers. On Bilibili they boast 19,000 followers.

"These days, there is a misunderstanding about agriculture, that we focus too much on how to grow tasty, good-quality products, but ignore the importance of sales," Niu says.

From planting to management and sales, agriculture is a business with a complete chain, Niu adds.

In 2021, due to a disagreement about the direction the farm's development was taking, they left the business and started providing technical support to farmers and agricultural companies in nearby villages.

Later that year, they rented 1,000 square meters of land to plant succulents as a new starting point.

"We will not quit the sector, but it has taken time to find a path that suits us," Niu says, adding that they've learned to use social media as a powerful tool for connecting with consumers.

According to data from the Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, from 2012 to last year, over 12.2 million people have returned or moved to rural areas with the aspiration of starting their own business.

Despite having been through various difficulties and challenges, Niu, Xu, Liao and Guo all agree that the agricultural sector has a promising future, and more young people need to try and find a way to build their own connection with the soil.

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“There is a profitable method that I think is viable for young people... They can use their knowledge of technology like the internet, to help local farmers or companies run their businesses.”

Liao Lijun, who helps her father run a farm

cause was determined to be the cause.

After oxygenating the pond, the problem was solved, but two months later, there was a bigger issue. It was their first time harvesting the pond, and her father had estimated the total weight of the fish at more than 15,000 kilograms. In the end, there were just 300 kg of bighead carp.

"Where have all my fish gone? Where have all my fish gone?" her father keeps asking, in ever more exasperated tones, in her video of the incident.

After consulting experts and fish farmers and trying all kinds of avenues to find answers, Liao and her father were still puzzled as to why their pond had yielded so few fish. It turns out that there are many important parameters required for the water, and which matter a lot in

CULTURE



Ethnic Mongolian herder Erdenetsugla and his wife Naren at the summer grazing grounds of Ar Horqin in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. PHOTOS BY WANG HAORAN / CHINA DAILY

Pastures for posterity

Time-honored grassland nomadic system brings together tradition and innovation for sustainable success, **Alexis Hooi** and **Yuan Hui** report in Ar Horqin, Inner Mongolia

Ethnic Mongolian herder Erdenetsugla rode his horse alongside his flock of 300 sheep and 80 cattle, looking across the lush grasslands to the mist-covered mountains on the horizon.

"This place has been our summer home for as long as I can remember," said Erdenetsugla, 41.

"The pristine environment, with its abundant grazing grounds and clear streams, nourishes our livestock and provides for our families," he said. "We in turn must take care of it for future generations."

Erdenetsugla's view is shared by many fellow herders in Ar Horqin, in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region, where time-honored nomadic practices stretching back to the Neolithic period allow the community to live in harmony with nature.

Lauded as a global green model of success, Ar Horqin is now bringing together tradition and innovation to ride the latest trends in sustainable development, online and on the ground.

Nature's way

In May 2022, the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations inscribed the Ar Horqin grassland nomadic system on the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems list, as one of "a living, evolving system of human communities in an intricate relationship with their territory, cultural or agricultural landscape or biophysical and wider social environment."

Since 2005, the FAO has designated at least 78 systems in 24 countries as agricultural heritage sites.

By the end of 2022, China ranked first in the world in the number of the heritage systems, with Ar Horqin part of the country's total of 19 entries.

According to the FAO, the traditional nomadic production and lifestyle of Mongolians in Ar Horqin have been "well preserved here in an original way" — central to the area's sustainable success is how its nomads regularly move to different grazing spots between the seasons, alternately allowing the vegetation, soil and other limited resources to revive and thrive.

Every year in mid June, many of the ethnic herders in the heritage site, which is home to about 15,000 people, move with their livestock to summer grazing grounds in the north, in a journey of up to three days covering 100 kilometers along three major waterways near the Greater Khingan Mountains.

The annual drive is staggered into groups of three to eight households at any one time, each with about 1,000 sheep and 300 cattle, to minimize impact on the environment, said Zhou Wenlong, deputy director of the Ar Horqin agricultural cultural heritage protection center.

In the summer area, spread across more than 173,000 hectares, herders set up traditional Mongolian yurts and take care not to overgraze their animals on the shared grasslands.

"There are no fenced plots, which means the herders enjoy a natural set-

ting that supports the interdependent biodiversity of the area," Zhou said.

When the weather gets cold, Ar Horqin's herders drive their livestock down south, back to their wintering grounds covering 160,000 hectares.

"It's a crucial cycle reflecting the wisdom of their predecessors, who realized the importance of achieving a fine balance between human development and the environment," Zhou said.

In July 2022, President Xi Jinping sent a congratulatory letter to the World Conference on Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems, emphasizing that it is the common responsibility of humankind to protect agricultural heritage.

China has actively responded to the program initiated by the FAO and the country has been protecting and inheriting agricultural heritage, Xi highlighted.

Ar Horqin's grassland nomadic system is based on traditional knowledge and accumulated generations of experience, with Mongolian herders developing a healthy ecosystem and the special natural environment also giving birth to a distinct culture, according to the FAO.

For master craftsman Sainduuren, 58, the wooden ox carts he creates help maintain Mongolians' links with the land.

"My carts are an extension of the agricultural-cultural heritage here, nurtured by the grasslands," said Sainduuren, who is a national-level inheritor of intangible cultural heritage involving the ox carts, also known as "lele" carts.

Ar Horqin's heritage listing allows knowledge of the carts, like other ethnic Mongolian customs and practices, ranging from dairy food and meat production to folk festivals and yurt dwellings, to be preserved and passed down, he said.

Moving forward

Ar Horqin residents like Tsetsenbileg are leveraging its green achievements to take it to the next stages of development, tapping digital platforms, technology and other new fields.

The deputy head of Manitu village is also a livestreamer promoting local meat and dairy products, with his programs attracting up to 3 million views.

"I've helped the herders sell about 5,000 yuan (\$697) of mutton in less than 10 days," said Tsetsenbileg, 36.

"We have government-supported train-



"We have government-supported training sessions to help us use the digital channels, so that we can share the bounty of our beautiful environment with more people."

Tsetsenbileg, deputy head of Manitu village, Ar Horqin in Inner Mongolia autonomous region



Above: Livestreamer Tsetsenbileg introduces viewers to local ethnic Mongolian delicacies in his Ar Horqin home in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. **Below:** Ethnic Mongolian ox cart master craftsman Sainduuren in his workshop in Ar Horqin in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. PHOTOS BY WANG HAORAN / CHINA DAILY



Left: Alfalfa forage crop cultivation in Ar Horqin of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. **Below:** Ar Horqin residents set up a traditional ethnic Mongolian yurt tent dwelling on the grasslands in summer. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



ing sessions to help us use the digital channels, so that we can share the bounty of our beautiful environment with more people," he said.

At the Talinhua company, named after one of the summer grazing spots, Ar Horqin meat is packaged as high-end products targeting urban consumers.

"Our customers in large cities like Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou place a premium on quality," its general manager Zhang Guangwen said.

"Those strict standards are met by our cattle and sheep, which are bred in an unspoiled and unpolluted place. We deliver the inimitable gems of the grasslands here to other parts of the country," he said.

The model agricultural system in Ar Horqin also includes a "farming-pasturing interlaced area" where a wide variety of crops such as millet, oats and alfalfa are grown, according to the local government.

The latest efforts building on the rich biodiversity of the area include a major push to cultivate forage crops like alfalfa, which has reaped impressive rewards.

Su Shengkun, director of the management committee of the Ar Horqin grass industry demonstration zone, said high-quality forage farming now covers more than 73,000 hectares, attracting at least 29 major enterprises involved in related businesses to the area.

"We're raking in 650,000 tons of annual output in commercial forage grass at an output value of 1.2 billion yuan, becoming a hub of the sector," Su said, adding that local residents are benefiting from the green investments, with annual per capita income increases of up to 40,000 yuan for workers in the industry.

"The forage crops also help increase plant coverage and protect the land against any environmental threats like desertification," he said.

"The inroads we've made in the field are a natural extension of Ar Horqin's green priorities and advantages, felt here and beyond," Su said.

According to local authorities, Ar Horqin will bring together its pillar forage crop and livestock industries to tap opportunities from the Belt and Road Initiative, positioning its nomadic products for global markets, with related cooperation agreements already reached with the United Arab Emirates covering the planting and processing of crops, animal husbandry and high-tech transportation facilities.

Zhang Haijun, deputy general manager of forage producer Green Pasture, said government support and incentives help complement the development of a sector perfectly suited to the area.

The company, using modern drying and packing technology, can churn out 50,000 tons of forage feed pellets a year from alfalfa, oats and other choice crops grown in the area, he said.

"The environment here is integral to our development, for enterprises and the residents alike," Zhang said. "All of us have an important stake in protecting it."

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