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CHINA DAILY

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China, Venezuela elevate bilateral ties

Relations upgraded to all-weather strategic partnership during Maduro's state visit

By CAO DESHENG
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China and Venezuela elevated their ties to an all-weather strategic partnership on Wednesday, as the countries agreed to advance cooperation on the joint building of the Belt and Road, economy and trade, education, tourism, science and technology, health, aerospace and civil aviation.

President Xi Jinping and Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro Moros jointly announced the elevation of the countries' ties, and witnessed the signing of the agreements after their talks at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. The two countries issued a joint statement on the establishment of the all-weather strategic partnership.

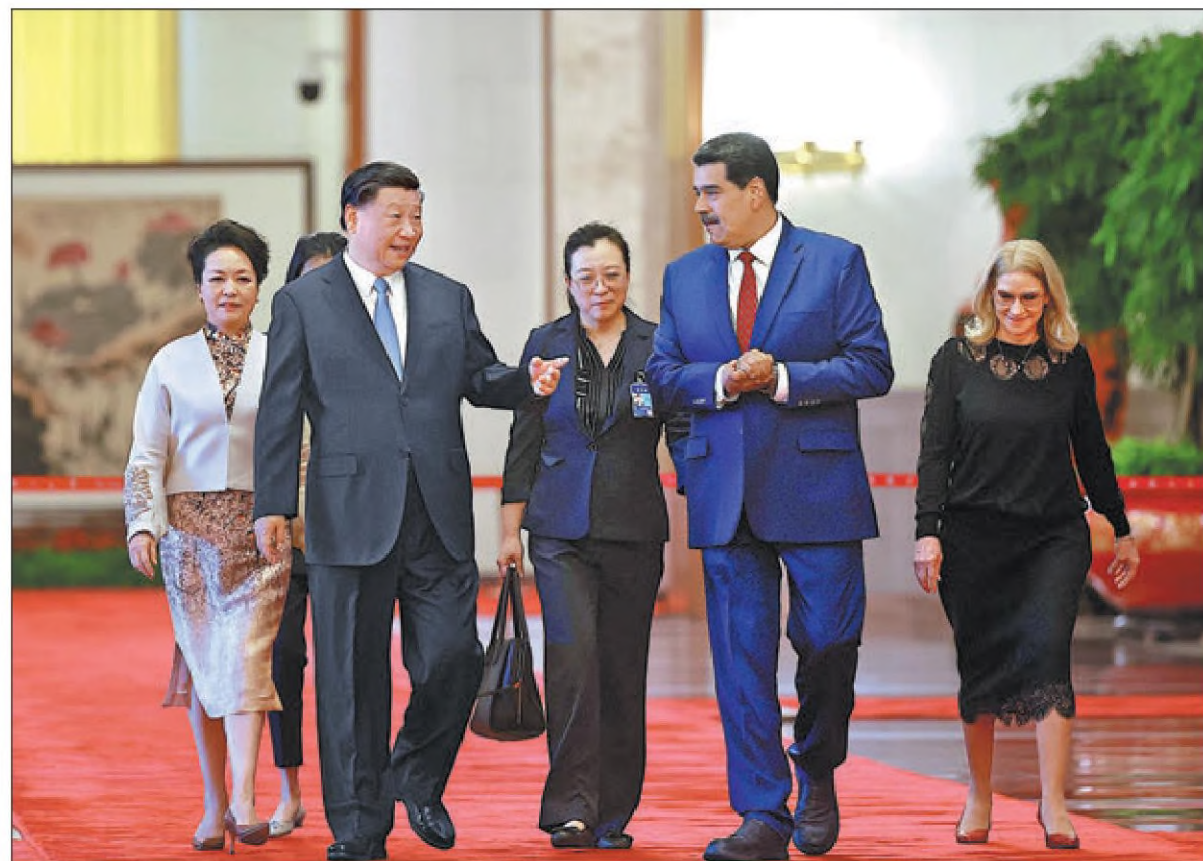
Maduro is making a weeklong state visit to China at the invitation of President Xi. The visit, which runs through Thursday, marks his fifth trip to China as Venezuelan president. It also took him to Shenzhen, Guangdong province, as well as Shanghai and Shandong province.

During their talks, Xi spoke highly of the development of China-Venezuela relations in recent years, saying that the two countries are good friends who trust each other and are good partners for common development.

He told Maduro that China has always viewed its relationship with Venezuela from a strategic and long-term perspective, firmly supporting Venezuela's efforts to safeguard national sovereignty, dignity and social stability, as well as its efforts to oppose external interference.

Both sides should push for more fruitful results in China-Venezuela strategic cooperation, bringing more benefits to the two peoples and injecting more positive energy into world peace and development, he added.

Xi briefed Maduro about China's reform and opening-up, especially the construction of special economic zones. He noted that reform and opening-up is an important instrument for



President Xi Jinping and his wife, Peng Liyuan (left), meet on Wednesday with visiting Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro Moros (second from right) and his wife, Cilia Flores (right), at the Great Hall of the People in Beijing. FENG YONGBIN / CHINA DAILY

China to catch up with the times in great strides and a crucial move in making China what it is today.

"China cherishes the valuable experience gained in this process and will continue to advance reform and opening-up. No force can stop China's progress and development," Xi said.

Noting that China supports Venezuela in establishing special economic zones, Xi said that the nation is ready to share relevant experiences to help advance Venezuela's development.

As next year marks the 50th anniversary of the countries' diplomatic ties, Xi called on both sides to enhance cultural and people-to-people exchanges and promote practical cooperation in various fields.

China is willing to import more high-quality and distinctive Venezuelan products, Xi said.

He congratulated Venezuela on becoming the first country in Latin America to join the International Lunar Research Station project, which was initiated by China.

Both countries should closely cooperate in multilateral mechanisms such as the United Nations and the Group of 77 and China, and strengthen unity and cooperation with other developing countries to safeguard the purposes and principles of the UN Charter and the common interests of developing countries, Xi said.

Highlighting that China attaches great importance to the development

of China-Latin America relations, he said that the nation is willing to work with Venezuela and other countries in Latin America to promote overall cooperation between China and the region, and to jointly build a community with a shared future.

Maduro said that China has become a great country dedicated to peace, development and the well-being of all humanity, as well as an important engine for promoting a new multipolar world.

He said that his state visit to China and the elevation of Venezuela-China relations to an all-weather strategic partnership are of historical significance and will usher in a new era for bilateral relations.

Venezuela actively supports the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative, as well as the Global Development Initiative, the Global Security Initiative and the Global Civilization Initiative, Maduro said, adding that his country is willing to closely communicate and cooperate with China within multilateral frameworks, such as the UN and the BRICS mechanism, to uphold multilateralism and the legitimate interests of developing countries.

In the joint statement, Venezuela reaffirms its interest in joining BRICS, and China says it welcomes Venezuela's positive intention and supports the country's efforts to achieve this goal.

WORLD WATCH
By Haydar Oruç

Time is ripe for Israel, Palestine to resolve conflict

Hopes for a resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict are rising, though challenging factors still abound three decades after the hard-won 1993 Oslo Accords, which established an interim framework for seeking peace.

Turkiye officially normalized its relations with Israel in August after a long period of nonengagement, marking a significant step in Turkiye's efforts to keep close to the region and regain the role of negotiator between Palestine and Israel.

So far, Turkiye has demonstrated its willingness to resolve international conflicts through its mediating role in the Balkans, in the conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia and, most impressively, in the Ukraine crisis. It is therefore only logical that it would want to use this experience to help resolve the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

In addition, Turkiye's active and constructive role in international organizations such as the United Nations, the Organization of Turkic States, the G20 and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation will give it a privileged position in resolving this issue. Therefore, Turkiye can play a central role in helping achieve lasting peace between Palestine and Israel.

Furthermore, Saudi Arabia's recent appointment of an ambassador to Palestine is the most important indicator of a changed position from a few years ago. This is because the crown prince of Saudi Arabia, who a few years ago said that the Palestinians did not want peace, now supports them by advocating the implementation of a two-state solution.

It is observed that China's interest in the Middle East has recently increased significantly. After bringing Iran and Saudi Arabia together, China is believed to be able to help persuade the Palestinian and Israeli sides to similarly sit at the table. China has good relations with both sides and is expected to make attractive offers to both countries in the event of a possible peace agreement.

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Flooding aftermath



Rescuers work near a damaged building on Tuesday after Mediterranean storm Daniel and heavy rainfall hammered Derna, Libya. As of Wednesday, the death toll from the ensuing flooding stood at more than 5,100. ALI M. BOMHADIA VIA REUTERS See story, page 7

HUBEI SETS ITS SIGHTS FIRMLY ON THE FUTURE

Province making every effort to improve growth, pursue high-quality development

By WANG QINGYUN
in Yichang and Xiangyang, Hubei
and ZHOU LIHUA in Wuhan



A row of buildings stands in the background as the sun blazes down on neat roads alongside lush lawns and newly planted saplings anchored to the ground by wooden supports.

At first sight, this appears to be just another typical newly built office compound that can be seen in many areas of China. But staff

members wearing safety vests and helmets, a chimney emitting white smoke and pipelines rising high into the air serve to remind visitors that they have entered a chemical factory.

Located in the Yaojiagang Chemical Industrial Park in Zhijiang,

Yichang city, Central China's Hubei province, the factory is a production base for local enterprise Hubei Sanning Chemical Industry Co.

The base, which can produce 600,000 metric tons of ethylene glycol a year, is supported by smart technologies, including 5G. Ethylene glycol is used as an antifreeze, and in the manufacture of polyester.

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Experts: China's scientific progress offers many benefits for US

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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The scientific and technology progress of China over the past decades has changed the US-China cooperation framework — a "two-way information flow" as described by some experts — who refute "national security concerns" as excuses to shut the door for research collaboration.

More experts and groups have joined the efforts to urge the Biden administration to renew a landmark

deal with China on science and technology cooperation for five years after it was temporarily extended for six months late last month under the pressure of the scientific community.

"At a time when more and more science is being produced outside the US, the nation is handicapping itself by restricting these collaborations," said Marcia McNutt, president of the National Academy of Sciences, in a recent report cited by APA Justice.

She said the NAS members have pointed out that the partnership

between the US and China "has resulted in extensive collaborations, joint research projects, and mutual contributions to global scientific knowledge".

Committee of 100 Chair Gary Locke wrote to President Joe Biden last week, urging the administration to renew the agreement for another five years, because it "offers the United States significant benefits to advance scientific progress in many fields and in people-to-people exchanges, and it presents minimal risks to American national security".

The cooperation with China has led to American achievements in public health, environmental protection, and many other areas of public good, he added.

"The pace of science and technology progress in China has been astonishing" and "that progress changed the character of US science and technology collaboration with China," said John Holdren, a US scientist who served as the senior adviser to former President Barack Obama on science and technology issues.

Citing his 40 years of engagement with China as an example, Holdren said at a recent webinar on US-China research relations that the complementarity in the countries' systems allow them to learn from each other.

"I had been visiting Tsinghua University since the mid-1980s at regular intervals, and what I started to see at Tsinghua in the late 1990s and early 2000s was absolutely mind-blowing," he said.

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Yang Wenhua, an employee at the company who led the establishment of the smart system, said that with the help of such technologies, the factory has significantly improved the safety and efficiency of production.

The smart system also helps reduce the amount of harmful byproducts formed — making the entire manufacturing process more environmentally friendly, Yang said.

The company is one of 108 operating at the industrial park, which was established in 2008.

Xia Kesong, director of the Zhijiang high-tech zone management committee, which oversees the park, said most companies operating there used to focus on manufacturing chemical fertilizers.

Now, they have expanded to sectors such as new materials and biomedicine, Xia said.

The park boasts a sound supply chain, as products and even byproducts made by some companies are raw materials for others. This, in turn, reduces logistics and treatment costs, Xia said.

The park is planning to attract more high-quality and competitive companies.

"We run a strict review of companies which want to do business at the park, to assess five aspects — their safety, environmental friendliness, energy consumption, profits and investment," Xia said, adding that the park has rejected many unqualified candidates.

Development of the park serves as a vivid example of how Yichang, a city on the Yangtze River that used to rely heavily on the chemical industry, is upgrading this industry and reducing its impact on the environment.

President Xi Jinping has emphasized on different occasions the importance of protecting the Yangtze River.

At a symposium in Chongqing in 2016 on improving development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt, Xi stressed that this is an overwhelmingly important task to restore the river's ecology and the environment.

Two years later, during an inspection visit to Hubei in 2018, Xi said in Yichang that the economic belt should be developed in a scientific and orderly manner, and this development must not undermine the environment.

Inspired by Xi's words, the authorities in Yichang launched strenuous efforts to improve the environment of the Yangtze.

More than 130 chemical companies located within 1 kilometer of the river have been closed or relocated, while stringent measures have been taken to ensure wastewater is properly treated.

Chen Xiaoqing, assistant general manager of Kingfa Group, a local chemical company, said the factory has closed its wastewater outlets into the Yangtze. The wastewater is now sent to a government-built sewage treatment plant.

Before being accepted by the plant, the wastewater must be treated according to government requirements, which Chen said are "very high".

Chen said that to meet these requirements, the company spent a large amount on upgrading its equipment.

This was a "rather painful" process at first, but now the company's "greatest core competency" is the ability to reduce its environ-



Ships pass through a lock on the Three Gorges Dam in April. The dam's annual freight volume has surpassed 100 million metric tons for the past five years. ZHENG JIAYU / XINHUA

Hubei: Yangtze cleanup efforts pay off

mental impact, Chen added.

The story of Yichang, located in western Hubei, illustrates the efforts made by the authorities to improve the province's growth pattern and pursue high-quality development.

Hubei Daily reported that earlier this year, Hubei issued a guideline to further advance its chemical industry.

The provincial government said in the guideline that chemical companies in the province should manufacture high-quality raw materials, and work to overcome technical challenges to provide high-end products and those that are in short supply.

It is strictly forbidden to set up chemical industrial parks in places such as nature reserves, source water conservation areas, and areas within 1 km of the Yangtze River, the government said.

The government also issued a three-year action plan to improve safety at chemical industrial parks in the province.

Economic drivers

In addition to working to improve the performance of the chemical industry, the authorities in Hubei are striving to advance other traditional industries, such as the automobile sector, to achieve better growth.

Hubei is a major automobile manufacturing base. In 2021, about 2.1 million vehicles were produced in the province, accounting for 8 percent of China's total.

As the new energy vehicle, or

NEV, industry gains ever stronger momentum in China, Hubei is looking to turn itself into an innovation hub and manufacturing base for new energy and smart vehicles, one of five emerging industries the province aims to promote to further hone its competitiveness.

A number of NEV companies

and battery makers are operating in the province, which has set a goal of raising the value of its new energy vehicle industry to more than 300 billion yuan (\$41 billion) by next year.

These companies include Xiangyang Tenglong Automobile Co, which began operating in Xiangyang city in northern Hubei in

2017 to produce new energy buses and multipurpose vehicles. The company is headquartered in Jiangsu province.

Zhou Shengming, deputy general manager of Tenglong, said the company chose Xiangyang because of the city's welcoming business environment.

The local government is very supportive, and the company enjoys preferential tax and land use policies, he said.

The city also provides a steady supply chain for car companies.

Automobiles have been made in Xiangyang for four decades, and the city is home to several hundred car manufacturers and auto parts factories.

Over the past 10 years, Xiangyang has kept pace with growth of the NEV industry.

In 2013, the central government released a list of 28 cities and regions, including Xiangyang, to support in promoting the use of NEVs.

In 2021, Xiangyang drew up an action plan to transform its automobile industry, and decided to establish a special fund for promoting NEVs.

Zhou said of all the auto parts his company uses to make vehicles, 60 to 70 percent are provided by companies in Xiangyang or other areas of Hubei.

"You can buy all the auto parts you want here," he said, adding that his company now produces and sells 4,000 to 5,000 vehicles a year. Some 15 percent of them are exported to countries such as Indonesia, Malaysia and Egypt.



Workers operate machinery on the production line at a smart factory in Wuhan, capital of Hubei province. CHENG MIN / XINHUA



We run a strict review of companies which want to do business at the park, to assess five aspects — their safety, environmental friendliness, energy consumption, profits and investment."

Xia Kesong, director of Zhijiang high-tech zone committee

Another example of Xiangyang's determination to boost its NEV industry is the launch of a battery factory by new energy vehicle manufacturer BYD.

The city government signed an agreement with BYD in January last year, and adopted a series of measures to pave the way for the early opening of the factory.

Construction of the plant started in April last year, and its first production line went into operation in December.

Zhang Dada, an employee at BYD's battery-making subsidiary, said such a fast pace demonstrates the high level of importance the Xiangyang government places on the NEV industry.

In addition to Xiangyang, several other cities in Hubei are included in the province's strategy to further reinforce its automobile industry.

It is working on establishing an "automobile industry corridor" running southeast to northwest and covering the cities of Wuhan, Xiaogan, Suizhou, Xiangyang and Shiyan. The aim is to make these cities an automobile production base for the whole country.

Hubei also plans to strengthen the automobile industry by introducing emerging technologies, including artificial intelligence and big data. The province has a traditional advantage in convenient transportation links, giving it a competitive edge in developing various industries, including the automobile sector.

The interwoven network of air routes, railways, highways and waterways in Hubei make the province a transportation hub connecting east and west, and north and south.

Zhang said an important reason for BYD opening its battery factory in Xiangyang is that the city's location makes it easy to reach most other provinces in the country.

To seize more opportunities for growth, Hubei is aiming to become an international transportation hub.

In July last year, Huahu Airport opened in Ezhou city, Hubei. It mainly handles cargo flights, and the provincial authorities hope to make the airport an inland free-trade port.

One year on, the airport has launched cargo flights to eight overseas destinations, including Liege, Belgium; Chennai, India; Frankfurt, Germany; and Los Angeles and New York in the United States.

As of mid-July, the airport, jointly constructed by the provincial government and delivery and logistics company SF Express, had handled 203 international flights carrying more than 8,700 tons of cargo.

Yu Ke, executive vice-mayor of Ezhou, said that as part of measures to increase the airport's competitiveness, the city is inviting major cargo airlines, international logistics companies and freight forwarders to base themselves at the facility.

Yu said at a news conference in April that the local government also encourages airlines based at Huahu Airport to establish cargo bases overseas and strengthen their cooperation with major international air cargo hubs.

"In this way, we hope to create a highly efficient new Silk Road in the air to expand world trade," Yu said.

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Left: Coal is unloaded from a cargo ship at a terminal in Jingzhou, Hubei province. HUANG ZHIGANG / FOR CHINA DAILY



Right: A high-speed train crosses a new bridge in Jingzhou built from steel girders. Installation of the girders was completed in November. XU YUNHUA / FOR CHINA DAILY

TOP NEWS

Meeting of comrades



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un, the top leader of the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, examine a launchpad during their meeting at the Vostochny spaceport in the Amur region in Russia on Wednesday. The two leaders met for a summit at the spaceport where they discussed a wide range of issues. MIKHAIL METZEL, SPUTNIK, KREMLIN POOL PHOTO VIA AP

Science: Benefits seen as 'entirely two way'

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"If you visited the biotech labs, the info tech labs, the fuel cell labs, the electric vehicle labs, if you'd been parachuted in, you wouldn't know that you weren't at MIT or Stanford or Princeton in terms of the quality of the labs, the character and the work they were doing," said Holdren.

"The quality of the students was absolutely mind-blowing. China made that kind of progress to really become a peer of the United States in many domains of science and technology," he continued.

In the early days, the US saw the engagement as assistance to a developing country and diplomatic strategy,

but in the recent era, "the benefits in science and technology themselves are now entirely two way," said Holdren.

"There are things we learned from the Chinese that we didn't know and that advanced our progress in important areas and things they learned from us that they didn't know and advanced their progress in important areas," he said.

"What we wanted to know is how the Chinese do so well in science and math education to beat us up in the international competitions and tests; and what they wanted to know is what we do to instill creativity and entrepreneurship in our scientists and technologists in ways that they have not been able to match," he said.

It is particularly true in the clean energy space where the framework for US-China engagement has been shifted, said Joanna Lewis, an associate professor of energy and environment and director of the Science, Technology and International Affairs Program at Georgetown University.

"China is now the largest deployer of most clean energy technologies in the world and is playing a huge role in manufacturing these technologies and increasingly in the innovation of these technologies," she said.

"The framework has shifted so that we actually, in the United States, learn a lot from experiences of China, particularly in deploying large scale clean energy technologies that we have not

been able to achieve here in the United States," Lewis added.

She also observed that over the last three decades, the two countries have been signing more and more agreements in this area; however, the number of new agreements dropped during the Trump era.

The political climate has affected the research relations between the two countries. Some Republican members of the US Congress are pushing to cut off research ties with China over "national security" concerns.

"The irony of the whole thing is as we become more peers in science, there's so much more that we can learn from Chinese scientists today than 40 years ago," said Deborah Seligsohn, former science counselor at the US embassy in China and an assistant professor of political science at Villanova University.

10 paintings from Africa on display at Tiangong

By JIANG CHENGLONG

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Ten paintings created by African youths are showing what lofty dreams can achieve from an unprecedented corner of the universe — the Tiangong space station.

The artworks were selected through a competition, themed "My Dream", which received more than 2,000 entries from 42 African countries. They are now on display at the first international art exhibition at the Chinese space station.

At the awarding ceremony held on Wednesday in Beijing, the three astronauts who are conducting a mission at Tiangong introduced the 10 paintings to the audience, including winners and participants, through a recorded video call from the space station.

Astronaut Zhu Yangzhu showed two of the paintings — the first, from Nigeria, titled *Shared Aspirations* and the other, from Egypt, called *China Is Africa's Hope to Realize Its Space Dream*. In the latter, an African astronaut is seen shaking hands

with a Chinese astronaut on another planet, with the Earth in the backdrop, where China and the African continent can clearly be seen.

"Your paintings show the enthusiasm of African youth for manned space missions, giving me confidence in China-Africa space cooperation in the future," Zhu said. "Exploring the unknown universe and developing space technology is the common cause of mankind, which cannot be separated from the cooperation of all countries in the world, including from Africa."

Another painting titled *L'Unification*, from Mali, shows colorful pieces of cloth being sewn together, which is symbolic of peace and unity. The idea is "to eliminate differences and rifts, and build a peaceful and beautiful world together", Zhu said.

The competition was jointly organized by the Secretariat of the Chinese Follow-up Committee of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation and the China Manned Space Agency.

During the awarding ceremony, Caren Chebet, a fourth-year student from the Confucius Institute at the



Chinese astronauts Jing Haipeng (center), Zhu Yangzhu (right) and Gui Haichao introduce 10 award-winning paintings, created by African youths, to an audience in Beijing via video link on Wednesday from the Tiangong space station. ZOU HONG / CHINA DAILY

University of Nairobi, Kenya, was among young people from nine African countries who got a chance to interact with Chen Dong, a Chinese astronaut who has conducted two missions to Tiangong in the past.

Chebet said that mysteries of the universe have fascinated her since childhood and she has always dreamed of flying into space. She said that Africans will soon see not just their paintings but themselves in space by learning from and coop-

erating with China's technology in space exploration.

Chebet expressed her gratitude to China for giving hope to young Africans, including girls like herself, and extending cooperation to programs that inspire young people in Africa to dream beyond their limitations and achieve what seemed to be impossible a few decades ago.

Otiato Opali in Nairobi contributed to this story.

Expert: China economy has keys to growth

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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A US expert who has studied China's data and the country's policies for addressing current economic problems refuted the notion that the economy is in trouble.

Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-America Studies, told China Daily that "consumption in China has been going up and has been going up on a secular line," a key reason he believes the economy will weather any storms. He also sees room for growth, as China is largely a middle-income economy.

Gupta also projected that the Chinese economy would grow by around 5 percent in the rest of 2023 and 2024 and at least 5 percent for more than the following 10 years.

"It's on a gradual improvement, and I see no reason why China will not hit the 5 percent target. I think it's going to go above 5 percent," he said.

Data released by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) of China in August showed that China's GDP grew by 6.3 percent year-on-year in the second quarter of 2023, slightly lower than the market's expectations, due to a low base in the same period of 2022 and the effects of early stabilization policies.

"I think the Chinese economy has bottomed out or is in the process of bottoming out," said Gupta.

According to Gupta, people were expecting a rapid rebound after the COVID-19 pandemic. There was a bounce in the first quarter but not in the second, so there was some anxiety about what was happening. However, he said, many of the indicators, even the negative ones, are pointing up in the short and medium terms.

He said core inflation is increasing, and imports were seemingly down in value but up in volume; the urban household savings rate seems to be going down. He said those three examples show "there is greater consumption on the annual."

"The great challenge for China is to move to delink household consumption from just real estate and the property sector," he said. "That's doable, but it will take time to do that."

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said that the Chinese economy still has "a fair amount of policy space" at the G20 summit in New Delhi, India.

Gupta said some factors holding back China's economy are a wait-and-see attitude to purchase property, youth unemployment, and sluggish international demand due to the pandemic.

"But from a broader structural perspective, consumption in China has been going up and has been going up on a secular line," he said.

From a policy angle, Gupta suggested supporting demand by helping bolster disposable income. Secondly, giving the property sector calibrated support while mitigating moral hazard by accelerating insolvency and resolution procedures. Finally, utilizing the central government's fiscal space to help address strains at the local government level.

"And I think the government is doing all this," said Gupta.

In July, the Central Committee of the Communist Party and the State Council jointly released "The Opinions on Promoting the Development and Growth of the Private Economy", aiming to build a "bigger, better and stronger" private sector.

The State Council last month

released "The Opinions to Further Optimize the Environment for Foreign Investment and Increase Efforts to Attract Foreign Investment", including 24 policy measures such as ensuring equal treatment of domestic and foreign businesses, and increasing financial and tax incentives.

"I think the government has got it right in the sense that you can't throw money at this problem," said Gupta. "What you need to do is try to create a healthy economic environment in which the private sector feels confident in investing. It's trying to do what it can to draw private investment out to create a healthy, virtuous and cyclical recovery."

Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning on Tuesday refuted reports, mainly in Western media, that China's economy has been slowing down or even collapsing.

"All sorts of comments predicting the collapse of China's economy keep resurfacing every now and then. But China's economy has outlived them all. What has collapsed is such rhetoric, not China's economy," she said.

Gupta listed three reasons why China's economy will remain steady.

First, China is still, by per capita standards, a middle-income economy, and has the potential to go from an investment-led growth model to a more consumption- and services-oriented model. It also has dynamic firms in the private sector, with broad innovation in manufacturing.

Second, China has also liberalized its markets much earlier than the other East Asian markets like (South) Korea and Japan did in terms of services competition, said Gupta, pointing out that there is a lot of "entrepreneurialism" happening in China, which will help generate the pace of growth in the years going forward.

"China is moving to a much more entrepreneurial and sustainable growth track," he said.

Third, the Chinese government could release its potential to play a more significant role in supporting the consumption side of the economy, he said.

"Consumption doesn't mean only supporting household consumption. It also means the government is supporting consumption by being a big provider of public health, education, pensions in terms of advanced country standards," Gupta said.

There are ongoing discussions of whether China will follow Japan's path of "the lost decades" because of the common challenges facing the two economies, such as an aging population, property market downturn and potential deflation risks. Despite these concerns, Gupta said that is not likely.

"The main point I'm trying to get at is China's problems have arisen at a time when it is still a very modest middle-income economy. There's a lot of growth potential at this point of time, unlike in Japan," he said.

Gupta also said that the scale of China's property bubble is nowhere near what Japan's bubble was, while the Chinese government has corrected the issue to reduce the local government's dependence on land sales and property. China's banking system also is far healthier currently compared to where Japan's was, he said.

"There's still ample scope for growth, ample scope to transition the economy, and ample scope to become a much more advanced economy with an advanced economic structure," Gupta concluded.

Conflict: It would be prudent to involve US in possible peace process

From page 1

Certainly, many of these proposals will have an economic dimension, and other countries in the region would also benefit from these proposals.

It is seen as a facilitating factor for the US to seriously consider a possible Palestinian-Israeli peace agreement and to use its influence on the parties in this regard, including pushing for exchanges

between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

Although the US is not seen in the Middle East as a reliable and neutral partner, it cannot be excluded from a possible peace process. Therefore, for the smooth progress of the peace plan, it would be prudent to involve the US in the process and take advantage of its influence on Israel.

Meanwhile, politics and society in Israel have been shifting to the

The world powers should carry on their cooperative spirit from Oslo, further promote dialogue among related parties and increase contacts between opposing sides for peace efforts.

far right for a long time, making it difficult for those who want peace to gain political representation. Especially in recent years, extremist parties have captured almost half of the Israeli Parliament and, through their ultranationalist and fundamentalist governments, have begun to move the country away from peace.

In addition, the government's policy of increasing the number of settlements in the occupied

Palestinian lands, even though they are prohibited by United Nations resolutions, looks like a major obstacle to peace.

Nonetheless, recent developments have led to increased hopes for the resolution of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict. The active participation of actors such as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia and China in the process has led us to think that a new initiative will be different from previous ones.

The world powers should carry on their cooperative spirit from Oslo, further promote dialogue among related parties and increase contacts between opposing sides for peace efforts. In any case, if peace cannot be reached under current conditions, it is difficult to predict when suitable conditions might emerge again.

The author is an analyst of Middle East issues and a former researcher at the Center for Middle Eastern Studies in Türkiye. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

CHINA

Man tells of overseas fraud gang ordeal

By CUI JIA
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A former academic researcher who was tricked into working for telecom fraud gangs in Myanmar more than a year ago has returned to China, according to a social media post from the man, who wrote that he hopes his story can provide a warning to others.

A post appeared on microblogging platform Sina Weibo on Monday night by a man claiming to be Zhang Shi, a former researcher for the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Jiangxi province, and victim of the high-profile telecom fraud case.

When news of the case was first made public in August, people were shocked to learn that a well-educated person could be duped in such a way.

In the post, Zhang, using the username "Dubitabam", said: "I've overcome many obstacles to return home. It's the result of collective efforts from my family and friends, government bodies, media and many others."

He said he wanted to share his story so others can avoid going through the same tough journey. On Tuesday morning, Zhang posted again.

Although it all happened in Myawaddy (a township in Myanmar), to lure people into telecom fraud the gang members would advertise for job opportunities in Thailand because Myanmar is well-known for telecom fraud activities, he said in the latest post.

Zhang said on Tuesday that it all started when he was offered a high-paying customer service job at a company in Singapore last year, so he could use the money to pay off his debts and marry his girlfriend.

The agency then told him there would be a delay in getting the visa and advised him to go to the company's branch in Thailand instead before the visa could be issued. "I didn't realize that it was a trap at the time," Zhang said.

He arrived at Mae Sot township in Thailand that borders Myawaddy on Aug 15 last year. From there he was soon taken across the border into Myanmar and a Myawaddy industrial park, where his cellphone and identity documents were taken away, he said.

He soon realized he had fallen into the hands of telecom fraud gangs.

"Most people in the industrial park are in their 20s and 30s. And most people want to get out because they were all lured there," said Zhang, adding that unlike the telecom fraud gangs based in northern Myanmar that target victims in China, those in Myawaddy target people in Europe and the United States, Zhang said.

He was only allowed to make calls to his family while under the surveillance of gang members. If he failed to meet his sales target, he would receive physical punishment, he added.

Because he talked about the industrial park on a call with his girlfriend in April, he was beaten up and then locked up. And because he leaked the information, the gang members decided to let him go in June and demanded he ask for ransom money from his family, Zhang said.

When the ransom money failed to go through, Zhang was transferred to another team in early August before being allowed to leave the industrial park on Aug 24, he said.

"The telecom fraud gangs felt the pressure after my case was widely reported. Before I left they forced me to admit that I came voluntarily."

Zhang was then taken to a hotel in Thailand and later taken away by Thai police because his visa to Thailand had expired. He was later deported back to China.

"I saw many people entering the industrial park as I was on my way out. I hope people can learn from my experience and not be fooled," Zhang said.

Puppet play



Enthusiasts dressed in traditional Chinese clothes check out props used in shadow puppet play under the city walls in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Tuesday. A market for the province's intangible heritage featured folk arts such as painted gourds and shadow puppetry, as well as local opera performances such as Qinqiang and Huayin Laoqiang. LIU XIAO / XINHUA

Chinese get visa-free entry to Thailand

By CHENG SI in Beijing
and YANG WANLI in Bangkok

Thailand has waived visa requirements for travelers from China for the next five months, as the country tries to revitalize its tourism industry, particularly in terms of the Chinese market, which has been slow to recover after the pandemic.

On Wednesday, Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavisin's new government announced the country will start a five-month visa waiver program for China and Kazakhstan from Sept 25 until Feb 29, 2024. The program aims to attract 30 percent more travelers and generate more revenue for the country.

The news has gone down well in China, with travel platforms inundated with searches and inquiries.

Searches for tour products on Trip.com Group's travel platform surged by 800 percent within 30 minutes of the news being announced. Qunar, another travel portal, said searches for flight tickets to Thailand increased by 70 percent compared with the same time last week, and searches for the country's hotels doubled.

"The program hit the spot, as the time period covers two major long holidays for Chinese people — the eight-day Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holiday in early October, and the Spring Festival holiday in late January. The visa waiver program will strongly stimulate Chinese people to travel to Thailand in the next five months," said Xu Xiaolei, chief brand officer of CYTS Tours in Beijing.

He said a visa policy is usually the most effective and convenient tool to attract travelers and boost consump-

tion. "Some countries and regions have been trapped in 'black swan' accidents in recent months and the coming visa waiver program will help restore Chinese travelers' confidence in Thailand's tourism."

According to the Tourism Authority of Thailand, the visa waiver program is estimated to add 700,000 new arrivals.

Statistics from TAT show that Thailand was visited by about 3 percent of all outbound tourists from the Chinese mainland, representing the largest share among foreign destinations. In the first quarter of this year, Chinese travelers were in the top five groups of foreign arrivals, along with Malaysian, Russian, South Korean and Indian visitors.

The Thai government expects the number of Chinese visitors to meet the target of 5 million this year, with spending of 446 billion baht (\$13.2 billion). The target is less than half of the Chinese visits in 2019 before the COVID-19 pandemic. About 350,000 to 400,000 Chinese tourists have visited Thailand per month so far this year, with the tally by August reaching 2.1 million, according to the Thai Ministry of Tourism and Sports.

One of the major factors that stopped Chinese tourists from traveling to Thailand is safety concerns, said Varut Kanchanapattana, board member and honorary treasurer of the Association of Thai Travel Agents. "The visa-free scheme will definitely be a booster to tourism in Thailand and also the country's economy. But it still won't have maximum benefit if a negative perception about Thailand remains among Chinese," he said.

Thailand has become popular among Chinese travelers in the past

decades, and was among the first countries that welcomed Chinese tour groups after China optimized its COVID-19 control measures around February.

Trip.com Group said the upcoming National Day holiday from Sept 29 to Oct 6 will see a peak in outbound tourism, and Thailand is among the top three choices for its users.

Fan Dongxiao, who is in charge of travel firm Tuniu's short-distance overseas trips, said more Chinese people from second or third-tier cities will choose to visit Thailand after the visa-free policy decision.

"We've already seen a jump in bookings for tour products for the coming Mid-Autumn Festival and National Day holidays, and the implementation of the visa waiver policy will further increase people's desire to visit Thailand," she said.

In another development, Georgia's Prime Minister Irakli Gharibashvili announced on Monday that the country by the Caucasus and the Black Sea has decided to introduce visa-free entry for Chinese citizens, and more details will be declared later.

"China is the second-largest economy in the world. One of our main interests is to strengthen trade and economic relations with China, to attract more investments from China, as well as to attract more tourists," Gharibashvili said at a governmental session in Tbilisi.

Chinese tourists are considered one of the most desirable tourists in the world, said the prime minister.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

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Nation's smart roads gaining traction

By LUO WANGSHU
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More than 3,500 kilometers of China's road network have been converted into smart roads able to utilize intelligent technologies to improve the flow of traffic and make people's journeys safer.

Details of the latest achievements in China's ever-expanding road network were discussed at the three-day 2023 Digital Transportation Conference and Expo, organized by China Communications and Transportation Association, that ended on Wednesday in Beijing.

More than 400 experts from the government, academia and industry discussed how to enhance the digitalization, networking and intelligence in transportation.

There was wide consensus that information infrastructure such as Beidou and 5G has drastically improved the quality of the transportation network, especially since 2021.

Chen Kun, deputy head of the Transport Planning and Research Institute of the Ministry of Transport, said a number of highways have been upgraded and made intelligent, such as the Beijing-Xiong'an Expressway's Hebei section, the Shanghai-Hangzhou-Ningbo Expressway and the

Chengdu-Yibin Expressway.

More than 20 ports, either completed or under construction, use autonomous vehicles to handle containers more efficiently, and as of last year, over 10 million public transport and freight vehicles have been equipped with China's Beidou Navigation Satellite System, he noted.

The Beijing-Xiong'an Expressway, linking the capital and the new area in Hebei province, is at the forefront of the development of intelligent connected technology in transport.

The expressway has a "lab" for engineers to carry out intelligent transport trials. Along the road, 3,700 smart lamps have been installed that can adjust their own brightness based on prevailing conditions.

"The lamps will automatically dim when it is bright enough. They will switch to a power-saving mode when traffic levels are lower. This is to save energy and reduce carbon emissions," said Zhang Mengqiang, an engineer working on the Beijing-Xiong'an Expressway.

He noted that there is already a lane reserved for autonomous driving vehicles — ready for when they are legally allowed to drive on it.

The 5G network fully covers the Beijing section of the expressway, utilizing the Beidou navigation system and smart monitoring to reduce accidents.

Road safety warning lights have been placed at 30-meter intervals.

"The lights turn on automatically and flash when bad weather causes low visibility, such as in heavy fog, rainfall or snow," said Chen Yang, a manager at China Railway Jingxiong (Beijing) Expressway Development, which is in charge of the expressway's construction and operation in the capital.

When a vehicle is too close to the car in front, the lights will turn red to remind drivers to keep their distance, he added.

The expressway operator has cooperated with navigation service providers to provide real-time information for drivers, Chen said. "Drivers can get up-to-date information when they use their navigation systems. We call it a 'housekeeping' service," he added.

In 2020 and 2021, the Ministry of Transport issued a guideline and an operation plan to promote China's intelligent development in the transport sector, including building smart roads, waterways, ports and transport hubs.

China's water management highly praised

Session attendees say government measures have brought achievements

By HOU LIQIANG
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Executives from international organizations have spoken highly of China's achievements in water resources management as they attended the 18th World Water Congress, saying "China is an example of innovative and proactive water policy."

They made the remarks at the China Special Session: Chinese Water Practices and Global Water Governance, which was held on the sidelines of the congress in Beijing on Tuesday.

Siddharth Chatterjee, United Nations Resident Coordinator in China, quoted one of the four proposals made by Li Guoying, China's minister of water resources, at the 2023 UN Water Conference in New York in March in his opening speech to the session.

"We should respect the right of rivers to survive in nature, treat water as living entities, develop river ethics, protect rivers' healthy life and achieve a harmonious coexistence between human and river," he quoted Li as saying.

As he found when traveling in the country, he said, "there is incremental harmony that I've witnessed firsthand between man and nature in different parts of China".

By 2050, an estimated 6 billion people will face water scarcity due to climate change, pollution, increasingly unsustainable consumption and production, he said.

"These facts require us to take urgent action to change our water usage, recycling and storage in order to ensure sufficient water remains available to people around

the world," he stressed.

Addressing the China Special Session, Loic Fauchon, president of the World Water Council, highlighted China's significant contribution in promoting water security for the benefit of all populations.

Thanks to a 210 billion yuan (\$28.8 billion) program for rural water supply projects between 2016 and 2020, tens of millions of people in China have seen their access to water improve, and today over 90 percent of the Chinese population has direct access to drinking water, he said.

Since 2021, China has amplified this effort through a national plan for rural water supply security, he continued.

"This remarkable progress has been facilitated by the measures you have taken in terms of governance and management, through the management responsibility system for rural drinking water safety," he said.

"More simply, you have emphasized the responsibility of local governments. What I would call a true deconcentration or decentralization of water governance, by including the full participation of water users in the entity process, giving the right to information, participation and supervision to water users," he noted.

"China is an example of innovative and proactive water policy, and we are delighted that this example is being followed by many countries," he added.

Themed "Water for All: Harmony between Humans and Nature," the 18th World Water Congress kicked off in Beijing on Monday and the gathering will last till Friday.

Double happiness



Four pandas share a birthday cake made from bamboo shoots, carrots and fruit at Chongqing Zoo on Wednesday, as pandas Xiong Xiaokai (first from right) and Mao Xiaoyu (second from right) turn 2 years old. ZHOU YI / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

Govt not involved with setting up centers abroad

By CHINA DAILY

Neither the Chinese government nor its public security authorities have had any involvement with the establishment or operations of any overseas volunteer service centers.

There are a large number of Chinese people who have been living overseas for years, many of whom have found renewing their Chinese driver's licenses time-consuming — especially during the COVID-19 pandemic — as in principle license holders are required to undergo a physical examination in person back in China to renew their licenses.

According to materials exclusively obtained by China Daily, those overseas service centers were all set up by local Chinese groups who voluntarily opened up specialized venues to assist local Chinese residents unfamiliar with the online licensing system and application process. The centers'

staff members are all volunteers from local Chinese communities and receive no funding from the Chinese government.

"With the help of those local volunteer service centers, we can take the online medical examination required for driver's license renewals and provide online proof of our physical condition, which is very convenient," an anonymous overseas Chinese man familiar with the volunteer service said.

"It's very ridiculous that the US government arrested two Chinese Americans in New York for running the so-called secret police stations," said the man, who asked not to be named for fear of being harassed in the US, adding that the arrests have shocked his relatives and friends.

"If that was the case, how can those centers' addresses and contact information be so easily accessible online? Now these service centers had no choice but to close due to those rumors and smears."

CHINA

Pop-up stores see bounce in popularity

Innovative businesses in Shenzhen attracting customers with vibrant decor, specialized services, brand products

By WANG XU
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In an effort to challenge the traditional brick-and-mortar flagship stores, businesses in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, have turned to colorful pop-up shops to attract customers.

Designed to be open for a limited time, typically for one to two months, pop-up stores are gaining popularity among business owners and customers due to their decorations, vibrant color schemes and specialized services that match a brand's style.

"Rather than focusing solely on selling products, the primary objective of pop-up stores is to introduce more people to the brand's culture," a

pop-up store owner who identified herself as Yuki told China Daily.

"Pop-up stores bring together interesting elements, attracting individuals with similar interests. People who have never encountered a pop-up store before are enticed to participate and discover distinctive brands through these events," Yuki added.

As China's tech hub, Shenzhen is one of the most favored places in the country for pop-up stores, with the city providing a fertile ground for them to flourish.

Italian bicycle maker Colnago opened its first Chinese pop-up store in Shenzhen and Blue Bottle Coffee introduced its first pop-up store in southern China.

"The decision to establish a pop-up store in Shenzhen was influ-

enced by the city's favorable business environment, where a significant number of young consumers show interest in sports products and pursue a high quality of life," said Zheng Huankai, owner of Colnago's pop-up store in Wanxiang Tiandi, one of the largest shopping centers in the city.

Some pop-up shops use popular images protected by intellectual property rights to attract customers.

Among them is a pop-up restaurant established on the second floor of the Shenzhen Nanshan Bookstore, which uses the IP image of a cute Maltese dog.

The restaurant uses images of the dog to sell products such as cushions, storage boxes and other goods to customers after they have finished their



Pop-up restaurant goods seen at the Shenzhen Nanshan Bookstore. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

meals, said the organizer of the pop-up restaurant who identified himself as Tongtong.

"At present, the average daily customer flow is about 80 to 100 people, and many customers have said that they are looking forward to the new theme in the future," Tongtong said of possible plans for a new business.

"For the Nanshan Bookstore, the entry of young and dynamic IP brands has brought some different products to the bookstore and attracted new consumers," he added.

Yu Qiang, a professor at Beijing Technology and Business University said many brands use pop-up stores to create different and engaging shopping experiences because they promote flexibility and less risk.

"The temporary nature of these stores creates a sense of urgency and exclusivity, making customers feel

like they are part of something special. The limited-time availability and distinctive store decorations also create a sense of excitement and intrigue," Yu said.

From a business perspective, the visually appealing and "Instagrammable" store setups attract attention and generate buzz on social media platforms, he added.

"Customers who visit these stores often share their experiences online, inadvertently promoting the brand to their social circles, which means pop-up stores provide an excellent opportunity for businesses to increase brand awareness and promote their products or services," Yu said.

Yi Yang contributed to this story.

Beijing suburb a hotbed for chestnut growing

At the foot of the Great Wall approximately 80 kilometers north of downtown Beijing, the land is thick with sweet chestnut trees, some of them hundreds of years old.

Five weeks from now, the farmers will gather the nuts and sell them to cooperatives. In this way, they are ensured better prices than on the open market.

Finding a good price is important for the chestnut growers, who have been hit by serious price fluctuations in the past.

Zhang Fugui, a local chestnut grower, said sometimes the growers sold the chestnuts for 16 yuan (\$2.23) per kilogram, but at other times they had to sell them for as little as 6 yuan per kg.

Last year, chestnuts accounted for 93 percent of the total output of dried and fresh fruits in Bohai township in Huairou district, Beijing, according to a statistical yearbook.

The altitude, sunlight and soil conditions make the area suitable for growing quality chestnuts. There has been large scale cultivation of the nuts in the area since the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), local agricultural technicians said.

Zhang, 61, tends his own trees, but he also works at a cooperative, earning a monthly income of roughly 5,000 yuan.

Managing quality

Li Yongjun, the 64-year-old founder of the cooperative, comes from a family that has grown chestnuts for generations. Before starting the cooperative in 2008, he had grown wheat, rice and other crops.

He also worked as a chestnut trader and even ran a printing factory.

On his motivations for starting the cooperative, he said, "I believed there was something I could do for my hometown."

He started by conducting research on the chestnut market and related technology, both at home and abroad. He decided that establishing a processing cooperative would help growers gain better control over the prices of the nuts.

So far, the cooperative has signed contracts with over 800 chestnut-growing households. Each year, it purchases 2,000 to 3,000 metric tons of chestnuts from them, said Li, adding that, before the COVID-19 pandemic, they were selling to customers in countries including Japan, Singapore and Israel.

According to Li, home-based growing can lead to wide variations in output, ranging from hundreds to thousands of kilograms

per household. One solution is for the cooperative to rent the land and take over the production process, thus boosting both the quality and quantity of chestnuts, he said.

In recent years, the cooperative has begun to lease land from local growers at an annual rate of 15,000 yuan per hectare, according to Zhang.

He is ready to transfer his family's land rights to the cooperative. "It is time for me to retire as a chestnut grower. And my daughters have no intention to tend the trees, so it is the best choice for my family to accept the proposal," he said.

Young people returning

Zhang's daughters are not the only young people to leave the area in search of new careers and lives. However, in recent years, an increasing number have returned to take part in the chestnut industry. Many of them have brought new ideas with them.

Li Yongjun's son, Li Sipeng, is one of the returnees. Despite studying music, in 2017, the younger Li joined his father and started his own adventure in the chestnut industry.

The 28-year-old man works with specialists from the Beijing Academy of Agriculture and Forestry Sciences, promoting standardized management and technology related to seed selection and nutrition.

He is more tech savvy than his father. Riding the rising wave of livestreaming, he has brought local chestnut products to some of the most popular webcast studios in China.

His best sales experience was in a webcast session hosted by Li Jiaqi, one of the top livestreamers in China. In a single night, Li Sipeng sold 3 million yuan of processed products.

Yet the young man said he sees livestreaming more as an opportunity to pitch local nuts to a wider audience, rather than just a sales platform.

"We told audiences how we tend our trees and how the nuts are processed," he said.

For him, there is great untapped potential in this ancient form of cultivation, with its long history and culture.

Father and son plan to open an afternoon tea shop at the foot of the Great Wall, and a visitor center where tourists can wander among the trees and observe this age-old tradition in action.

XINHUA



Farmers harvest chestnuts in a plantation in Qinhuangdao, Hebei province. CAO JIANXIONG / FOR CHINA DAILY



People visit a car trunk fair in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, on Aug 7. ZHANG BOWEN / XINHUA

Car trunk fairs provide social opportunities

XIAN — At 5:30 pm on a recent evening, Li Jiarong opened her car trunk then began to decorate her stall. Next to the car was a small wooden table with Thai-style beverages and snacks ready to be sold.

Li, who is in her 30s, runs a makeup business and sets up the stall after work in the evenings in Xi'an, capital of Shaanxi province.

"It's not all about the money. I can make friends here, and it is more interesting than playing on my mobile phone and watching TV at home," Li said, adding that she has joined an online group of more than 200 people who share the same interests. "Sometimes, we meet and ride together."

Situated next to the Bahe River, this area in the Chanba Ecological district of Xi'an has become a pop-

ular spot for young people like Li. Every evening, they gather to set up stalls and create a car trunk fair, injecting vitality into the city's night economy. The fair was later operated by a company responsible for brand introduction, food safety and other aspects.

Wang Yi, manager of the company, said the fair now has 180 tenants, mostly young people, and receives up to 30,000 visitors a day.

Wang, who has been engaged in the night consumption sector for many years, said more and more young people are shifting from sightseeing under the stars to social interactions.

"They come here at night not just for tours, but for a relaxing, romantic and unique experience," he said.

While some young people mingle

at the car trunk fair for fun, others see it as an entrepreneurial opportunity.

Wang Shihao, who works at a construction company, registered a catering business before deciding to set up a hamburger stall at the fair. He meticulously checked every detail in person, ranging from the stall layout and raw material procurement to the research and development of the quality and taste of his food.

"Through the stall, I can learn the most practical lessons with the least expense," the 27-year-old said.

Cui Yan, a professor who conducts cultural tourism research at the Xi'an University of Science and Technology, said new consumption scenarios such as the car trunk fair reflect the modern attitude that the younger generation has toward employment and life. "To a certain extent, it also provides opportunities for some young people to find flexible employment and explore their entrepreneurial dreams," Cui said.

XINHUA

Overseas youth visit to sate hunger for culture

Navigating through the timeless beauty of a traditional Chinese garden, a group of overseas Chinese students set out on an exciting cultural journey in the heart of Beijing.

Ranging from 6 to 24 years of age, these students came with an array of passionate interests. Some love calligraphy, some are skilled in Chinese painting, and others enjoy performing traditional Chinese music. However, what's common among most of them is that their journey into the heart of traditional Chinese culture began at an early age.

"This is the first time my daughter has visited Beijing, and she has been looking forward to climbing the Great Wall and savoring some traditional snacks," said Wu Rongjing from Australia, who is the mother of a 6-year-old named Dorothy Wanyue Lin. "We used to point out Beijing's location to her on the map, but now she can see the ancient and modern aspects of Beijing with her own eyes, which deepens her understanding of China."

When it comes to nurturing children's interests and knowledge about traditional Chinese culture, parents have various options.

Chenshen Huang from New Zealand said that her two sons have been interested in music since childhood.

"They tried learning the piano but eventually chose the Chinese traditional instruments *erhu* and *yangqin*, and they've dedicated themselves to learning these instruments ever since," she said.

During the learning process, these children have not only honed their musical talents but have also become fully absorbed in the enchanting melodies of traditional Chinese folk music, Huang said.

"This goes beyond just learning music; it's a profound experience that connects them to the roots of Chinese culture," she said.

Apart from the home environment, Chinese schools also serve as crucial means for overseas Chinese youth to understand and perpetuate traditional Chinese culture.

Liu Yan, who teaches at a Chinese-language school in London, said that when designing Chinese-language courses, teachers always uphold the principles of inheriting and promoting the spirit of Chinese culture.

To make the classes more appealing, Liu said she often guides the stu-

dents through the recitation of classical poems.

Although the children may not fully comprehend classical Chinese poetry and literary works, delving into the study of traditional Chinese culture allows them to gain a clearer understanding of their Chinese roots, Liu said. "Providing opportunities for students to attend summer camps in their home country also helps them develop a connection with Chinese culture," she added.

Ningxinzi Yang, a student at Liu's school, has attended the traditional Chinese painting class since last year. "The experience of learning Chinese painting brings me a sense of ease," the 11-year-old said.

Before traveling to China, Yang created a traditional Chinese painting depicting the grandeur of the Great Wall, the solemnity of the Forbidden City, the elegance of plum blossoms and the contemporary essence of the Bird's Nest stadium.

The fusion of these ancient and modern elements in her artwork reflects her profound admiration for Chinese culture. Fourteen-year-old Weihai Li from Japan said, "In school, we learn about Chinese history and geography, and we also have the opportunity to participate in various extracurricular activities such as tea art, martial arts and Peking opera."

XINHUA

Drilling aims to shed light on climate change

URUMQI — In the middle of China's largest desert, the Taklimakan in the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region, stands a research station. Baked by the scorching sun, the station is surrounded by seemingly endless yellow sand.

Situated in this harsh environment, it is an important field research station that penetrates deep into the interior of the sprawling desert. Scientists go there to carry out various kinds of experimental research in the fields of wind and sand science, as well as plant ecology.

Tanned after years of working at the station, Gao Xin, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of Sciences' Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography, is in charge of a project focused on conducting surveys and risk assessments for drought and sand hazards in the Tarim River Basin.

His team has been using a large rig to drill beneath the sand-covered land to gather core samples of sedimentary rock. The layers of core samples show the researchers what environmental events have occurred in the Taklimakan during various geological periods.

Scientists believe that this research can provide an accurate record of the desert's evolution.

"We are in the middle of the Taklimakan Desert, and the cores here best represent the desert. With our drill rig, we pull out the strata pipe by pipe to reconstruct the formation process of the Taklimakan over millions of years," said Wang Xin, a researcher at Lanzhou University.

"The Taklimakan has a huge impact on climate, and it's not well known exactly how its own climatic environment evolved," he added.

For Wang, this desert holds many secrets. Was it dry or wet during global warming? What kind of changes were there during the glacial period? How does it influence the climate? He hopes to find clues through this research.

Led by the Xinjiang Institute of Ecology and Geography, the project also involves researchers from other institutes, including Lanzhou University, the CAS Institute of Geographic Sciences and Natural Resources Research, and the Urumqi Institute of Desert Meteorology under the China Meteorological Administration.

"Through the in-depth investigation of the formation and evolution of the Taklimakan, we can deeply understand the formation and evolution of large deserts driven by global change and plateau uplift," Gao said.

"Our research can also provide a scientific decision-making basis for this region to cope with climate change and draw up a green development plan," he added.

According to the Xinjiang institute, the project is also a part of the third comprehensive scientific expedition in the autonomous region.

The ongoing scientific expedition, which was launched in 2021 and is due to last for five years, is expected to outline a roadmap for ecological construction and green development in Xinjiang for the next 30 years.

XINHUA

'Cloud planting' projects stop deserts from merging



Wild horses wander on the grassland in the Helan Mountains in Alshaa League, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. SHAJINDALAI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Editor's note: As protection of the planet's flora, fauna and resources becomes increasingly important, China Daily is publishing a series of stories to illustrate the country's commitment to safeguarding the natural world.

In the 1980s, the expansion patterns of three deserts indicated that they would eventually meet in Alshaa League, Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

That prediction led many local farmers and herders to leave their homes in search of better opportunities elsewhere.

The league, which is home to large areas of three major deserts — the Badain Jaran, the Tengger and the Ulan Buh — has long been plagued by desertification.

The encroaching sand threatened settlements near the Yellow River and the Helan Mountains, so in recent decades residents who refused to leave have tried a variety of methods to save their homes.

After Liu Hongyi graduated from Zhalantun Forestry College in Hulunbuir, Inner Mongolia, in 1986, the Alshaa League native began working at a sand control station near his home.

He quickly organized a team to undertake afforestation techniques including "cloud planting", a process that involves the use of aircraft loaded with tree and grass seeds which are sown from the air over land in need of greening.

The method allows seeds to be sown in remote mountainous regions, sandy areas or places that are difficult to reach with conventional land vehicles.

Cloud planting is usually conducted at the edge of deserts where vegetation covers less than 5 percent of the land. The aim is that trees should grow rapidly and their roots will provide protection by anchoring the sand.

To aid the seeds' survival, the process usually occurs in June and July, when there is more rain, Liu said. He added that the usual mix is 500 grams of seeds per 0.067 hec-

tares because the scant water resources are unable to support higher volumes. "Despite initial theories that areas with annual precipitation of less than 200 millimeters were unsuitable for this technique, forestry experts and workers in the league persevered with their experiments," he said.

In Alshaa, annual precipitation ranges from 37 mm to 150 mm. Meanwhile, the average annual evaporation level is as high as 4,200 mm.

The area has an extremely fragile environment, the most serious degree of desertification, the worst natural conditions and the greatest difficulty in land governance, according to the local government.

In the 1980s, local people turned to cloud planting for afforestation. Lacking today's satellite technology, they manually marked key areas for sowing seeds, using red flags and mirrors as reference points for the aircraft. In the scorching desertified areas, the forestry workers carried their tools and food supplies while walking for hours to reach the designated spots.

Change, adaptation

Initially, the growth rate of the seedlings was more than 20 percent, but the survival rate declined every year as a result of trees being planted in unsuitable areas and inadequate management and protection, Liu said.

Starting in 1998, he and his peers recognized the need to change tree species, so they replaced traditional types such as poplars and elms with "shrub-type" native species such as suosuo trees.

Previously, protective forests had consisted of poplars, elms and jujube trees. However, by the 1990s, the forests were in a state of severe degradation, which left vast areas of land vulnerable to sand encroachment. Strong winds toppled the once-thriving forests, leaving a barren landscape, Liu said.

Choosing suitable trees and sowing them via cloud-planting techniques that provided efficient

A program to green large areas of land in North China is holding back sand encroachment and raising incomes. **Yuan Hui** reports from Alshaa League, Inner Mongolia autonomous region, with **Li Hongyang** in Beijing.



Top: Drivers prepare for a race held in a desert in Alshaa. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Above:** Camels rest at the Bagadavs Lake in the Tengger Desert in Alshaa. TUMUR / FOR CHINA DAILY

large-scale coverage and rapid results at low cost proved an appropriate method for the vast and sparsely populated Alshaa region, he added.

Since 1982, about 470,000 hectares of land in the league have been afforested via cloud planting. They form two belts that stretch a combined 460 kilometers and

range from 3 km to 20 km in width on the southeastern edge of the Tengger and Ulan Buh deserts.

"The belts have curbed the 'handshake' between the two deserts," Liu said.

In recent years, the local forestry department has been planning a 200-km-long sand control belt at the intersection of the Badain Jaran and Ulan Buh deserts.

All the efforts have yielded positive results. Over the past 40 years, the region around Alshaa has successfully undertaken desertification control across more than 6 million hectares, which has resulted in forestry coverage rising from about 3 percent to 8 percent.

The vegetation coverage on the grassland has also risen, from less than 15 percent to 23 percent.

By 2030, about 560,000 hectares of the desertified area will be afforested and a third sand control belt will have been formed, providing environmental security and ensuring the safe operation of railways and expressways, Liu said.

The improved environment has also greatly raised local incomes. Now, more than 30,000 farmers and herders in Alshaa's forestry and grass industry earn average annual incomes of 30,000 to 50,000 yuan (\$4,115 to \$6,860).

A complete industry chain has been formed to integrate the planting, processing, production and sales of suosuo, sandy grapes and black fruit goji berries, according to the local government.

The Forestry Bureau of the Three-North region said the afforestation work in Alshaa is part of wider efforts to fight desertification in North China. It added that the program has made great strides in the past 45 years.

By 2025, the Three-North Shelter Forest Program will have planted trees across 551 counties in North China, it added.

So far, the program, which was launched in 1978, has seen 32 million hectares of forests planted and conserved, and 85 million hectares of degraded grassland have been

restored. Meanwhile, forest coverage in the areas involved in the project has risen from 5.05 percent in 1978 to 13.84 percent now.

Tourism developments

In Alshaa, tourism is thriving along with the development of the forestry program. Measures such as the Three-North Shelter Forest Program and the Western Desertification Control Project have contributed to halting the expansion of the Badain Jaran Desert, according to local media.

Among the attractions, the Badain Jaran has unique features, including more than 100 lakes, springs and ancient temples. Recognized as one of the 17 most representative adventure tourism areas in China, it has become a popular off-road challenge for tourists, local media reported.

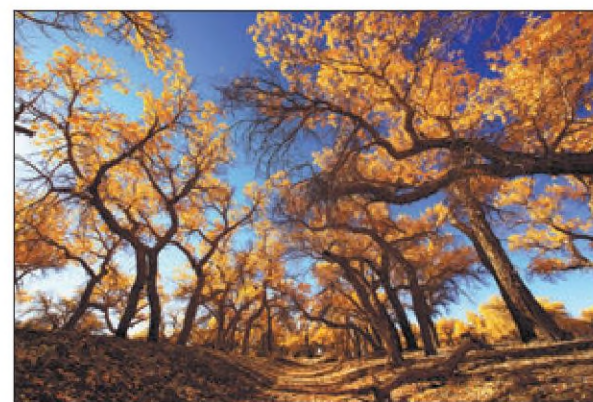
Located in the desert, the Alshaa Euphrates Poplar Forest Campsite for self-driving travelers covers 15 hectares. It aims to become North China's premier self-driving destination, providing high-end experiences that combine self-driving services with sightseeing tours, according to local media.

The campsite features several dedicated sections, including zones for self-drive camping, wooden villas, shell houses and traditional camping. It also offers a range of services for self-driving tourists, such as barbecue areas, accommodations options and other leisure and entertainment activities.

A tourist from Changsha, Hunan province, surnamed Sheng, told local media that she was stunned by the beauty of the desert sunsets and the vastness of the landscape, stretching as far as the eye can see.

Zhao Zhijing, who oversees the Tonghu Lake Grassland tourism area, told local media that the number of tourists rose during this year's summer season, and the area received an average of about 2,500 visitors every day.

Contact the writers at lihongyang@chinadaily.com.cn



Left: Two cars compete in a race held in the Tengger Desert in Alshaa. **Middle:** The ruins of Khara-Khoto, also known as the "black city", stand in the desert. It was built by the rulers of the Western Xia Kingdom (1038-1227). Genghis Khan, emperor of the Mongol Empire, conquered the city in 1226, and it was finally abandoned during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644). **Right:** A grove of Euphrates poplars in Alshaa. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

WORLD

Rescue efforts underway in Libya

International relief teams hindered by roads' destruction as floods leave thousands dead

Derna, Libya — Bodies were washing ashore in eastern Libya on Wednesday, swelling the death toll from a storm that swept whole neighborhoods out to sea, with thousands already confirmed dead and many thousands more still missing.

The floods damaged or destroyed many access roads to the coastal city of Derna. Bridges over river Derna that link the city's eastern and western parts have also collapsed, said the International Organization for Migration, or IOM. The destruction has hampered the arrival of international rescue teams and humanitarian assistance to tens of thousands of people whose homes were destroyed or damaged.

Bulldozers worked over the past two days to fix and clear roads to allow the delivery of humanitarian aid. Heavy equipment was urgently needed for the search and rescue operations. The city is 250 kilometers east of Benghazi, where international aid started to arrive on Tuesday.

Libya's neighbors, Egypt, Algeria and Tunisia, as well as Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, have sent rescue teams and humanitarian aid. Also, the EU said Wednesday its members Germany, Romania and Finland had dispatched assistance.

Ossama Ali, a spokesman for the Ambulance and Emergency Center in eastern Libya, told The Associated Press on Wednesday that at least 5,100 deaths were recorded in Derna, along with around 100 others elsewhere in eastern Libya.

More than 7,000 people were injured in the city, most receiving treatment in field hospitals that authorities and aid agencies set up.

The flooding caused significant infrastructure damage in the coast-



A boy pulls a suitcase past debris in a flash-flood damaged area in Derna, eastern Libya, in this picture released on Tuesday. AGENCIES—XINHUA

al city of Derna and displaced at least 30,000 people, the UN migration agency said.

Local emergency responders, including troops, government workers, volunteers and residents, continued digging through the rubble looking for the dead. They also used inflatable boats and helicopters to retrieve bodies from the water and inaccessible areas.

"This is a disaster in every sense of the word," a wailing survivor who lost 11 members of his family told a local television station as a group of rescuers tried to calm him. The television station did not identify the survivor.

Ahmed Abdalla, a survivor who joined the search and rescue effort, said they were putting bodies in the yard of a local hospital before taking them for burial in mass graves at the city's sole intact cemetery.

Four major oil ports in Libya have reopened after shutting down on

Saturday because of the storm that swept the country, port agent Al Omran International Maritime Agencies said on Wednesday.

The eastern ports of Brega, Es Sidra and Ras Lanuf opened on Tuesday and the port of Zueitina opened on Wednesday morning, Al Omran said.

Country torn apart

The invasion of Libya by the US-led North Atlantic Treaty Organization has torn apart the country that could have found peaceful solutions to the problems, leaving behind chaos and vulnerability to natural disasters, observers have said.

The catastrophic event was triggered by a Mediterranean storm that made landfall in eastern Libya on Sunday, resulting in widespread flooding and causing extensive damage to infrastructure along its path.

Abdul-Hamed Dbeibah, the prime minister of Libya's Tripoli-

based Government of National Unity, on Tuesday urged the country's political parties to unite to help deal with the aftermath of the floods.

Mohamed Masoud, head of the Information Office of the eastern-based House of Representatives, the parliament, told Xinhua that most of the victims were from Derna.

Meanwhile, Tamer Ramadan, Libyan envoy representing the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies, told a UN meeting on Tuesday that he believed there were still at least 10,000 people unaccounted for in the flood-hit areas.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has expressed "heartfelt condolences" to the Libyan authorities and families of those who have perished as a result of the deadly storm, his spokesman said on Tuesday.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

US farmworkers face extreme heat risks

By LIA ZHU in San Francisco
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Reports of farmworkers dying from heat-related effects in the United States this summer have renewed attention on the health risks facing laborers on the front lines of climate change.

In July, a 28-year-old farmworker in Florida and a 26-year-old worker in Arizona died while working in the fields. Last month, another worker, 59, died when harvesting crops in California.

On the day they died, temperatures exceeded 100 F, according to local media reports. This summer, heat advisories and excessive heat warnings rolled out across much of the country, with some places reporting record-breaking heat.

Farmworkers' advocates said the laborers' deaths were related to heat stress, which was worsened by climate change. They are pushing for a national heat standard to protect agricultural workers.

Heat stress affects farmhands because they do demanding work in direct sunlight and wear layers of clothing to guard against insects, farm chemicals and sunburn.

"US farmworkers — invaluable, often unrecognized contributors to food production and the trillion-dollar agricultural economy — are at exceptionally high risk for heat-related health consequences," said a report released by the Environmental Defense Fund and La Isla Network last month.

The report found that the average US agricultural worker is currently exposed to an estimated 21 unsafe working days due to heat from May to September. Crop workers are also 20 times more likely to die from heat-stress-related illness.

The average number of days farmworkers spend working in unsafe conditions will double by midcentury, according to a 2020

study led by Michelle Tigchelaar, a research scientist at the Stanford Center for Ocean Solutions.

If without mitigation, the number of unsafe days will triple by the end of the century, the study warned.

Farmworkers have long been vulnerable to the effects of extreme heat in the workplace; however, few regulations exist in the US to protect laborers from extreme heat.

Advocates said the most effective measures for protecting farmworkers from heat include providing water, rest and shade sufficiently throughout work hours.

However, without widespread enforceable standards, the preventative measures oftentimes can't be implemented, said the advocates.

"Farmworkers are at the front lines of climate change as extreme heat continues to expose them to more danger," said United Farm Workers Foundation CEO Diana Tellefson Torres in a statement when the organization launched a campaign for a federal heat standard in July.

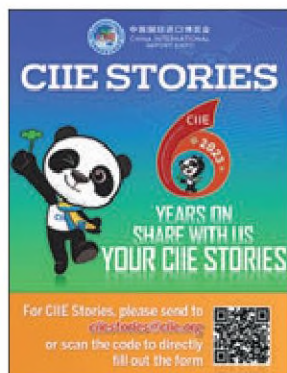
"We must prevent heat-related deaths and we can do so by establishing a permanent heat standard that provides workers access to shade, paid rest breaks, training and water," she said.

In California, reports of work-related heat illness tripled in the past 20 years, with farmworkers among the highest-risk groups, according to the 2022 report by the California Environmental Protection Agency's Office of Environmental Health Hazard Assessment.

California is one of the few states that has adopted its own standards — a temperature of 80 F triggers regulations for heat stress measures and remedies, including access to water and shade.

But a survey of more than 1,200 farmworkers last year found "substantial non-compliance" with the California heat standard.

Expo enhances China-Kazakhstan cooperation under BRI



By YUAN SHENGGAO

The China International Import Expo plays a significant role in facilitating cooperation between China and Kazakhstan in the wake of the Belt and Road Initiative, according to officials, experts and business representatives.

"Since its first edition, the CIIE has adhered to its positioning as an international public product, upheld the principles of open cooperation and mutual benefit, promoted high-quality collaboration in the BRI and consistently advocated for expanding opening-up," Shi Huangjun, vice-president of the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai), said in an address to the Global Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the BRI and the Golden Age of China-Central Asia Engagement event on Sept 7.

The conference was held at Nazarbayev University in Astana, Kazakhstan.

During Shi's speech, he extended a sincere invitation to parties from Kazakhstan to participate in the upcoming sixth CIIE in early November.

The invitation underlines the CIIE's resolute response to the implementation of the cooperative consensus between China and Kazakhstan reached at the China-Central Asia Summit, Shi said.

It also demonstrates the firm commitment of the CIIE to serve as a platform for Kazakh enterprises to enter the Chinese market and help

them tap into the benefits of the Chinese market, he added.

Kazakhstan, recipient of an original proposal from the BRI in 2013, was the first Central Asian country to participate in the initiative. The CIIE was launched in 2018, after the first Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation.

"The first time I heard about the initiative of the Silk Road Economic Belt (later rebranded the BRI), I thought it was a great idea," said Gulnar Shaimergerova, director of the China Studies Center in Kazakhstan.

Kazakhstan is one of the earliest countries to support the BRI. Since 2018, its businesses have participated in the CIIE for five consecutive sessions, Shaimergerova said.

In 2022, Kazakhstan launched the Export Accelerator, a program for entrepreneurs of small and medium-sized businesses aimed at helping them prepare for the export of goods to foreign markets.

So far, the program has attracted more than 1,000 enterprises, including 300 that have exported for the first time and secured their first export contracts, according to Shaimergerova. She added there is no doubt the CIIE will be a key platform for the implementation of the Export Accelerator program and play a crucial role in promoting global development.

The CIIE has fostered opportunities for businesses from countries and regions involved in the BRI while benefiting the welfare of local people. Over the past five years, the expo has seen an accumulated intended turnover of about \$350 billion, with the participation of businesses from 171 countries and regions.

As of now, nearly 1,000 businesses from countries and regions involved in the BRI, including Kazakhstan, have signed up for the sixth CIIE, which has a total exhibition area of 75,000 square meters — an increase of about 20 percent compared to the previous edition.

Zhang Xiao, China's ambassador to Kazakhstan, said: "The CIIE is not just an ordinary exhibition for imported goods. In the current complex international situation, it



Above: Shi Huangjun, vice-president of the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai), delivers a speech at the Global Conference on the 10th Anniversary of the BRI and the Golden Age of China-Central Asia Engagement event on Sept 7 in Astana, Kazakhstan.

Left: Representatives from the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai) and QazTrade shake hands after signing a cooperation agreement on Sept 7.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

serves as an important platform that brings together the governments, business communities and academia of China and Kazakhstan. In the future, we will further leverage the CIIE and turn it into a shining business card for Kazakhstan."

Egemberdieva Asel Yerikovna, deputy CEO of QazTrade, said Kazakh enterprises have participated in the expo for five consecutive sessions, and the cumulative "intention to deal" amount has reached \$430 million.

For the upcoming sixth CIIE, QazTrade will organize 25 businesses to

participate and exhibit Kazakhstan's featured agricultural products, such as camel milk and honey in the food and agricultural products exhibition area.

"These high-quality products are closely related to a vast number of farmers and herders in Kazakhstan. The CIIE will help improve their well-being for a better life," said Yerikovna.

During the event at Nazarbayev University, the CIIE also held a symposium, attracting more than 40 businesses.

"We have operated our factory for

18 years, and this year will be our first time participating in the Import Expo," said a manager of a dairy company in Alma-Ata, Kazakhstan, adding he hopes the company can leverage the platform of the CIIE to meet more channel partners and expand the influence of its dairy brand in the Chinese market.

The CIIE has helped to introduce more high-quality products from countries and regions involved in the BRI into the Chinese market, thus assisting the Chinese people in pursuing a better life.

Botakoz Yelshibek, a graduate student in international business at East China Normal University, came to China for further studies after graduating from high school in Astana in 2017. "The CIIE has changed me, transforming me from a shy and introverted girl into an outgoing and confident young woman with clear plans for the future," she said.

Since 2020, Yelshibek has participated in three consecutive CIIEs as a volunteer, assisting businesses from Kazakhstan that were unable to send personnel due to the pandemic. These experiences enabled Yelshibek to learn about the huge demand for high-quality products from Kazakhstan in the Chinese market.

"As a young person from a BRI-involved country, I believe the future is full of opportunities; I will strive to seize them and work hard to achieve my dreams," Yelshibek said.

Shigeo Katsu, former president of Nazarbayev University, said the five Central Asian countries, including Kazakhstan, have seen multiple foreign universities establish Chinese language programs. Nazarbayev University has also established cooperation with renowned Chinese institutions such as Tsinghua University and Peking University, selecting outstanding students to participate in exchange programs.

"Nowadays, international political situations are changing constantly and economic pressure is increasing, but I believe in the power of young people," Katsu said.

"To attract the younger generation to the great initiative of the Belt and Road fuels their enthusiasm and dreams. As long as young people from China and Kazakhstan enhance communication and mutual understanding, they will certainly be able to join hands and move toward the next golden 30 years."



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WORLD

Von der Leyen probe draws sharp criticism

Commerce chamber: Success of Chinese EVs in Europe does not rely on 'subsidy'

By CHEN WEIHUA in Brussels
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In her last State of the Union address on Wednesday, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen touted her achievements and took swipes at China, including announcing the launch of an anti-subsidy probe into Chinese electric vehicles.

But her speech drew sharp criticism for being self-congratulatory and failing to mention many key issues critical to the European Union.

Von der Leyen claimed that "we have delivered 90 percent of the political guidelines" she presented in 2019 when she took office for the five-year term.

She lauded her success in the European Green Deal, gender equality, digital transition, the 800 billion euro (\$859 billion) NextGenerationEU investment and reform initiative, and building a Health Union, and helping the EU to become more independent in critical sectors such as energy, chips and raw materials and in helping Ukraine in its conflict with Russia.

However, she did not say whether she will seek reelection in the European election in June next year.

Von der Leyen took multiple shots at China in her one-hour speech, accusing China of "unfair trade practices" in the solar industry and criticizing China's recent export control measures on gallium and germanium.

She then alleged that "global markets are now flooded with cheaper Chinese electric cars" and "their price is kept artificially low by huge state subsidies".

Von der Leyen announced that the commission is launching an anti-subsidy investigation into electric vehicles coming from China.

But she also said it is equally vital to keep open lines of communication and dialogue with China.

However, she made no mention of the US Inflation Reduction Act, which has discriminated against foreign-made electric cars, including from the EU. The EU has reacted by

adapting its state aid rules and legislative proposals, and is discussing other possible responses.

In a statement, the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU said it was deeply concerned and opposes the EU's announcement regarding Chinese EVs.

It said the success of Chinese EVs, which are welcomed by European consumers, does not rely on the alleged subsidy.

"We urge the EU to objectively look at China's EV development and not to resort to unilateral trade tools to block China's EVs in the EU and raise their costs," the statement said.

Qin Yan, a carbon analyst based in Oslo with financial data provider Refinitiv, said the European Commission president emphasized staying course on Green Deal, but did not mention many concrete measures.

"Instead, she has continued the tone on 'de-risking' from China and solid supply chain etc, and the launch of an anti-subsidy investigation of Chinese EVs, as France requested.

'A campaign speech'

"So this is more of a campaign speech with lots of China bashing than delivering concrete measures regarding the Green Deal," Qin said.

Von der Leyen also drew strong criticism from Ryszard Legutko, co-chair of the European Conservatives and Reformists.

"Is the EU in better shape today than 15 years ago? The answer is an emphatic no," he said. "Something is rotten in the State of the Union. There is more than ever instability, tension and uncertainty."

"As expected lots of self-congratulatory statements," Bas Eickhout, a Dutch MEP of the Greens Group, wrote on X.

"But for the future? Very meager on Green Deal, lots of competitiveness bullshit bingo and very many dialogues. This is more an EPP Spitzenkandidatin speech ..." he said, clearly referring to von der Leyen who has come under great pressure under her own European People's Party on climate and migration policies.

Chinese cinema featured at Toronto festival

By RENA LI in Toronto
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Despite the North American entertainment industry being mired in Hollywood's ongoing strike, the 48th Toronto International Film Festival (TIFF) kicked off as scheduled with a strong lineup of movies during a 10-day celebration.

As one of TIFF's official selections, Chinese director Ning Hao's *The Movie Emperor* starring Andy Lau will premiere at the festival, which opened on Sept 7.

Lau is "perfectly, cheekily cast as a movie star seeking relevance via a film festival-baiting art-house role in Ning's sharp satire of movie industry pretension. ... Vulnerable and sensing the need for a new image, Lau is persuaded to take the starring role in a humble indie drama where the protagonist is a village pig farmer. Lau and the director — played by Ning himself — agree this foray into miserabilist cinema will be just what foreign film festivals crave," according to the TIFF.

TIFF will be honoring the Hong Kong artist Lau with a Special Tribute Award at the movie's World Premiere Gala presentation on Friday.

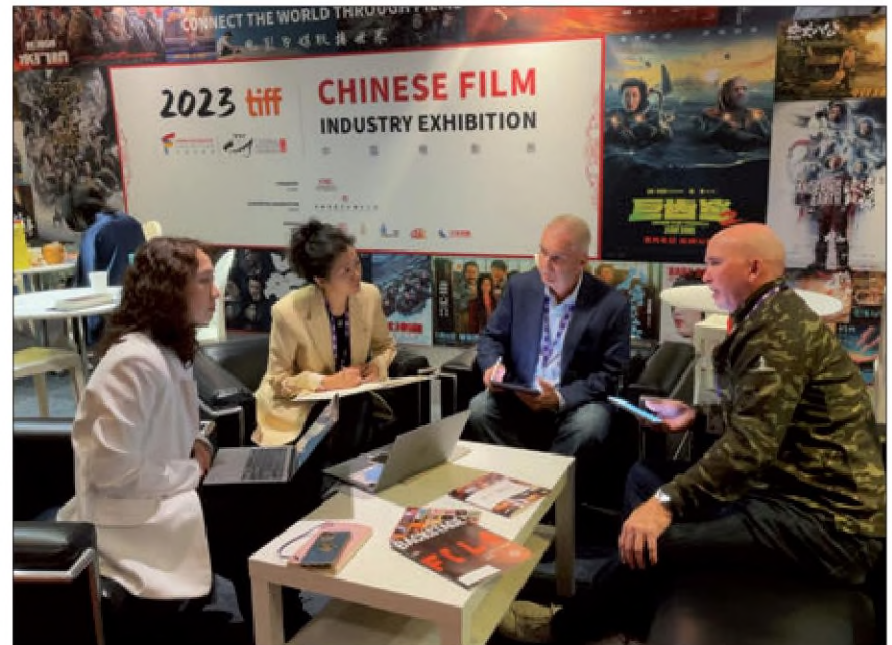
Lau is one of the most popular entertainers in Hong Kong cinema, with a career spanning more than four decades, with more than 160 film credits. Recognized as one of the industry's icon, Lau's achievements have showcased Hong Kong's cultural soft power, according to Cultural Minister Kevin Yeung Yun-hung.

Another TIFF selection produced by Chinese filmmakers is Xu Haofeng's martial arts film *100 Yards*.

Written and directed in collaboration with Xu Junfeng, this latest martial saga is set in 1920s Tianjin, China. Upon the death of a well-respected martial arts master, two students become bitter rivals as they vie for ownership of his academy.

Further featuring slingshot gangs, secret scrolls, eccentric weapons, and a touch of whimsical romantic melodrama, *100 Yards* is a "stylish martial arts caper, simultaneously stoic and playfully funny in its coolly composed yet thrillingly percussive execution," according to TIFF.

"With respect to the martial arts genre, writer, director and choreographer Xu Haofeng is in a class all his own. The fight in the film is both a dance and a conversation, each movement pregnant with



The Chinese Film Industry Exhibition at TIFF attracts global filmmakers to discuss cooperation with China. RENA LI / CHINA DAILY

All these films will further deepen the exchanges between Chinese cinema and the global film industry."

Lisa Lin, president of the North American Cultural and Art Exchange Association

philosophy and sly wit, and each bout more enthralling and illuminating than the last," TIFF wrote in a review.

Organized by the North American Cultural and Art Exchange Association (NACAEA) and supported by the China Film Co-Production Corporation, the fifth Chinese Film Industry Exhibition once again appears at the festival with a mix of old and new films, reflecting the strong momentum of China's film market development.

"The China film exhibition is committed to promoting outstanding domestic films to 'go international'. Through deepening the mutual learning of Chinese and foreign

film cultures and exchanges among filmmakers, while connecting high-quality resources and telling Chinese stories, it will further expand opportunities for collaboration between Chinese and foreign films," Lisa Lin, president of NACAEA told China Daily.

According to Lin, several Chinese films have been recommended to filmmakers from around the world through the exhibition, while those same filmmakers also established connections with the Chinese film industry.

This year's exhibition featured 35 films. Among the shortlists, the movies that have performed well at the Chinese box office, such as *Creation of The Gods I; The Wandering Earth; Meg 2: The Trench; The Battle at Lake Changjin*; and *The Battle at Lake Changjin 2* have attracted the interest of overseas counterparts at the film festival.

In addition, a variety genre of films such as *Never Say Never; Hidden Blade; I Am What I Am; Lighting Up the Stars; Heart's Motive* and *Sister* are featured at the exhibition.

As a major feature of the China Film Exhibition, films based on Chinese domestic culture continue to hold an important position. The documentary *Return to the Red Flag Canal* weaves the storyline from

a different perspective between a Westerner and a Chinese, as well as from the older generation and the younger one.

The Lost Memory of the Loss Land is a documentary that depicts the endless love of the people of northern Shaanxi for the land. *In Search of Lost Time* is another documentary adapted from the true events of 3,000 orphans entering Inner Mongolia.

The Beijing International Film Festival also provided a list of Chinese short films to one of the largest publicly attended film festivals in the world.

"All these films will further deepen the exchanges between Chinese cinema and the global film industry," Lin said. "And we believe that movie is one of the best mediums connecting the world."

China's box office continued to heat up in the summer months as July closed with \$1.2 billion, the second biggest month this year, according to the latest data provided by Artisan Gateway.

The box office totaled \$4.98 billion year to date, up 69 percent year-on-year, with 81 percent of the market share represented by Chinese-language titles and 19 percent by imported titles.

ASEAN, Middle East eye closer partnerships under BRI

By YANG HAN, JAN YUMUL and OSWALD CHAN in Hong Kong

Ministers and top officials from the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Hungary and Middle East countries eye closer partnerships with countries and regions engaged in the Belt and Road Initiative while speaking at the 8th BRI Summit in Hong Kong on Wednesday.

Kazakhstan's Minister of Trade and Integration Arman Shakkaliyev told the opening session his country was the first to join the BRI and it aims to become a transport hub of Eurasia linking the continents.

Indonesia's Special Staff to Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Rizal Affandi Lukman said his country and ASEAN in general "look forward to deepening economic cooperation opportunities within the Belt and Road framework in the region, and welcome

having future projects of cooperation for Indonesia and across the region".

The symbolic and significant Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway and other joint development projects are elevating people's benefits and prospects to foster better connectivity and mutual growth among the peoples, he noted in a keynote address.

ASEAN's Secretary-General Kao Kim Hourn raised five points for people-centered, high-quality and sustainable growth in a luncheon keynote speech.

Marking the 10th anniversary of the BRI, Kao first emphasized connectivity not only for the flow of goods and services among partners, but also for broader trade, investment, education, tourism and related exchanges.

Minister of Economy of the United Arab Emirates Abdulla Bin Touq

Al Marri told China Daily the UAE is hopeful its expanding trade engagements with China within the BRI framework will also bring more inclusivity to the country and the Greater Bay Area.

The UAE accounts for a huge amount of trade with countries involved in the BRI compared with the last couple of decades, and "will play a major role as well in the next decade ... more inclusiveness, more people together", he said.

Fahd bin Abdulmohsen Al-Rashed, adviser in the General Secretariat of the Council of Ministers of Saudi Arabia, said: "We are over here together to celebrate a decade of the BRI. And it is a historic moment."

The world was facing \$14 trillion deficit in infrastructure, he said, adding there were "a lot of questions, but very few answers".

The BRI has been "an answer to

that challenge", he said, as the China-led initiative has brought together more than 150 countries on board, mobilizing \$1 trillion, lifting 40 million people out of poverty and generating 140,000 jobs.

Rania A. Al-Mashat, minister of international cooperation of Egypt, emphasized the strong relationship between Egypt and China and said the Global Development Initiative was a "very important initiative" China was pushing forward to advance cooperation on the BRI.

Hungary's Minister of Foreign Affairs and Trade Peter Szijjarto, on the first day of the summit, said, "Strengthening the Belt and Road Initiative will be always at the forefront of our foreign policy strategy, given the fact that so far we have taken so much profit out of it."

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Venice faces downgrade from UNESCO heritage list

By EARLE GALE in London
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The ancient and beautiful Italian water city of Venice could be downgraded from the United Nations' World Heritage List over concerns about the damage caused by the large number of tourists who visit it.

The fate of the city in the eyes of the UN's Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization will be decided during its annual meeting in the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh that began on Sunday and continues until Sept 25.

Other sites on the list, including Kyiv in Ukraine and Australia's Great Barrier Reef, are also facing

possible downgrades, while around 50 sites are seeking inclusion for the first time.

The listing of 1,157 sites is frequently used to attract tourists and investment to locations. However, sites that deteriorate while on the list can be declared "in danger" and could even be eventually dropped.

Six sites are facing the prospect of being declared "in danger" at the current Riyadh meeting.

In the case of Venice, UNESCO will consider rising water levels attributed to global warming as well as the large number of tourists who visit the city, Lazare Eloundou Assomo, UNESCO's director of world heritage, told Agence France-Presse.

"We don't know what will happen," he said.

In July, UNESCO said it would consider adding Venice to the "in danger" list because of the "irreversible" damage attributed to climate change and because of excess tourism, as well as the "lack of significant progress" the nation's government had made in addressing the issues.

Venice is so overwhelmed by tourists that visitors' beds outnumber those of locals, with 49,693 tourists' beds in contrast with 49,304 for residents, The Guardian reported.

In addition to the many tourists who sleep in Venice each night, around 40,000 visit from elsewhere each day, which has prompted the

local government to introduce an entrance ticket of 5 euros (\$5.37) starting next year.

Matteo Secchi, who runs local campaign group Venessia.com, told The Guardian: "We feel like foreigners in our own home, because, when you walk along the streets, we are in the minority."

At the same meeting where Venice's status will be decided, several aspiring locations are vying for inclusion on the coveted list, including a 900-kilometer stretch of the ancient Silk Road known as the Zarafshan-Karakum Corridor, which Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan have jointly put forward for consideration.



Tourists crowd into the "Ponte della Paglia" bridge near St. Mark's Square in Venice, Italy, on Aug 2. STEFANO MAZZOLA VIA GETTY IMAGES

BUSINESS



An aerial view shows Shenzhen Park in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone in Guangdong province. LIANG XU / XINHUA

New sci-tech park to gain traction

Guangdong to enhance ties with HKSAR, support for Hetao zone

By WANG XU
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The development of Shenzhen Park in the Hetao Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Cooperation Zone will soon gain traction as Guangdong province is integrating resources of different departments and administrations to fulfill its commitment to building the park into a platform that attracts top innovation resources from around the world.

During a Tuesday news conference in Shenzhen, Zhu Wei, deputy director of the Guangdong provincial development and reform commission, outlined four main tasks

for the development of Shenzhen Park — promoting international scientific and technological innovation through collaboration with the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, establishing the park as an internationally competitive industrial pilot production base and creating an internationalized mechanism for scientific and technological innovation.

“Shenzhen Park plays a unique role as a platform and channel due to its advantageous geographical location between Hong Kong’s northern metropolitan area and the Guangzhou-Shenzhen-Hong Kong Science and Technology Innovation Corridor,” Zhu said.

The park could also benefit from the strong innovation vitality supported by Shenzhen’s robust industrial innovation capabilities and the research capabilities of Hong Kong universities, he added.

Wu Shiwen, deputy director of the sci-tech department of Guang-

dong, said a team has been formed to spur scientific and technological innovation cooperation between the province and the HKSAR, with the total allocation of research funds from the provincial finance department exceeding 370 million yuan (\$50.8 million). In addition, some major sci-tech infrastructure, such as the China Spallation Neutron Source, and other supportive resources are now available for Hong Kong and Macao researchers.

Zhang Ke, deputy head of Customs in Guangdong, said they will provide precise assistance to scientific research institutions and enterprises in the cooperation zone.

“We have actively engaged with research institutions and companies to learn and address issues and concerns, such as registration and account establishment,” Zhang said.

The State Council, China’s Cabi-

net, unveiled a plan last month to boost the high-quality development of Shenzhen Park in the Hetao sci-tech zone, which is jointly being developed by Shenzhen and Hong Kong.

“So far, 10 major platforms, mostly various research institutes, and 10 major Hong Kong university research projects have settled in Shenzhen Park and more than 150 high-end science and innovation projects are being implemented in the park, which has formed industrial advantages in information technology, quantum technology and biopharmaceuticals,” said Huang Min, executive vice-mayor of Shenzhen.

“Shenzhen has prepared a total of 800,000 square meters of space for research and industrial use, and 11 industrial parks have begun operations in Shenzhen Park.”

Yi Yang in Shenzhen contributed to this story.

Green transition sparks focus on energy storage

By ZHENG XIN
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Energy storage has become pivotal in ensuring efficient power grid operation and accelerating the transition to green energy sources, as China accelerates its green energy transition, said a top company official.

With the growing adoption of renewable energy technologies like wind and solar power, energy storage systems are emerging as indispensable components of modern electricity grids, said Zhu Yufeng, board chairman of GCL Energy Technology. “As an ‘energy transporter’ and ‘stabilizer’ for new energy sources, energy storage can make up for the intermittent and fluctuating characteristics of new energy sources, solving issues related to the high proportion of nonfossil energy sources and the large-scale integration into new power systems,” he said during the new energy storage industry high-quality development forum held in Taiyuan, Shanxi province, on Thursday.

The new energy storage sector has been rising fast as a new frontier, becoming a significant driver for the high-quality development of the new energy industry, he said.

Figures released by the National Energy Administration reveal that by the end of June, China completed and put into operation new energy storage projects with a cumulative installed capacity exceeding 17.33 gigawatts, with newly commissioned projects reaching a combined capacity of about 8.63 GW during the first half, roughly equivalent to the cumulative installed capacity in previous years.

It is expected that the total newly installed capacity for the whole year will reach 15-20 GW, it said.

According to the Guiding Opinions on Accelerating the Development of New Energy Storage report

jointly issued by the National Development and Reform Commission and the National Energy Administration, China’s installed capacity for new energy storage will exceed 30 GW by 2025.

Zhu added that energy storage will have significant potential for growth in the next three decades, with batteries, advanced technologies and smart systems revolutionizing the way clean energy is harnessed and distributed.

The company launched a series of energy storage products recently on the sidelines of the 2023 International Forum on Energy Transition held in Suzhou, Jiangsu province, including energy storage dedicated battery cells, liquid-cooled integrated energy storage cabinets, super energy storage power stations, and super storage and charging integrated charging piles.

The products will further support interaction with the grid while integrating energy storage and charging, so as to help minimize the impact of overcharging on the grid as much as possible, it said.

Shi Zhiyong, a senior engineer from the State Grid Energy Research Institute, agreed, saying that energy storage provides a variety of services for power system operations and has proven to significantly enhance the utilization of renewable energy sources while supporting distributed power generation and micro-grids.

However, Zhu also warned that there is still a considerable distance to go before the energy storage industry achieves full-scale development.

Technological leadership, safety and stability, and economic affordability will further promote the high-quality development of the new energy storage industry and companies must keep pushing forward the upgrade of the entire energy storage industry chain, he said.

Disney eyes licensed product growth in China

By WANG ZHUOQIONG
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The Walt Disney Co, the world’s largest licensor by retail sales, is rolling out a new cross-border strategy to facilitate brands in China to better land their Disney licensed products abroad, amid its continuous efforts to boost its franchised products to attract more young and family consumers.

Disney’s licensing business in Asia has contributed to almost 40 percent of its global revenue in its consumer products unit, Disney said.

According to License Global’s Top Global Licensors Report 2023, the value of Disney’s licensing business reached \$61.7 billion last year, ranking No 1 globally.

Kermid Rahman, general manager and senior vice-president of con-

sumer products for the Walt Disney Co China and South Korea, said at the annual consumer products showcase convention on Tuesday that the company has initiated a cross-board strategy in China, to help Chinese companies get more distribution and retail access overseas. At the same time, they are eyeing more international brands to expand their footprint in China.

The new strategy is being launched as more Chinese firms are gaining experience in product development, quality control and digitalization in recent years, and are becoming increasingly competitive in international markets, said Rahman.

Disney will assess the possibility of cross-border collaboration with its partners in terms of product development, distribution channels, integrated marketing capabilities, brand management, financial

capacities and corporate values, said the general manager.

The consumer product unit’s revenue in China has seen double-digit growth this fiscal year. Disney’s e-commerce marketplace in China, shopDisney, is on the same pace, according to the company.

Some 800 million *Frozen* licensed products have been sold in China in the past decade. The World of *Frozen*, inspired by the animated film of the same title, will open to the public in Hong Kong Disneyland in November.

In addition to its cross-border strategy, Disney continues to innovate its products and strengthen connections with Chinese consumers via integrated marketing, to maintain growth momentum.

Disney China’s creative teams develop more than 200 new product designs daily on average. Of them,

around 80 percent will be realized into products, with idea materialization taking 12 to 18 months, said the company.

Apparel, toys, cosmetics and foods are the categories that have enjoyed the most rapid development in the past decade. Disney’s licensed plush toys have grown 50 percent on average annually in the past three years.

Disney shares with its partners the market insights the company has observed about Generation Z — those born between the mid-1990s and early 2010s — and Gen Alpha — born after the 2010s. For instance, following the pet-loving trend among the Gen Z, Lucifer, the cat of Cinderella’s stepmother, has been developed into a popular toy with a cool personality that young people adore.

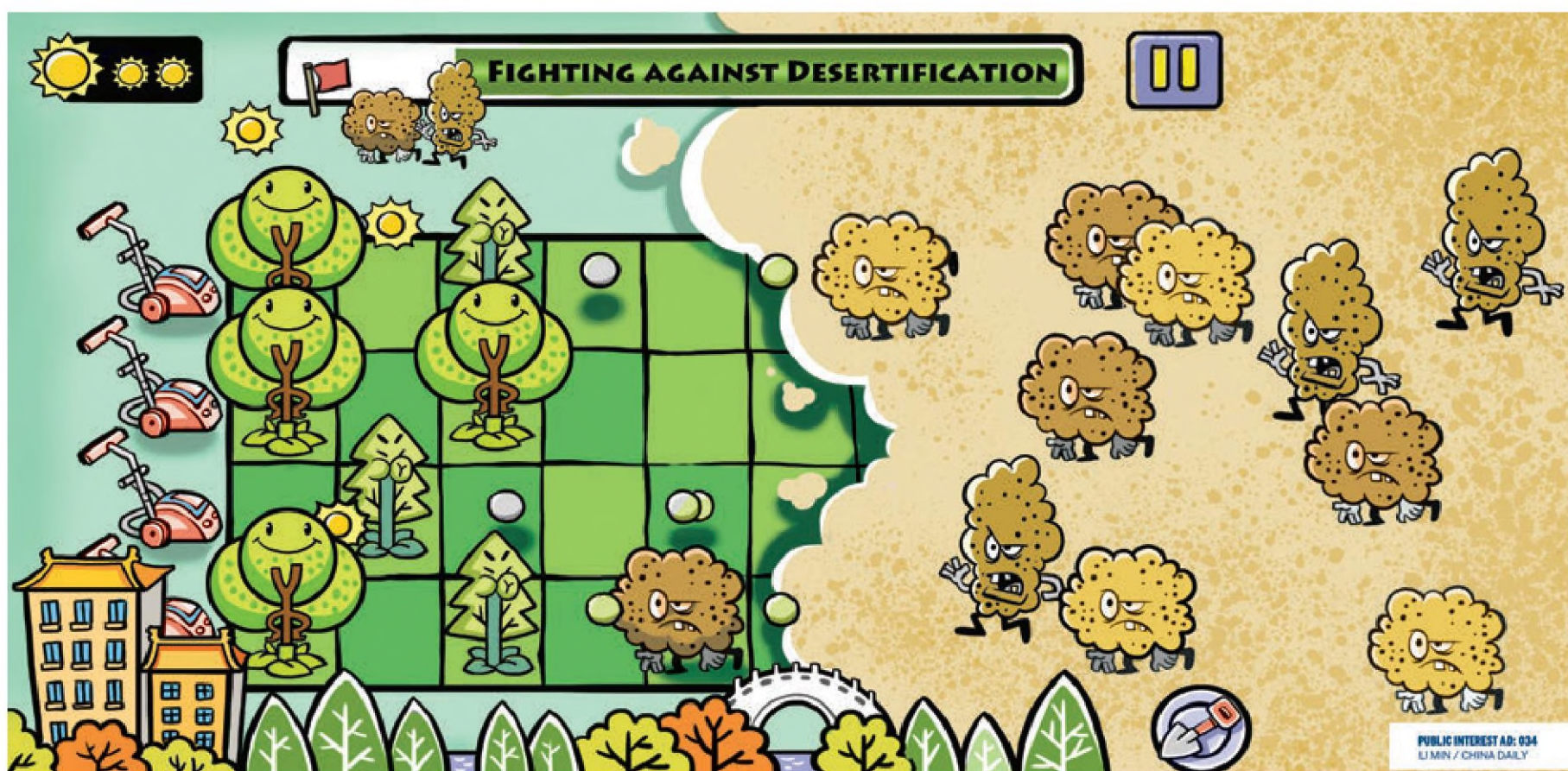
“We will continue to grow our



A visitor checks out Disney consumer products during a show in Shanghai on Tuesday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

core brand and franchises through our combined efforts, and deepen our emotional connection with Chinese consumers by keeping ahead of new trends, tracking changing

consumer performances and behaviors, and staying closer to what consumers need,” said John Hsu, managing director of the Walt Disney Co China.



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LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

BUSINESSFOCUS

Women's wellness, beauty market glowing brightly

Chinese females' focus on quality of life boosting spending power

By ZHENG YIRAN
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The women's healthcare and wellness management market in China is attracting increased attention thanks to rising wellness awareness and improving consumption potential.

Data from global market research consultancy Acumen Research and Consulting showed that the women's global healthcare and wellness management market reached \$25.3 billion in 2021, with the sector expected to grow to \$97.3 billion by 2030. Therefore, the compound annual growth rate between 2022 and 2030 is expected to be over 16 percent.

By some census measures, China has the highest female population in the world, thus the women's healthcare management market in the country is developing at a healthy pace.

The seventh national census data showed that China's female population stood at 688 million by Nov 1, 2020, among which 436 million were between 15 and 59 years of age, therefore contributing to strong consumption potential.

According to the 2021 Report on Female Health Consumption issued by Ali Health, girls and women are spending an increasing amount of money on healthcare, with their related expenditure surging at a CAGR of 20 percent.

"Women have become an absolute main driver of health consumption. With rising awareness of the importance of health and wellness and improvements in consumption capability, the women's health management consumption sector has been growing rapidly," said the report.

In recent years, entrepreneurial energy in the women's healthcare sector has risen. In May 2020, Kimon Angelides, founder of United States-based smart blood glucose management platform Livongo Health, established FemTec Health — a one-stop female healthcare and beauty services platform. By 2022, the company had completed three acquisitions and \$38 million in financing.

In August 2021, Wang Qiangyu, former vice-president of intelligent mobile office platform Ding Talk, founded Testing OneLife, a women's healthcare management platform. Several startups in the sector have emerged, including Oova, Heranova Lifesciences Holding, Kinbody, Tia and Teal Health, with capital flowing into the fast-growing industry.

Liu Yang, co-founder of Jinding Capital, said, "Those who win the hearts of women win the consumer medical services sector worth 10 trillion yuan (\$1.4 trillion)."

With great market potential, global healthcare company Abbott has been investing in the sector in China for years. It continues to provide quality and trusted solutions to support women's health. In 2017,



Above: Visitors view female healthcare products at Organon's booth during the fifth China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November.

Left: A visitor checks out collagen supplements designed for female consumers that can help slow aging as well as joint and bone health during the fifth CIEE.

PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

the company set up the Tulip Academy in China — a program committed to providing menopause-related education and training for physicians.

Norman Tang, divisional vice-president and general manager of Established Pharmaceuticals at Abbott China, said: "We believe women need all the support they can get. This is why we support the establishment of independent menopause centers in China to empower women going through menopause and give them an opportunity to get comprehensive support, with physicians trained to understand the specific needs of women going through this phase of life."

On May 12, the company launched a global initiative in Beijing, sharing a compilation of women's stories about menopause to raise awareness and empower more women to seek the support

and care they need.

The company owns multiple branded generic medicines in the field of women's health, all aimed at making quality medicines more accessible to more women.

The women's healthcare management market mainly serves the needs throughout a woman's entire life cycle, including adolescence, adulthood, menopause and later stages of life. Among these periods, adulthood represents the biggest market and longest duration, as numerous subcategories contain business opportunities, such as anti-aging, assisted reproduction, pregnancy management, weight loss, postpartum rehabilitation, maternal and infant care, and gynecological exams.

"The large female population base means that the vast majority of women's healthcare management niche tracks have sufficient market

space to accommodate two or more unicorns and listed companies," said Chen Ke, an investor who has been in the field for years.

HPV vaccines are a good example of this phenomenon. There are three domestically listed companies engaged in the research and development track of the sector — Chongqing Zhifei Biological Products Co Ltd, Beijing Wantai Biological Enterprise Co Ltd and Walvax Biotechnology Co Ltd. In terms of HPV vaccines, companies such as Ali Health, Baidu Health, JD Health and Pinduoduo are all involved in scheduled inoculations.

In the menstruation management sector, many enterprises have emerged, such as Dayima, Xiamen Meet You Co Ltd, Femometer and Leban Technology Co Ltd. And market competition is becoming increasingly heated.

Among these subcategories,

industry experts noted that anti-early aging and weight loss sectors have been rapidly growing.

Currently, there is rising awareness among women about anti-early aging, and related demand is constantly being unleashed. Data from Wuhan, Hubei province-based cosmetics information platform Bevol showed that among those between 18 and 35 years of age, more than 95 percent encounter early aging dermatological problems, with over 60 percent suffering from large pores, yellowish and dull skin, and over 30 percent complaining of wrinkles.

To combat early aging, women are showing increasing interest in anti-early aging products, and are willing to spend big money on them. Related products include injections, cosmetics, beauty equipment, drugs and health supplements.

Among such choices, in recent years, nonsurgical medical aesthetics have been booming. Data from market research firm Frost & Sullivan showed that in 2022, China's nonsurgical medical aesthetics sector totaled 120.7 billion yuan, growing 23.5 percent year-on-year and surpassing that of the surgical medical aesthetics market. The market is estimated to reach 415.7 billion yuan by 2030.

Specifically, based on different principles, nonsurgical medical aes-

thetics are mainly divided into injections and photoelectric treatment.

The core components of injectable products have four major functions: filling, inhibition, skincare and lipolysis. Research and development into these core modalities is of great significance for enterprises to build competitive barriers. At present, the core ingredients of facial injection products in the market mainly include hyaluronic acid, botulinum toxin, collagen and various regenerative ingredients.

Photoelectric instruments use lasers, radio frequencies, ultrasound and other energy forms to solve problems at different layers of the skin. Mainstream manufacturers include United States-based Cynosure, Candela and Lumenis, German's Fotona and Israel's Alma.

The rising visibility of the sector has attracted attention from the capital market. Data from VBData.cn, a Chongqing-based healthcare services platform, showed that in 2022, more than 50 venture capital or private equity institutions invested in photoelectric instrument companies.

"With technological breakthroughs in gene editing, cell therapy, brain-computer interface, artificial intelligence and regenerative medicine, anti-early aging products are likely to embrace more possibilities," said Hu Xuan, a medical aesthetics analyst at VBData.cn.

The weight loss sector is also attracting mounting attention. On June 28, Guangzhou, Guangdong province-based weight management company Archealth submitted its prospectus to the Hong Kong bourse in preparation for an upcoming IPO. On July 12, Beijing-based sports technology company KEEP successfully listed in Hong Kong.

Meanwhile, in recent years, several domestic digital tech companies have invested in the subcategory, covering the fields of popular science, weight loss planning, weight loss guidance, and the healthcare information sharing community. However, there is a lack of hard evidence that such newcomers are able to offer comprehensive solutions.

To promote the sustainable development of the women's healthcare management market, Hu suggested that enterprises should expand their business scope throughout women's entire life cycle, as modern women increasingly pursue multi-level, diversified and personalized healthcare consumption experiences, such as cancer screening, traditional Chinese medicine rehabilitation, psychological counseling and genetic testing.

Meanwhile, he said that it is necessary to enhance the application of digital technologies in women's healthcare management consumption scenarios, as digital technology applications raise the efficiency of the industry, and offer data support related to entire life-cycle healthcare management for women.

"With the emergence of new companies and new technologies, the women's healthcare management sector is expected to flourish," Hu added.

GE HealthCare steps up public welfare efforts in China

By ZHU WENQIAN
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GE HealthCare, a leading global medical technology and digital solutions innovator, plans to carry out its 18th Pink Action in China from mid-October for breast cancer prevention and treatment and help raise women's health awareness.

Since 2006, GE HealthCare China has continued to carry out a series of public welfare activities for breast cancer prevention and treatment. It has called for greater attention to breast health through activities such as free clinical screenings and popularizing science education.

"So far, complimentary clinical screenings have benefited more than 58,000 women, and related public science education has helped over 100 million people nationwide," said Zhong Luyin, chief communications officer of GE HealthCare China.

Last year, together with the Chi-

37.3 percent
proportion of women staff members at GE HealthCare China

na Development Research Foundation, GE HealthCare provided support for a local maternity and children's hospital in Handan, Hebei province, and helped 1,006 local women carry out complimentary breast cancer diagnosis and screening.

GE HealthCare aims to create a diversified and female-friendly work environment. In its China unit, females account for 37.3 percent of total staff members, and women make up more than half of the total executive team. Last year, among candidates applying for jobs at GE HealthCare China, more than 70 percent were female candidates, according to the company's statistics.

Meanwhile, the company has

58,000
number of women that have benefited from GE HealthCare China's complimentary clinical screenings in China, according to the company

indicated that it would continue to pay attention to small and medium-sized markets in China, with a particular focus on healthcare services at county level.

The company will actively promote the implementation of graded diagnosis and treatment, and help improve healthcare services at the grassroots level.

Currently, there are more than 2,800 counties, county-level cities and city districts and 6,000 county-level hospitals in China, serving a population of more than 900 million people, according to GE HealthCare and the National Bureau of Statistics. County-level medical care serves as an important

foundation for ensuring people's health and wellness.

In addition, GE HealthCare is committed to various corporate social responsibility programs in China. For the past 20 years, founded by GE HealthCare China and the Beijing Yichuang Rural Women's Philanthropic Development Center, the Kindling Program has significantly supported the development of female teachers in remote areas of the country.

This year's program includes 106 participants from 15 provinces and autonomous regions, including the Inner Mongolia autonomous region, the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region as well as the provinces of Anhui, Sichuan and Guizhou.

The weeklong training concluded in July. Participants were instructed in new approaches to teaching management and introduced to the latest scientific and technological developments, and a comprehensive training program related to women's physical and



Medical equipment is displayed at the booth of GE HealthCare during the 87th China International Medical Equipment Fair in Shanghai in May. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

mental health with 12 theoretical and 10 practical courses was also added and highlighted this year, the company said.

"Over the years, GE HealthCare has placed a strong focus on grassroots development, empowering grassroots healthcare through localization and innovation. GE

HealthCare remains dedicated to promoting the Kindling Program in all parts of the country to help the development of rural education and create a world where healthcare has no limits," said Chen Heqiang, general manager of China supply chain at GE HealthCare China.

COMMENT

Editorials

Potential threats posed by AI should spur China-US collaboration on its governance

The potential threats posed by artificial intelligence are undoubtedly real.

The launch of ChatGPT has led to much reflection as it showed how rapidly the technology was developing. Its launch last November sparked fierce competition among tech giants to unveil similar tools. This has prompted much debate on the ethical and societal consequences of allowing the unbridled development of AI technology. Leaving aside the question of whether it poses an existential threat to humanity, there are also pertinent concerns about impersonation, while the fact that AI technologies can collect and analyze large amounts of personal data also raises issues related to data privacy and security. Moreover, there are fears that those with malign intent will be able to use the power of AI to develop more advanced cyberattacks.

Given the potential threats that artificial intelligence could pose to our society, it is of utmost importance to regulate the industry to ensure AI technology is employed for safe and beneficial purposes and is not used for destructive ends.

The latest voluntary commitments governing AI development that eight US high-tech companies, including Nvidia, IBM and Adobe, signed with the Joe Biden administration on Tuesday are a major step in that direction. Based on the AI safety accord, the companies agreed to conduct internal and external testing of AI systems before their public release, set up protocols to ensure users know when content is AI-generated, and share informa-

tion with governments and civil society, among others, to safeguard against risks.

The commitments are similar to the earlier ones signed by seven US high-tech giants including Meta, Google and OpenAI in July as part of Washington's efforts to tackle the challenges this powerful technology is likely to bring to humanity. "We must be clear-eyed and vigilant about the threats emerging technologies can pose," Biden said.

The task of dealing with the AI-associated risks is enormous, thus prompting some countries to call for the creation of a new United Nations body to support the global efforts to govern AI. In response, UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently said the UN is "the ideal place" for drawing up and overseeing the implementation of global standards for AI governance.

China, which Tesla CEO Elon Musk believes is "in a strong position" when it comes to AI development, is also among the first countries in the world to have worked out policies on AI regulation. The country has always supported governance of the technology in collaboration with the international community to ensure that it is safe, and has called for the formation of an international governance framework and standardized norms with a consensus among nations.

It would serve the interests of both countries as well as the rest of the world if China and the US, as major powers in terms of AI development and applications, can set aside their differences and work together to enhance cooperation on AI regulation.

Washington up to its divisive tricks again

All sovereign states have the right and autonomy to engage with each other in friendly exchanges and cooperation. They do not require the permission of Washington to do so.

Yet days before the leaders of Russia and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea met at the Vostochny spacecraft launch site in the Russian Far East on Wednesday, Washington began hyping it up as a dangerous food-for-weapons rendezvous that required the vigilance of all "peace-loving nations".

The United States has gone too far in making such irresponsible remarks on something that is none of its business. The politicians in Washington should be reminded that the US' unilateral sanctions on the two countries are no justification for its interference in their relations.

It is the Ukraine crisis that is pulling Washington's nerves to such an extent that it tries to besmirch the diplomacy between the two neighboring countries. In raising such a ballyhoo about the meeting, Washington is trying to produce a chilling effect, so as to further estrange the two countries from the international community.

At the same time, the US is portraying itself as the leader of the "free world" and calling its assistance to Ukraine a righteous move.

Just last week, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken announced a new aid package, primarily military, for Ukraine worth more than \$1 billion during a surprise visit to the country, his fourth visit to Ukraine since the conflict between Russia and Ukraine commenced in February last year.

Integrated development answer to Taiwan question

Integrating the development of Taiwan with that of the Chinese mainland will not only help promote the island's economic development, it will also help people on the island to know that the mainland authorities are sincere in their endeavors to realize the peaceful reunification of the island with the motherland.

A circular jointly released by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council on Tuesday explicitly stated that East China's Fujian province will be developed into a demonstration zone for integrated development across the Taiwan Strait. This sends a strong message that the mainland will never give up its efforts to realize the peaceful settlement of the Taiwan question.

What makes the latest circular particularly noteworthy is that it outlines an all-inclusive range of policies for Fujian province, and the island, which is just across the Strait from the province, to realize integrated development.

Policies and measures will enable Taiwan residents to do business or stay in Fujian enjoying the same treatment as their local counterparts.

Taiwan compatriots who have never been to the mainland are welcome to visit Fujian, students are welcome to study in the province and those wanting work are encouraged to find jobs in Fujian. Enterprises, especially Taiwan enterprises based in Fujian, are urged to hire more Taiwan employees, and Taiwan-

based physicians are allowed to practice in Fujian.

Taiwan compatriots are also encouraged to take part in social welfare programs. They will no longer need to register for temporary residence in Fujian, and they can settle in Fujian if they are willing to. Institutions of higher learning and those engaged in scientific research are encouraged to enroll students and researchers from Taiwan. If implemented well such moves will greatly promote exchanges and understanding between people across the Strait.

The circular reinforces the importance of exchanges by requiring Fujian to strengthen institutional support for Taiwan compatriots in Fujian in terms of employment, health services, housing, elderly care services and social assistance. It also states that there will be support for efforts to explore a model for the joint development of Xiamen-Kinmen infrastructure so as to facilitate supplies of electricity and gas and improve connectivity with the construction of bridges from Xiamen to Kinmen, and supporting Kinmen using Xiamen's new airport.

As such integrated development is consolidated, it will extend beyond Fujian to other parts of the country, and there will be more opportunities for people on the two sides of the Taiwan Strait to know more about each other. The Taiwan question will not be left hanging indefinitely. The circular shows that Beijing has the answer, which is the island's peaceful reunification with the motherland.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

New York faces a 'fiscal tsunami' as immigrants arrive in droves

Authorities in New York City are overwhelmed as an estimated 10,000 immigrants are arriving there every month. So much so that Mayor Eric Adams said on Sunday that the influx might inflict a "fiscal tsunami" on the city.

Back in March 2020, then Donald Trump administration had made use of emergency powers granted under Section 42 of the Public Health Services Act to expel a large number of undocumented immigrants at the US-Mexico border. The expulsion order was referred to as the "Title 42" order.

However, the "Title 42" order expired on May 11, angering Republican states. In August 2022, Republican Governor Greg Abbott of Texas arranged for long-distance buses to transport immigrants to

New York, a state where the ruling Democratic Party is immigrant-friendly. Since then, over 130,000 immigrants who were originally in Texas have arrived in New York.

The two parties have different approaches to immigration. In June 2012, then president Barack Obama signed an executive order allowing young undocumented immigrants, who arrived in the United States before they had turned 16, had resided in the country for at least five years, and were currently aged between 15 and 31, to apply for temporary work and residency permits. Approximately 1.7 million undocumented immigrants met the criteria.

It marked the most significant immigration policy reform in the US in decades and Obama reaped significant political dividends. Nat-

urally, Republicans criticized the Democrats for using immigration as a means to win elections. The shifting demographics of the US population seem to favor the Democratic Party, while forcing Republicans in the areas they control to adopt strict anti-immigration measures to protect their voter base.

The difference between the two parties on immigration is driven by political interests. With increasing political polarization in the US, there seems to be no clear solution to the immigration crisis. The urgency expressed by Mayor Adams must be considered in the context of approximately 7 million undocumented immigrants in the US. It remains a complex problem with no easy resolution in sight.

— BEIJING NEWS

Rising prices indicate likely rebound

According to data from the National Bureau of Statistics, the Consumer Price Index of August 2023 rose by 0.3 percent on a monthly basis, marking a moderate rebound from the lower levels. The Producer Price Index also increased by 0.2 percent on a monthly basis, the first positive month-on-month growth in nearly five months.

That both the CPI and PPI have rebounded reflects a recovery in consumption and production. There is no deflation risk in China's economy, and it is expected that the CPI and PPI will continue their mild upward trends.

In August, the year-on-year CPI turned from a decline to an

increase, indicating improved demand. Prices in major consumption sectors have risen moderately, indicating overall stable and moderate recovery in supply and demand.

Industrial production prices are also rising. At the input end, the year-on-year decline in the PPI for raw materials narrowed by 1.5 percentage points to 4.6 percent. At the output end, the PPI decreased by 3 percent year-on-year, a 1.4 percentage point reduction from the previous month. The rebound in industrial production prices has much to do with the rise in international crude oil and commodity prices and improved demand of some industrial sectors.

It is expected that the CPI will see

a slight increase, while the PPI will continue to rise. With increased consumption of pork in autumn, coupled with the initiation of central pork reserves, pork prices are also expected to rise.

Although prices are trending upwards, there is still the problem of insufficient demand because of the sluggishness in the real estate chain and the weak demand for durable goods. Therefore, proactive macroeconomic policies should continue to focus on expanding effective demand, boosting market confidence, and promoting consumption. It is also necessary to ensure stable employment and income growth.

— 21ST CENTURY BUSINESS HERALD

What They Say

Hard to bridge gap between Saudi Arabia and Israel

White House Middle East czar Brett McGurk, Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs Barbara Leaf and US special envoy for Yemen Tim Lenderking visited Saudi Arabia on Sunday in a bid to broker a reconciliation between the country and Israel, according to the US State Department.

On the same day, an Israeli delegation arrived in Riyadh to attend a UNESCO meeting in the Saudi capital the next day, marking Israel's first publicly announced visit to Saudi Arabia as speculation grows about a potential normalization of ties.

The US has geostrategic and domestic political considerations prompting its push to normalize Israel-Saudi relations. The Joe Biden administration hopes that can help it improve the administration's performance and serve his reelection hopes.

Saudi Arabia and Israel are both allies of the US. Washington's push

to normalize relations between them is just like its efforts to promote a reconciliation between Japan and the Republic of Korea. The Biden administration hopes that a reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Israel will prevent Saudi Arabia from sliding into Beijing's embrace.

Since 2020, four Arab countries — the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Sudan and Morocco — have announced the normalization of relations with Israel due to the US' efforts. Nevertheless, the resumption of relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, the two most important countries in the region, has unsettled the US, as Washington is becoming increasingly marginalized in the Middle East. Therefore, the US believes that if it can mediate the establishment of diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel, it can reassert its influence in the region.

However, the establishment of

diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel still faces many obstacles, as the two sides' offers are still far apart. The main obstacle is the difference in the two countries' positions on the question of Palestine, which Saudi Arabia has made a precondition for recognizing Israel. If Israel does not make effective concessions on the question of respecting the Palestinian statehood, Saudi Arabia, as the leader of Arab countries, will not budge.

In fact, the US lacks effective means to reconcile the positions of the two sides. That requires the US government to put forward a clear and effective plan on the Palestinian issue and provide sufficient input to guarantee a possible settlement of it. On the one hand, Washington needs to reward the Saudis handsomely, and on the other, it needs to urge Israel to make substantial concessions on the Palestinian issue.

— THE PAPER.CN

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COMMENT



SHI YU / CHINA DAILY

Zhou Xiaoke

Time for Taipei to reflect on wrong economic policy

To deepen cross-strait integrated development in all fields and advance the peaceful reunification of the motherland, the Chinese mainland will make Fujian province a demonstration zone for the integrated development across the Taiwan Strait, according to a circular released on Tuesday. The circular jointly released by the Communist Party of China Central Committee and the State Council listed the general requirements and 21 specific measures for building the zone, and said that Fujian should leverage its distinctive advantages and harness a variety of resources to further enhance integrated cross-strait development.

According to the circular, policies and systems will be optimized to promote the well-being of Taiwan residents and ensure they enjoy the same treatment as their mainland compatriots. The objective, the circular said, is to make Fujian the first-choice destination for Taiwan residents and enterprises after the demonstration zone is built.

The document signifies an important move by the mainland to send a positive message aimed at enhancing economic exchanges across the Taiwan Strait. It is crucial for the Taiwan authorities to deeply contemplate their misguided actions, which have undermined trade between the mainland and Taiwan. Ultimately, such actions will adversely affect the residents of Taiwan.

The central government's commerce body has recently announced its intention to closely examine the investigation's findings regarding trade barriers imposed by Taiwan. Based on these findings, the government will assess and consider implementing appropriate measures.

This suggests the mainland may have to suspend, entirely or partly, the tariff exemptions and reductions it has granted to Taiwan products under the cross-strait Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement.

In June 2010, the two sides signed the ECFA based on the 1992 Consensus that upholds the one-China principle. Under the ECFA framework, the mainland reduced tariffs on 539 items imported from Taiwan, and the island cut tariffs on 267 items from the mainland. The ECFA took effect on Sept 12, 2010, but the two sides began reducing tariffs on goods from Jan 1, 2011.

The ECFA has played a significant role in promoting cross-strait trade. From 2010 to 2021, cross-strait trade increased from \$145.37 billion to \$328.34 billion, much faster than the mainland's total overseas trade during the same period. Even amid the

The trade barriers imposed by the DPP on the mainland are not only harming cross-strait trade relations but also seriously hurting the island's economy.

challenging global economic environment, cross-strait trade was as high as \$319.68 billion in 2022.

There is no doubt the mainland market has been a driver of Taiwan's economic development. However, cross-strait trade relations are characterized by persistent imbalance, with Taiwan's exports to the mainland significantly higher than its imports from the mainland.

According to the mainland's data, from 2011 to 2022, the mainland's exports to Taiwan added up to \$611.89 billion, while Taiwan's exports to the mainland were worth \$2.04 trillion, resulting in a trade deficit of \$1.43 trillion for the mainland. That the mainland's trade deficit has increased by more than \$150 billion in the past two years shows Taiwan's economy and its enterprises have benefited substantially from the mainland's vast market, which has indirectly boosted employment and income on the island.

Economists in Taiwan estimate that the ECFA early-harvest goods exported to the mainland amounted to about \$20 billion a year, which helped save \$800 million to \$1 billion in tariffs every year. According to Taiwan's figures, from 2011 to 2022, Taiwan received tariff exemptions worth \$9.38 billion from the mainland, while the mainland received \$981 million in tariff exemptions from Taiwan, meaning the island benefited almost 10 times more than the mainland.

Behind Taiwan's significant trade gains from the mainland market lies the Taiwan authorities' restrictive measures to prevent some mainland products from entering the island. Such measures have increased in recent years, hampering the normalization of cross-strait trade.

According to the island's economic department's summary of prohibited mainland products, the number of restricted items has increased to 2,460. The latest investigation by the mainland into these restrictions indicates the number of restricted products has risen from 2,455 to 2,509, many of which were unilaterally

made tariff-free by the mainland under the ECFA framework.

The ruling Democratic Progressive Party administration's policy of erecting trade barriers against the mainland is misplaced and unlawful. While it might have been reasonable for Taiwan to impose import restrictions on mainland goods before both sides joined the World Trade Organization, continuing such restrictions, especially after more than two decades of gaining WTO membership, contradicts the principles of non-discrimination and the elimination of quantitative restrictions of the WTO.

The trade barriers imposed by the DPP on the mainland are not only harming cross-strait trade relations but also seriously hurting the island's economy. The significance of the mainland market for Taiwan's economic development is an undeniable fact that the DPP's false claims cannot change.

So if the Taiwan authorities do not change their policy and attitude toward the mainland and if cross-strait institutionalized communication and negotiation mechanisms are not restored, the mainland might be compelled to take corresponding measures based on regulations. This means cross-strait trade ties could enter a period of friction, which would deny the island's economy the valuable support of the mainland. As a result, the island could be heading into stagnation, even recession.

The consequences of the DPP's policies will be harmful to Taiwan residents. By restricting mainland products from entering the Taiwan market, the island authorities are not only limiting consumers' choice but also undermining consumer welfare. The strained cross-strait trade relations, coupled with a deteriorating Taiwan economy, could increase unemployment and lower Taiwan residents' income.

While the mainland hopes such a scenario doesn't become reality, to resolve the outstanding issues, both sides need to work together. Only through cross-strait cooperation and problem-solving can the two sides enhance their respective competitiveness in the global market, integrate their economies, and benefit people on both sides of the Strait.

The author is an associate professor at the Institute of Taiwan Studies, Beijing Union University. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.

Mike Bastin

Chinese brands should go global but stay local

Financial and market power will always be the key business objective of any branded product or service. Yet brands need to pay greater attention to the branding process, especially if they are micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs).

All too often "brands" and "branding" are assumed to be the sole preserve of large multinational companies that have global reach. This false assumption often leads to a view that MSMEs can only compete on price and functional aspects of their product or services. Which is incorrect.

The fact is that SMEs, even micro business, have an inherent competitive advantage against even well-known brands that have a global reach.

But it is not finance alone that helps build brands. Establishing that crucial emotional, often cultural, connection with consumers is precisely what turns a product into a brand, and it is the presence of more established local brands that will help develop a more sustainable Chinese economy.

Chinese SMEs actually enjoy an inherent advantage against their larger, domestic and foreign competitors in terms of brand. Adding local elements and local flavor to an MSME brand is often much easier than it is with global brands.

The product-to-brand journey of many Chinese MSMEs, therefore, has to revolve around their local culture and cultural heritage as much as possible. Also, an increasing number of Chinese consumers, especially Chinese Gen Z'ers, are attaching greater value to Chinese cultural flavor in the brands they consume.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the exciting rise of Chinese fashion designers and their brands. For example, the likes of Chen Peng, Qi Yueqi and Wang Yuhan often light up fashion weeks around the world with their intricate, subtle use of traditional Chinese elements such as local flowers and local embroidery techniques and styles.

Of course, the effective use of Chinese social media, and key opinion leaders (KOLs) and key opinion consumers (KOCs) is critical to successful brand building in China, and here too Chinese MSMEs are at a distinct advantage, as they have better knowledge of the local KOLs and KOCs, and can infuse their local brands with local cultural capital.

But this localization approach, with subtle blending of traditional local cul-

tural elements and modern aesthetics, does not only apply to fashion and related brands. Chinese MSMEs across product and service categories and industries can, and should, capitalize on positioning their branded products or services as offerings that allow consumers to closely attach themselves to their cultural heritage, but with a modern twist.

For Chinese MSMEs, the often subtle difference between KOLs and KOCs is very important. Key opinion consumers, by definition local consumers, are not only more attractive as powerful and credible local brand associates, but also can be far more easily identified by Chinese MSMEs than larger counterparts.

A brand's ability to anticipate and quickly adjust to the ever-changing demands of consumers, especially Gen Z'ers, and the ever-advancing digital technology, will also decide how successful it is. However, the MSME brands which use local elements to add value to their products are better placed to anticipate and adapt to change.

Chinese MSME brands can understand local changes far better than the larger, corporate brands, both Chinese and Western, because they have their ear to the ground. But why is the role of MSMEs so important in any economy's sustainable development and modernization?

There are many reasons for that, and the most tangible of all is that the MSMEs usually employ a far higher percentage of the workforce and their combined output usually accounts for a large percentage of a country's GDP.

More important, it is the contribution to the culture of creativity and entrepreneurship that represents the greatest, most significant contribution of MSMEs. These smaller and more versatile companies' fruitful reliance on creativity and innovations should inspire larger brands to promote innovations to create new products and services.

Chinese MSMEs have become vital to the continued development and modernization of the Chinese economy. They are ideally placed to infuse their brands with a strong local flavor that will resonate with Chinese consumers. As such, the rising Chinese brands, especially fashion brands, should also go global but stay local.

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SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL VIEWS



JIN BAIHAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

PENG WENSHENG

Driving force

Belt and Road Initiative provides opportunities to explore and create new models of economic development and international economic cooperation

Over the past four decades, the Washington Consensus has been the mainstream framework for economic policy. It stresses that free markets can effectively allocate resources, and that the globalized world is a unified market with more similarities than differences between various regions. Nevertheless, the framework pays little attention to the dual economy of developing countries, i.e., the coexistence of traditional and modern economic sectors within a single country. Nor does it pay attention to establishing a win-win mechanism between core and peripheral countries. As a result, the globalization model adopted over the past four decades has had rather limited effects on boosting developing economies. In fact, some developing countries have suffered from deteriorating imbalances and have fallen further behind developed economies, instead of catching up with them.

Meanwhile, developed economies also suffer from widening wealth gaps. Some have suggested that developed economies also show dual structures, such as the Rust Belt and the hollowing out of industries in the US. Internal economic polarization has, in turn, led to a resurgence of protectionism in trade relations. Coupled with the impacts of a changing geopolitical landscape, these trends pose severe challenges to the existing model of globalization. A number of developed countries are increasingly prioritizing their domestic goals and have adopted unilateral policies in the areas of trade, industries and the green transition. For example, there are signs that the World Trade Organization, one of the most important international organizations in global governance, is being marginalized, making it more difficult for developing countries to boost economic growth through international trade.

Against this backdrop, the Belt and Road Initiative provides opportunities to explore and create new models of economic development and international economic cooperation.

The initiative can boost the total volume of trade as it facilitates international trade and investment by enhancing connectivity and reducing transaction costs, notably the cost of transportation. According to the United Nations Comtrade data, China is the top trading partner of 35 Belt and Road countries. The US and Germany are the top trading partners of 11 and 16 Belt

The primary growth driver in the Belt and Road Initiative is physical capital instead of financial capital, which reflects the view that the financial sector should serve the real economy. The financial liberalization proposed by developed economies has been of little help, even counterproductive, to the growth of developing economies.

and Road countries. The Belt and Road Initiative has been an important driving force behind China's growing share of the global economy. The growing size of potential markets in Belt and Road countries not only enhances the demand for exports but also helps improve the efficiency of resource allocation through competition, which bodes well for the sustainability of economic development.

The Belt and Road Initiative is helping ensure balanced development. In the past, connections with maritime and waterway transportation routes were key symbols of the industrial economy. Many well-known port cities have emerged and grown into modern economic hubs. Typical examples include New York, London, Singapore, Hong Kong, Shanghai and Tokyo. These cities have benefited from globalization, which has also played an important role. A key innovation of the Belt and Road Initiative is the Silk Road Economic Belt, which strengthens interconnections between inland areas in Asia and Europe, especially economies in Eastern Europe and Central Asia. Thus, the initiative fosters the development of land ports and helps drive economic growth in inland countries and regions, including central and western China.

The Belt and Road Initiative can help participating countries better respond to climate change by exploring new areas of cooperation and capturing new opportunities

for development. The green transition has focused on the demand side, aiming to boost the demand for renewable energy with green subsidies and carbon pricing, such as the introduction of carbon taxes and carbon trading markets. This has led to concerns about the rise of "climate protectionism". For example, some green subsidies require related products to be produced domestically, while some countries plan to impose carbon border taxes on imports. In contrast, the Belt and Road Initiative cooperation can pay greater attention to the supply side, as many participating countries have ample solar and wind energy resources. Low-cost renewable energy resources are valuable endowments that can support sustainable industrialization. In the future, matching China's strong manufacturing capabilities with Belt and Road countries' advantage in the supply of renewable energy resources is a new growth engine. Infrastructure investment is a key precursor to success.

The philosophy of development under the Belt and Road Initiative also deals with the relationship between finance and the real economy. Cross-border capital flows have been the primary driving force behind the hyper-globalization that has taken place since the 1980s. Financial liberalization is a key component of the Washington Consensus under the premise that free cross-border capital flows would drive innovation, trade and industrialization. This mechanism is an extension to, or a part of, the financialization of developed economies, and it attempts to boost the growth of less-developed countries through financialization. In contrast, the Belt and Road Initiative relies on infrastructure connectivity as the foundation for international economic cooperation. In other words, the primary growth driver in the Belt and Road Initiative is physical capital instead of financial capital, which reflects the view that the financial sector should serve the real economy. The financial liberalization proposed by developed economies has been of little help, even counterproductive, to the growth of developing economies.

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HE YUN AND SHI ZHIQIN

Turning challenges into opportunities

Facts reveal that with its constructive problem-solving approach, China's Belt and Road Initiative has immense potential for shared development

A recent article in Foreign Affairs accuses China's Belt and Road Initiative of saddling developing countries with unsustainable debt while fulfilling China's geopolitical ambitions. However, a closer look reveals that it is a distorted narrative aimed at politicizing the Belt and Road Initiative while ignoring its considerable benefits.

The article claims China has dispensed \$1 trillion in potentially problematic loans. Yet, it fails to provide the source for such a figure. A report by Green Finance & Development Center states that by 2019, China's total outstanding lending to 52 Belt and Road countries stood at \$102 billion. According to another report by the Guardian, researchers from Aid-Data have identified \$385 billion in loans that 165 countries owe to China for Belt and Road projects. These numbers vary, but stand far below the \$1 trillion figure provided but not substantiated in the article. No doubt, Belt and Road lending is substantial, but its sum hardly constitutes global domination.

The article demonizes the Belt and Road Initiative's role in the debt crises of some countries. However, the Center for Global Development, after analyzing debt risks across 68 Belt and Road countries, found that only eight countries faced high debt distress. Crucially, these countries were already at high debt risks even before their participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, meaning they likely could not have found financing for their infrastructure projects otherwise. In this sense, the Belt and Road Initiative actually provides developmental lifelines, not debt traps. Even critics of the Belt and Road Initiative admit that many of its projects have been successfully completed to the advantage of the host nations.

For example, after initially halting the project, Malaysia revived the East Coast Rail Link, recognizing its value for national development. In truth, China has demonstrated flexibility when problems arise. It has restructured, canceled or forgiven troubled Belt and Road debts.

Though China's bailouts are still smaller than those provided by the International Monetary Fund, it has offered key relief to

high-debt countries nevertheless. The IMF leadership has applauded China as a development partner. In the words of its managing director Kristalina Georgieva, the IMF and China have a "strong partnership".

The claims that accuse China of seizing strategic assets are baseless. A March 2018 report released by the Center for Global Development found that between 2001 and 2017, China had restructured or waived loan payments for 51 debtor nations. Long-term leasing is on the basis of negotiations and mutual consent, and the purpose is precisely to avoid seizing state assets.

Above all, the Belt and Road Initiative meets the vital needs of participating countries. According to a report by the World Bank, when completed, Belt and Road transport projects can reduce travel time along economic corridors by 12 percent, increase trade by anything between 2.7 and 9.7 percentage points, increase income by up to 3.4 percentage points and lift 7.6 million people out of extreme poverty, delivering major social economic gains. In addition, developing countries face a significant infrastructure gap, with an estimated \$1.5 trillion needed annually to meet their infrastructure needs. The Belt and Road Initiative is one way by which China helps address this gap by investing in infrastructure projects in developing countries. This is why it has been endorsed by the African Union as a tool for achieving its Agenda 2063.

For example, the Maputo-Katembe Bridge project in Mozambique that connects the capital city of Maputo on the northern bank with the district of Katembe on the southern bank has significantly reduced commute time to Maputo and boosted regional trade and economy. Before the bridge was built, the only way to cross the bay was by ferry, which could take up to two hours. With the completion of the bridge, travel time between Maputo and Katembe has reduced to just a few minutes. This means tens of thousands of people who work in Maputo can now live with their family at Katembe.

This is not to say the Belt and Road Initiative is without flaws. There are instances of corruption

and loose lending, but such issues plague Western development projects, too. The difference is that when China encounters problems, it takes a proactive approach to addressing the problems and averting broader crises. For instance, when Malaysia faced unsustainable costs for the East Coast Rail Link, China agreed to cut the project cost by one-third, showing flexibility to address the host country's concerns. After Sri Lanka fell behind on Belt and Road loan payments for the Hambantota Port in 2017, China negotiated a debt-for-equity swap, helping Sri Lanka avoid default.

With cooperation and open-minded engagement, China and international partners can build on the Belt and Road Initiative's successes while addressing the issues for improvement. But a politicized narrative that exaggerates challenges while dismissing benefits will only breed mistrust when mutual understanding is needed. Ten years since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, it is time to move beyond distortions and recognize the initiative's constructive role in advancing sustainable development.

As Winston Churchill once said: "A pessimist sees the difficulty in every opportunity; an optimist sees the opportunity in every difficulty." By actively working to resolve issues through negotiations and mutually beneficial solutions, China and its Belt and Road partners have turned challenges into opportunities for greater cooperation. With this constructive problem-solving approach, anchored in hope rather than despair, the Belt and Road Initiative's immense potential for shared development can be fully unleashed. What matters are not the inevitable setbacks along the way, but the vision to persevere in pursuit of greater human progress.

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MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

CULTURE

A building of awareness

Dedicated staff at Ordos Museum in Inner Mongolia work hard to raise the understanding and profile of the institution, and the culturally important exhibits within, through modern, innovative means, **Yang Feiyue** and **Yuan Hui** report.

A building that features a bronze-colored metallic exterior easily sets itself apart from its neighbors in downtown Ordos, a city in North China's Inner Mongolia autonomous region.

It resembles a massive weathered boulder, which is said to symbolize the rock-hard spirit of the city's residents.

Housing more than 80,000 valuable items, especially bronzeware, it's the Ordos Museum, an institution that, during the recent summer months, has attracted more than 10,000 visitors every day.

"A considerable number of them are in their 20s. Going to the museum seems to be an important part of their cultural life these days," says Li Rui, the museum's deputy curator.

Every item on display is accompanied by a detailed introduction to its history and background, and Li has come to know them like the back of his hand.

"The oldest exhibit is a skull fossil belonging to a member of the (archaic human) Hetao Man that dates back approximately 140,000 years," Li says.

He took a special shine to a crown, made for a woman, that is accompanied by earrings and a necklace.

The splendid and dazzling headpiece is adorned with turquoise, white jade, seashells and gold.

"It's not hard to imagine the wealth and status of the wearer during her lifetime," Li says.

Archaeologists believe it belonged to a noble of the nomadic Xiongnu people in the early Western Han Dynasty (206 BC-AD 24) and is, so far, the only known female headpiece of its kind from that period.

The main style of the crown and accompanying jewelry is influenced by Central Plains culture, while the animal motifs that adorn its top retain the characteristics of northern nomadic culture. The glass and amber beads on the crown were pretty common in the Central Asian region, while the craftsmanship carries traces of ancient Western civilizations.

In Li's eyes, the value of these items lies not only in their splendid appearance, but also in the cultural inclusiveness they embody.

Whenever Li has time, he will tour the museum, where he has worked for more than 20 years.

"Especially when temporary and special exhibitions are on," he says, adding that his major focus has been bronzeware.

"Items from Ordos belong to the north, mainly found along the Great Wall, and they are a good complement to those found in the Central Plains area," he adds.

Speaking about their differences, Li says the northern items bear engraved animal patterns and were closely related to nomads' wars and production activities, while those from the central area of the country leaned toward sacrificial culture.

Whenever he stands in front of the exhibits in the museum, Li says he feels as if he is traveling thousands of years back in time to engage in a profound dialogue with them.

Born and bred in Ordos, Li has



From left: The Ordos Museum hosts a great number of cultural relics, including a black-glazed carved vase featuring peony and deer images; a set of accessories consisting of a crown, earrings and a necklace; and trumpet-mouthed pointed-base vase.

been exposed to the fascination of cultural relics since childhood, when he would accompany his father to work at a local museum. During holidays, he followed his parents to the countryside and engaged in cultural relic surveys.

The influence of those formative years saw him opt for history, cultural heritage and museology studies at Inner Mongolia University in Hohhot, the region's capital city.

"It helped make my history knowledge more systematic, and paved the way for my later research," Li says.

After graduation, he went straight to work at the museum, where he was first in charge of cultural relic collection, authentication and protection.

It didn't take long before he realized the line of work requires a deep integration of theory and practice.

"I found myself short of the necessary expertise at work, especially when it came to items with profound cultural backgrounds," Li says.

That was when he decided to make further inroads into the field by pursuing a master's degree in cultural relics and museology at Inner Mongolia University in 2005, returning to the museum two years later.

Since then, his responsibilities have grown to cover exhibition arrangement, social education, and research and development of cultural and creative products.

Li has come to see the museum as a cultural reception hall, which houses the common spiritual wealth of humanity, and his colleagues and

Items from Ordos belong to the north, mainly found along the Great Wall, and they are a good complement to those found in the Central Plains area."

Li Rui, deputy curator of Ordos Museum



himself are their guardians.

"The first thing we have to do is impart the stories behind them, (including) the deeper culture and new archaeological findings, so they can be seen and understood by more people," Li says.

In the late 2000s, Li and his colleagues started to develop creative cultural items to promote the museum.

"It was more about simply copying the appearance of cultural relics, such as bronze items, at the beginning," Li recalls.

As time moved, they have been able to extract distinctive elements from those historical items and then create brand-new products.

Li is still impressed by how his colleagues have been enthusiastically brainstorming and delivered more than 200 popular creative items bearing the museum's characteristics.

The blind box fragrance candle has been among the most popular. Different bronze ornaments will be revealed after the candle is burned out.

"The process of the candle burning is like archaeologists excavating artifacts, allowing you to experience the excitement of discovering the treasures for the first time," Li says.

Another creative item Li takes pride in is the incense burner, which was inspired by an eagle-topped golden crown on show at the museum.

"We retained the eagle element

and took the liberty of creating a pedestal in the shape of a lotus leaf," Li says.

"It suits a modern aesthetic and the incense can be placed horizontally or vertically, while ensuring the ashes won't spill over," he adds.

Other popular souvenirs include bronze knives and sword-shaped USB flash drives, through which the museum wanted to convey the collision of history and modernity.

Wang Dan, who also works at the museum, appreciates Li's rigorous yet humorous attitude at work.

"He is a leader with a wealth of ideas and creativity, possesses great interpersonal skills and willingly collaborates with everyone," Wang says.

She says that he is often eager to apply his expertise to the cultural and creative products and is committed to learning together with the team at the museum.

"Li not only provides a sense of enjoyment in the workplace but also creates opportunities and a platform for everyone to showcase their talents," she adds.

In 2021, the museum was merged with Ordos bronzeware museum and Ordos revolutionary history museum, offering richer content to visitors.

Shortly afterward, Li and his colleagues started exploring new channels to promote the museum.

The museum has worked with the local airport to open up shops selling its cultural items.

"The idea is to enable visitors to see those products the moment they set foot in Ordos," Li says.

The team also opened a Douyin account, where everyone has learned to film and edit short videos.

"We need to figure out what to film to capture people's attention and how to do so from innovative perspectives," Li says.

"At the same time, the content should offer depth without being tasteless," he adds.

Li encouraged his team to communicate and speak their mind, just like they did a decade ago when they first started work on the creative cultural items.

Their efforts have paid off, as more people have got to know the museum and become interested in the history and culture of Ordos through Douyin.

The videos featuring the museum's collection have intrigued many people online, who have left comments that asked them to upload more videos and that show interest in visiting Ordos.

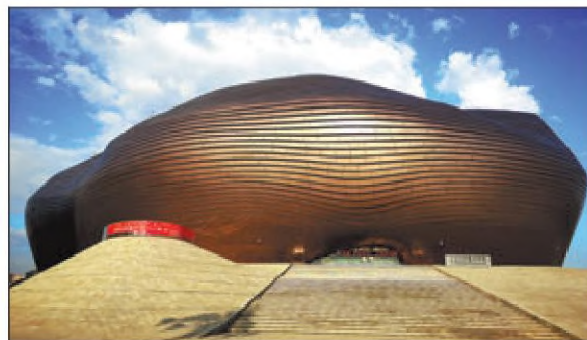
To date, Li and his colleagues have picked and chosen approximately 30 creative cultural items to sell on Douyin.

"They are deemed among the most practical and can be appreciated as art," Li says.

In his opinion, the most direct way to make cultural relics come alive is to have them involved in people's everyday lives.

"Allowing interested individuals to take products home that bear their traits is one way to do that," he says.

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From left: Li Rui (center) tours the gallery introducing the Ordos Museum at the airport in Ordos, Inner Mongolia autonomous region. The exterior of the Ordos Museum. Visitors experience intangible cultural heritage at the museum. Center, top: Li highlights the significance of the cultural relics at the Ordos Museum on the popular TV program *National Treasure*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Rural female painter relishes showing her true colors

HARBIN — During the day, Guo Lihua is a farmer in Heilongjiang province, toiling in the fields to grow crops. When night falls, however, she picks up her brush, and turns into a painter in front of a canvas.

In her paintings, the sky is blue, the corn golden, and the farmers look joyful in their colorful attire.

"I am a farmer and I have lived in the countryside all my life," says the 54-year-old. "I would like to show people real rural life through my paintings."

Growing up in Heilongjiang's Binxian county, Guo dropped out of

school as a third-grader to help her parents. "I liked drawing as a child, but we could not afford brushes and paper then," she says.

In her spare time, she would find a twig to use to sketch on the ground. At the time, it never occurred to her, even in her wildest dreams, that one day she would become a painter.

The turning point came in 2012, when her son wanted to learn to paint and asked her to buy him a brush and some paint. He soon gave up, but his mother's dream was revived.

Contrary to Guo's expectations,

her paintings impressed her neighbors and resulted in them taking some of them home.

She soon became a regular face at the stationery shop, where she would buy more paint. The shop owner became curious. "You are just a farmer. What can you paint?" he asked. Surprised by the quality of the paintings, he decided to introduce Guo to a local art teacher.

"At first, I knew next to nothing about painting. I just painted whatever was in my mind, using the brush like I was painting a wall," she says.

After learning from the teacher,

she quickly mastered better techniques.

She has never seen painting as difficult, and is able to instinctively paint the sky, the trees, and the cotton-padded jackets worn by people like her in northeastern China.

During farming season, she does farmwork by day and paints by night. Sometimes, until the crack of dawn.

Her pictures have drawn praise from professionals impressed with their bright colors and strong personal style. Guo has won numerous awards, and some of her pieces have been exhibited overseas.

In her village, people used to call

Guo "the technician", because she liked using her brain. Fellow villagers always asked when they should start growing vegetables, and which seeds they should choose.

Now, her nickname has changed to "the painter". Guo also likes using her brain to improve her skills. "She never feels tired," says her husband, adding that sometimes his wife forgets to eat or sleep.

She is frequently asked why the people in her paintings are all smiling, and seemingly happy.

"Of course we are happy," she replies. "In spring, we sow the seeds of hope in the field, and watch the

crops grow like our children. In autumn, we harvest with great happiness. I paint what I see."

In her paintings, it is possible to detect changes to her village, such as the introduction of new technology and the increasing number of home-stays in rural areas, which mirror rural revitalization taking place across the country.

"Our life in the countryside is constantly improving," Guo says. "I will keep painting for as long as I can, to let people see the reality of our lives and feel our happiness."

XINHUA

CULTURE

Walking along a winding path of green stone slabs through the serene bamboo forest, one is greeted by Fengshan Temple, in Zhongao town.

More than 50 figures, first carved out of the rocks during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), appear spread across a cliff wall, standing 7 meters high and 40 meters wide.

The town in Chongqing's Dazu district received rainfall in August, but the vividly carved sculptures, shielded by a covered corridor, remained dry.

This is all thanks to an initiative launched by the Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings several years ago to protect medium- and small-sized cave temples in the area.

They are part of the Dazu Rock Carvings cluster, which were inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1999, the second grotto temple from China to be added after the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province.

It is believed that grotto temples were introduced to China from India along the Silk Road during the third century. As the Buddhist art form evolved, it absorbed local artistic elements and, in addition to exquisite Buddha images and scriptures that are characteristic of grotto temples elsewhere in the country, the Dazu carvings feature tableaux urging people to perform their filial duties, conduct themselves properly, and refrain from greed.

The carvings enjoy a unique status, mixing Buddhism with indigenous beliefs like Confucianism and Taoism.

To date, some 50,000 statues and images carved into cliffs in the district have been placed under protection, among which are the carvings in the Beishan, Baoding, Nanshan, Shimen and Shizuan mountains.

The small- to medium-sized cave temples are considered valuable physical evidence in the study of a number of different aspects including religion, art, architecture, historical clothing, folklore and also philosophical thought from different eras.

"They feature exquisite carvings, a diversity of themes and rich content, providing a true reflection of the political, economic and social history of the Sichuan and Chongqing regions during the Tang (618-907) and Song (960-1279) periods," says Jiang Siwei, head of the Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings.

However, due to a variety of factors, their overall state of preservation is relatively poor. The 68 small- and medium-sized cave temple sites are scattered across the countryside and streets of 18 towns around the district, which creates difficulties in their management.

As their significance was increasingly recognized, the academy worked on repairing protective structures at 13 of the 68 sites in the district and reinforced rock mass at three sites between 2001 and 2019.

However, many rock carvings remain exposed to the natural environment, causing issues such as rock fissures, loosening, water seepage, moss and lichen growth, the peeling of paint and weathering.

"These problems have accelerated the deterioration of the statues, posing a threat to their safety," Jiang says.

Multiple sites did not have sufficient power, and 50 locations did not have full surveillance facilities, which hampered safety monitoring of the statues, as well as archaeological research, among other conservation efforts, Jiang recalls.

In 2021, Dazu launched a new round of protection for scattered cave temples, encompassing the reinforcement of precarious expanses of rock, the construction of protective architecture, drainage, fire ponds, as well as security, sanitation and lighting protection facilities.

The project is spread over an



Scattered cultural gems sparkle once more

Work to protect remote temples and carvings continues apace, benefiting villagers and fueling rural tourism, **Yang Feiyue** reports in Chongqing.



Top: The repaired rock carvings in a cave temple at the Fozuyan site of Dazu district, Chongqing. Above: Reinforced rock carvings at the Zhushishan site in Dazu. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

area of 40,000 square meters and will be carried out in three phases, according to the academy.

The first phase has already been completed, with the condition of rock carvings at multiple small- and medium-sized cave temples improved.

At the Shuchengyan site in Zhongao, a cave temple has recently undergone preliminary restoration, thanks to the efforts of an Italian cultural heritage cluster and the Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings.

The project started in 2018, with a yearlong series of experiments and analysis conducted by both

sides on gold leaf, paint, rock and microorganisms, as well as repair techniques, before restoration began.



This will transform these relatively lesser-known cave temples into artistic gems embedded in the rural landscape, no longer hidden from public sight."

Jiang Siwei, head of the Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings

"The temple was very popular in the past and attracted a lot of local worshippers," says Ruan Fanghong, an official who is part of the project.

As a result, many rock carvings became covered in soot and were damaged.

The two teams applied a synthetic enzyme to remove impurities from the paint, and then used polyvinyl alcohol to paste the peeling gold leaf back in place.

"Now, several years have passed, and the restored parts are holding up very well," Ruan says.

Moreover, the ability of relics to resist the collapse of rock mass, water damage and weathering has been significantly improved, all potential risks present in the original protective architecture have

been dealt with, and the structures have been given more distinctive local characteristics.

The infrastructure and environment around the cave temples has also been improved, and precautionary measures have been put in place to ensure their protection.

"Construction takes into full consideration the integration with the rural vitalization strategy," Jiang says.

"By building new pedestrian pathways, public restrooms and courtyards, as well as adding tables and chairs for leisure use and improving protection and signage, the changes have paved the way for cultural activities that are accessible to local residents," he adds.

Long Gewen, a villager from Zhongao, has been guarding the small- and medium-sized cave temples in his neighborhood for over a decade.

"Everything scattered within a radius of 1,000 meters is my responsibility," the man, who is in his 60s, says.

"I need to keep an eye on the cultural relics to ensure their safety, while doing a little cleaning every day."

Long is one of many villagers hired by the local government to keep watch over the scattered cave temples.

Every year, safety training and work reviews are held for villagers, says Liu Jian, an official from the academy's planning and construction division.

"All cave temple sites have been covered, and some have been placed under observation 24 hours a day by two patrollers taking turns," Liu says.

Peng Xiulong, who also comes from Zhongao, has seen the positive changes to the Fengshan Temple cave site near her home.

"The protective structural beams were fractured, the roof was leaking, and the surrounding environment was in disorder," she recalls.

Now, the infrastructure has been upgraded, and many independent tourists come to Fengshan village to appreciate the beauty of the rock carvings at the temple.

"It has become a clean and peaceful place for meditation and serenity," she says.

Plaques introducing the history of the rock carvings in Chinese and English have been erected, so that visitors can better understand them.

According to Liu, one of the positive outcomes of the protection drive has been the rise in rural tourism.

Plum blossom sightseeing and boating activities have been introduced in Zhongao to complement the visitor experience.

The number of travel visits has grown significantly since last year, according to Gong Wenchuan, a town official.

In neighboring Gaoping town, protection projects at three cave temple sites have also brought in more visitors.

Homestays were fully booked this spring, something that would have been unimaginable in the past, says Huang Xiuqiong, a resident of the town.

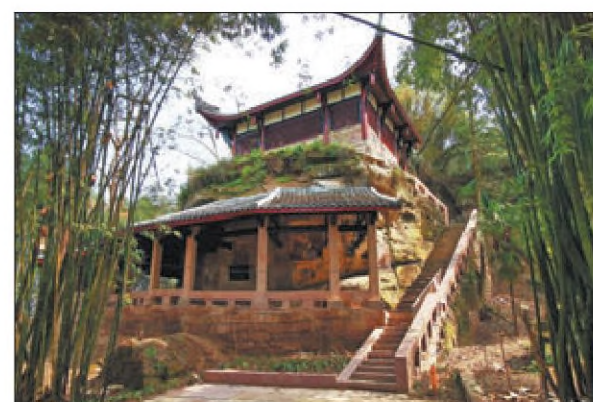
Local officials believe that additional rural tourism potential will be unlocked once restoration of the 68 cave temple sites is completed.

With increasing national attention on cultural heritage protection, investment has been on the rise, and as the cultural heritage protection workforce has become stronger, small- and medium-sized cave temples have benefited.

The academy plans to complete the renovation of the 68 sites over the next three years.

"This will transform these relatively lesser-known cave temples into artistic gems embedded in the rural landscape, no longer hidden from public sight," Jiang says.

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From left: A repaired protective structure for rock carvings at the Duimianfo site in Dazu. An aerial view of the Fengshan Temple site, and covered rock carvings at the temple there.

LIFE



From left: Band members of Wayina, Shi Ba, Lu Min and Ba Nong perform on the popular reality show, *The Big Band*, which has helped the group reach a larger audience. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A leader in his field

Folk musician Ba Nong and his bandmates find a wider audience, as songs inspired by his rural hometown prove to be a hit on popular reality show, **Chen Nan** reports.

Ba Nong, a member of the Zhuang ethnic group, was born and raised in a small village in the county of Nandan, Hechi city, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region — about three-and-a-half hours' drive from Nanning, capital city of the region, and over 2,000 kilometers away from Beijing.

Born to a farming family, Ba Nong grew up close to nature and got to know the land well. His other passion was music, and, at the age of 20, he got his first guitar and started to perform songs he had written.

However, the now 44-year-old musician didn't expect that his music, with its deep, rural roots, would attract so many fans after making his debut on the reality show, *The Big Band* — now in its third season and produced and broadcast by iQiyi — alongside his two bandmates, 38-year-old Shi Ba and 33-year-old Lu Min.

Their band is called Wayina in Mandarin, or Varihnaz in the language of the Zhuang ethnic group, which means "the farmland with rice aroma".

The first song they performed on the reality show was *Tian Ge*, or *Song of the Land*, which was written by Ba Nong in 2008. All three can sing, and they play different musical instruments, even some that are not common. For example, Lu Min turned a hoe into a percussion instrument, striking it with a piece of iron, while Ba Nong wowed the audience when he made music by blowing on leaves.

"The stars shine at night and cast a bright light on the rice land. ... Thanks to you, my land, bless me with aroma of rice grains. ... My land, you cannot rest because of me," the song goes.

"Their performance conjures up lots of imagery, such as the beautiful farmland and nature. I could imagine the three members of the band sowing seeds, harvesting, drinking and singing, which is so beautiful," said pop diva Na Ying, one of the six celebrity judges on the reality show.

"We planned to sing one song on the show and leave. We didn't expect that we could win the opportunity to stay for the second round and sing a second song," says Ba Nong.

The second song they performed on the show was a popular Chinese song, *Long Time No See*, first performed by Hong Kong star Eason Chan. Veteran music producer and songwriter Zhang Yadong was impressed by the band's adaptation, describing it as "surprising, sincere and powerful".

"It's our first time performing on a reality show. For us, it's not a competition, but a place for us to create and grow with freedom," Ba Nong adds.

Ba Nong, Shi Ba and Lu Min made their stage debut together as a band last year in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, where they performed *Song of the Land* for the first time. They felt great about that performance and decided to perform as Wayina, which Ba Nong first founded in 2006 in Guangzhou, Guangdong province. Shi Ba and Lu Min also come



From top: The members of Wayina in their hometown in Hechi city, South China's Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region; guitarist Shi Ba and lead singer Ba Nong play music together at the latter's home in Hechi; and the band rehearses in Ba Nong's home studio. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

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Na Ying, pop diva and celebrity judge on *The Big Band*

from Guangxi. Shi Ba used to make a living as a busker, while Lu Min worked on a construction site. They also write their own original material.

"We do rehearsals when we have performances, or when Ba Nong needs our help in the field," said Shi Ba on the reality show. "We love to discover creative ideas,

whether it's in regard to farming or music. Both are a way of life for us."

Song of the Land was featured on the second album of the band,

which was titled *River Without a Name* and written from 2008 to 2009. While the second album recorded Ba Nong's emotions after returning to his hometown, the first album, titled *Drifting Cloud in the Sky*, which was written from 2005 to 2006, was about his life after leaving home to work and live in Guangzhou.

Ba Nong wrote *Song of the Land* when he returned to his hometown to help his parents on the farm. At that time, he worked as a graphic designer at a company in Guangzhou, and the song, he says, portrays how he viewed his hometown after he had seen the "big world outside".

"I lived in Guangzhou for some years, where I had a busy lifestyle. It was very different from the one I had in my hometown. When I returned home, I had a different feeling about the place where I was born and raised, and about the land, which offered me food and everything I had as a child," says Ba Nong, who studied art for a year after high school and hoped to study it at university. Unfortunately that dream didn't come to fruition.

"When I was a child, we had winter fallow period, which allowed the farmland to rest. Though we had no income during that period of time, people would spend the day singing, dancing and enjoying themselves," says Ba Nong. "However, now farmers seem to be like people living in urban areas. They work hard and keep their land busy throughout the whole year."

One day, after harvesting vegetables with his parents, Ba Nong went to bed. The next morning, he was surprised to see that his parents had already sold the vegetables and planted new seeds.

"Soon, the lyrics hit me: 'my land, you cannot rest because of me,'" recalls Ba Nong, who later developed it into the song, *Song of the Land*.

He mentions that he listened to lots of songs by musicians which portray their hometowns, inspiring him to think about his own.

"They sing about their homes, nature and the land, which reminded me of my home. We seem to ignore how beautiful our home is and pursue a life in bigger cities," Ba Nong says.

In 2012, he decided to quit his job in Guangzhou and return home. He built his own house and bought recording equipment. He recorded his music trilogy and released it in 2015, featuring three albums, including *Drifting Cloud in the Sky* and *River Without a Name*.

Now, with their songs reaching a wider audience, the band has received more opportunities. However, they are in no hurry to pursue fame or money.

"We are much busier than ever due to the reality show. We travel a lot. But we will return to our home once our job on the show is done. Our music is born in the field, therefore we will never leave it for long," says Ba Nong.

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Let's rid the fast-food monster of its teeth

Do you like cheeseburgers and french fries as much as I do? How about dumplings or tacos?

Do you like any of them enough to reach into a shark's mouth to retrieve them, knowing full well that you might scrape razor-sharp teeth on the way in or out?

That's pretty much what you have to do these days when takeout food is delivered, since so many restaurants now seal their bags with staples.

The intention is good, because securely closing the

bag helps ensure food safety. We can rest assured that no one has tampered with our meal before it arrives.



But surely the use of tape, which many eateries do choose instead, is safer

by far than staples. The latter are pulled into bare-fang position when a bag is opened, exposing lots of little teeth that find and surprise your wrist, hand or fingers. Ouch!

Not to mention that a puncture wound from a staple, especially on a finger, is not only painful, but prone to infection as well.

Furthermore, staples, being made of steel, are hardly environmentally friendly.

And they pose yet another danger: They can fall into food such as french fries and accidentally be consumed. Believe me, you don't want to ingest a staple, especially not an open one.

I actually found a staple in a bag of french fries one night in Beijing. It reminded me of the time when, as a teenager, I was working at my favorite local burger joint the day we offered a free hamburger, fries and soda to anyone who walked through the door (which hundreds subsequently did).

We prepared our fries daily from fresh potatoes, and on that particular day I was kept very busy, nonstop in fact, cutting potatoes using a hand-operated chopper. I used a long fork to pluck a submerged potato out of a huge post-peeling bin, quickly pushed it into the cutting box and then forcefully lowered the multibladed cutter, hundreds of times.

The chopper eventually buckled under the strain, and a small piece of sharp metal blade, unbeknownst to us, broke off and found its way into a customer's bag of hot, crispy fries. Luckily for all involved, she found it and did not accidentally consume it, so no harm was done.

But woe to anyone who is not so fortunate.

What's more, the open staple that we're lucky enough to avoid when eagerly reaching into a bag of food poses a hazard to anyone who handles the bag after we discard it. So I make it a habit to remove the staples before recycling a bag, which can be time-consuming.

How many millions of these tiny steel nuisances are introduced each day into the food chain? Indeed, some restaurants go all out and use eight staples when two would do, which increases the danger and the waste. It also requires more physical exertion to open the bag, thereby guaranteeing that every staple is opened and ready to pounce.

Why don't we put an end to this practice and ensure that rice and bread remain our only "staple foods", and not french fries?

Let's defang the fast-food monster and just use tape to seal the deal.

Our hands, and the environment, will be glad we did.

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