

Stargazing joy

Photographer captures major award, wide attention for heavenly images

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Huawei unveils new products, including high-end cellphone

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Demanding process

Traditional paper-making craft survives, prospers amid challenges

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CHINA DAILY

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Zhejiang urged to advance Chinese modernization

President calls on province to play leading role in boosting country's common prosperity drive

By XU WEI
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President Xi Jinping has called for Zhejiang province to play a leading role in the nation's common prosperity drive, saying that the eastern province should become an example showcasing the strength of socialism with Chinese characteristics.

Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, made a fact-finding trip to Jinhua and Shaoxing in Zhejiang on Wednesday.

He made the visit before hosting Asian leaders and attending the opening ceremony of the ongoing 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, the provincial capital.

The fact-finding trip took him to a village, an international small-commodities market, an exhibition hall, and a culture park featuring the Grand Canal, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

During his visit to Lizu, a village in Jinhua, Xi was delighted to learn that its annual per capita income had reached 52,000 yuan (\$7,250) and expressed his hope that the villagers would make further efforts and achieve more results in advancing rural vitalization.

He later visited Yiwu International Trade Market in Jinhua, where he learned about the operation of the market and the China-Europe freight trains. Xi urged the trade market to contribute more to expanding markets at home and abroad as well as to smoothing domestic and international economic flows.

While visiting a canal culture park in Shaoxing, he stressed that culture related to the Grand Canal,

the world's longest artificial waterway, is an important part of the fine traditional Chinese culture and demands proper protection, inheritance and utilization.

At a briefing on Thursday on the work of the provincial Party committee and the provincial government, Xi urged Zhejiang, a manufacturing powerhouse and leading innovation hub, to fully, accurately and comprehensively implement the new development philosophy and focus on building a new development pattern and promoting high-quality development.

Xi stressed the significance of strengthening the role of enterprises as the main drivers of technological innovation, deepening the integration of innovation, industry, funding and talent chains, and accelerating the commercial application of research outcomes.

The real economy should be seen as the foundation for building a modern industrial system, and more work must be done to guide and support the application of cutting-edge technologies in traditional sectors and promote the high-end, intelligent and green development of the manufacturing sector.

In Zhejiang, which is home to several of China's internet giants, the new economy, including new industries and business models, accounted for 28.1 percent of the province's GDP last year, according to the provincial bureau of statistics.

Going forward, Xi said Zhejiang should create strategic emerging industry and digital industry clusters with international competitiveness, while continuously improving the resilience and security of its industrial and supply chains.

See Visit, page 3

Warm welcome



Srettha Thavisin (center), Thailand's prime minister, poses on Monday for photographs with visitors during an event to welcome inbound tourists from China at Suvarnabhumi Airport in Bangkok, Thailand. Around 340 travelers from Shanghai landed at the airport on Monday morning. Thailand had recently announced its decision to allow visa-free entry for Chinese tourists from Monday until the end of February. VALERIA MONGELLI / GETTY IMAGES See story, page 6

Upgraded digital RMB services to benefit foreign users

By LIU ZHIHUA and ZHOU LANXU

China has upgraded its digital renminbi payment services as part of the country's efforts to improve the profile of its digital currency and make the payment process more user-friendly for foreigners.

As mobile payment has become the dominant means of payment in China, such steps will offer foreigners a better experience during their visit to or stay in the country, experts said, adding that more measures are expected to further promote the digital fiat currency.

The newly launched "recharge before use" feature on the e-CNY app allows foreigners to replenish the wallet of the app using online services of global payment networks Visa and Mastercard.

Foreigners can also go to bank service outlets to recharge the digital RMB wallet with cash. If there is a balance left in the digital wallet

afterward, it can be returned to the foreign bank card or account that was used for topping up.

Previously, foreigners in China could not top up their e-CNY wallets in advance. They could only do so on the spot when making payments.

The new function allows foreigners to use more convenient online payment methods, such as "quick pay", just like domestic users. Also, it shortens the payment duration, makes the operation simpler and smoother, improves payment efficiency, reduces waiting time due to foreign card verification and enhances the overall payment experience.

With the upgrade, foreigners can use their e-CNY wallets both at brick-and-mortar merchants capable of accepting the digital currency under trial programs and on online platforms such as ride-hailing app Didi, takeaway service provider Meituan and travel portal Ctrip.

Dong Ximiao, chief researcher at Merchants Union Consumer Finance, said that mobile payment services are not as widely used in most foreign countries and regions as in China. "Therefore, the digital RMB is an important means for offering foreigners safe, convenient and fast payment services in China."

Zhou Maohua, an analyst at China Everbright Bank, said the upgrade will benefit foreigners and increase the presence of e-CNY in cross-border transaction scenarios, which will ultimately help promote the digital RMB and facilitate the internationalization of the currency.

China has been developing the digital version of the fiat currency since 2014 under trial programs.

As of May 31, around 264 million e-CNY transactions were made in trial regions, totaling 83 billion yuan (\$11.4 billion), according to the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank.

Zhou Mi, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation in Beijing, said that China always welcomes foreign consumers, and there is still room for improvement in areas such as cross-border payment.

In another development, Chinese financial technology company Ant Group introduced seven new leading digital wallets and payment apps from Asia to the Chinese mainland, bringing the total number of overseas digital wallets accepted on the mainland to 10.

The company said that users of overseas digital wallets, such as HiPay of Mongolia and Changi Pay of Singapore, will be able to use their domestic mobile e-wallets to enjoy a seamless payment experience on the mainland across Alipay's vast merchant network.

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Ethnic inspiration



Models walk the ramp in costumes featuring embroidery of China's Miao ethnic group during the Milan Fashion Week in Italy on Sunday. The show offered the audience an opportunity to appreciate the craftsmanship of Miao embroiderers from close quarters. Another show featuring embroidery of the Yi ethnic group was also held on Saturday at the fashion week. JIN MAMENGI / XINHUA See related story, page 7

THEME PARKS RISE TO CULTURAL CHALLENGE

Venues nationwide strive to attract audiences with icons

By YANG RAN and ZHAO RUINAN

Sui Guoxing, 21, a student in Changchun, the capital of Jilin province, recently spent an evening visiting the city's Zoological and Botanical Garden, where she met staff members dressed as characters from Chinese folklore.

For example, she encountered the Monkey King from the classic

In-depth

work *Journey to the West* and Hua Mulan, a legendary heroine from the Southern and Northern Dynasties (420-581).

"It was like being in the television series *Journey to the West*. The characters we met were just like those in the show, especially

the fairies, who were exceptionally beautiful," said Sui, who is studying civil engineering at Jilin Jianzhu University.

This summer, the garden's managers went beyond their remit of being responsible for the plants, flowers and animals at the venue, and came up with the idea of giving it the feel of a theme park in the evenings.

See Attractions, page 2

Biden's speech at UN theatrical but hollow

Amid the grand theater of this year's United Nations General Assembly, United States President Joe Biden gave a disappointing speech that bore the stamp of hollow verbosity.

He tried to use the General Assembly as an opportunity to emphasize US "global leadership." Just like last year, his chosen spotlight narrowly focused on the

WORLD WATCH

By Imran Khalid

Ukraine conflict, serving as the linchpin for reinforcing alliances with select partners.

Biden's disproportionate emphasis on the Ukraine conflict

in his speech on Sept 19 was largely driven by his domestic political situation. The Democrat is grappling with significant challenges related to passing spending bills and contending with low approval ratings, while former president Donald Trump is emerging as the Republican front-runner, in major opinion polls, for the 2024 presidential race.

This focus on the Ukraine conflict is being used as a strategic distraction or an attempt to bolster his leadership image amid these pressing domestic issues and a resurgent political rival.

Biden chose to put the spotlight on the Russia-Ukraine crisis at the General Assembly, while deliberately ignoring the main theme of "rebuilding trust and rekindling global solidarity."

By prioritizing the Ukraine crisis, he appeared to be reinforcing the bonds of select allies while

exploiting the issue to tarnish and exert pressure on other countries, indirectly commanding the General Assembly as a tool to advance his own geopolitical agenda.

While he briefly addressed other topics such as climate change, the restructuring of the UN Security Council, Iran's nuclear program and the Palestinian-Israeli conflict, his primary focus remained squarely on the Ukraine conflict.

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China-Thailand cooperation set to help boost regional growth
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Left: The Journey to the West Theme Park in Hua'an, Jiangsu province, integrates intellectual properties such as the Monkey King with the theme park industry. **Right:** Visitors view a lighting show at the Journey to the West Theme Park in July. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From page 1

During her visit, Sui watched a number of parades and performances based on themes from *Journey to the West*, one of China's most popular literary works.

"When we walked to see one parade, the entire pathway was filled with dry ice, creating a kind of dream world. It was overwhelming," Sui said.

"I really love the Monkey King, who was portrayed exceptionally well. The performances included the Monkey King using his magic staff, which bears the poetic name At-will Golden Banded Staff."

Journey to the West, written during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) by Wu Cheng'en, depicts the pilgrimage of a monk and his three disciples, including the Monkey King.

In 1986, the TV adaptation of *Journey to the West*, which has had an enduring impact on millions, was a hugely popular series with audiences of all ages.

As a result, it is no surprise that the Changchun Zoological and Botanical Garden's initiative has rekindled childhood memories for many Chinese and is attracting visitors from across the country.

Short videos and posts featuring the park quickly began appearing on the internet, prompting many netizens to ask why, when it comes to theme parks, Chinese traditional culture and iconography seems to be largely absent. One poster on a social media site stated: "We should build a *Journey to the West* theme park in each of the top 10 cities in China. It would obviously be more fun than Disney."

International theme parks — think Disneyland and Universal Studios — occupy an inordinately large space in China, but no park of national significance has been based on traditional Chinese iconography.

Sui said the *Journey to the West* show in Changchun bore strong Western overtones, such as Disneyesque parades and character performances.

"After my visit, I now really want to explore Shanghai Disneyland," she said.

Millions welcomed

Western influence is clearly evident in the theme park world, as Shanghai Disneyland attracts nearly 1 million more visitors annually than China's most popular non-Western theme park, Chimelong Ocean Kingdom, a marine-life ven-

ue in Zhuhai, Guangdong province, according to data from 2022-22 collected by a report.

In April, the Shanghai International Tourism Resort, home to Shanghai Disneyland, said it had welcomed more than 113 million visitors and earned revenue of over 61.5 billion yuan (\$8.46 billion) since it opened seven years ago.

The only theme park in China to rival Shanghai Disneyland in terms of attendance is Universal Beijing Resort, which opened in 2021 to an overwhelming response despite the COVID-19 pandemic, with nearly 30,000 people flocking to the venue on its opening day.

This raises the question of why such parks in China with local themes appear to find it impossible to match the likes of Disneyland and Universal Studios.

Zhang Zheng, deputy dean of Tsinghua University's School of Journalism and Communication, said one reason is that the cultural-

intellectual properties, or IPs, which include hit movies, books and characters, these international parks rely on, have long been well-received and loved by China's main consumer groups.

Amanda Wu, 30, who works in Beijing as an analyst, said she visited Universal Beijing Resort twice in the past six months, and is planning a third trip. She said she bought the tickets because of the iconic IPs the venue boasts.

"I was born in the 1990s and grew up with movies such as the Harry Potter and Transformers series. When my family visited me, we thought it would be fun to go to Universal Beijing Resort, where we could experience such world-class IPs without leaving the country," Wu said.

Sui, the Changchun student, said she is drawn to Shanghai Disneyland and Universal Beijing Resort because she enjoys animated Disney movies and is familiar with the characters featured at these venues.

If an iconic cultural IP is the key to success for international theme parks, then China certainly has an abundance of beloved cultural icons. China can draw on classic works such as *Journey to the West* and *Dream of the Red Chamber*, an 18th-

Attractions: Immersive experiences sought



A dancer performs at a district in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, themed on the Chinese novel *The Longest Day in Chang'an*. ZOU JINGYI / XINHUA

century novel written by Cao Xueqin, for its theme parks, and the recent Netflix adaptation of *Journey to the West* and the popular Disney movie *Mulan* underline the international recognition of Chinese classics.

The fact that China lacks a national theme park based on these traditional icons is not for want of trying. A report in the weekly magazine *China Newsweek* said the country once boasted more than

400 theme parks based on stories from *Journey to the West*, but most of them have closed after failing to attract enough visitors.

Zhang said, "One big problem in building traditional Chinese theme parks is that they are based on adaptations of well-known literary works, which may not be able to support the core story needed to establish such a park."

Journey to the West is now a pub-

lic intellectual property, meaning that anyone can create cultural products based on the story without having to pay royalties. However, Zhang said the fact that the original story was extremely popular does not necessarily mean that any spin-off will be equally as successful.

"Products based on secondary creations usually draw smaller audiences. Attractions such as Shanghai Disneyland and Universal Beijing Resort essentially rely on their original IPs to attract visitors. If a park is based on secondary interpretations of well-known IPs, it lacks a core story to build its theme, and I think this is why it is difficult to develop theme parks based on traditional Chinese iconography represented by *Journey to the West*," Zhang added.

Nostalgic audiences

Han Shunfa, a professor at Nanjing Normal University's School of Journalism and Communication, said the popularity of entertainment related to *Journey to the West* is due to strong feelings of nostalgia among audiences and their familiarity with such stories. However, finding a suitable way to integrate this well-known IP with the theme park industry is quite a challenge.

Many operators have failed in attempts to make *Journey to the West* a winning theme park proposition, but this has not deterred others from trying. The Journey to the West Theme Park in Hua'an, Jiangsu province, which opened in 2021, is one of the latest attempts.

The park's owners recruited Zeitgeist Design & Production, a design company based in the United States which had a hand in designing Shanghai Disneyland, to work on conceptualization and storytelling at the Hua'an attraction. The park also engaged China Jingye Engineering Co, which helped build Shanghai Disneyland and Beijing Universal Resort, to be in charge of construction.

The park features parades and evening light shows. One visitor, Ada Zhang, 32, an influencer on the social media platform Xiao Hongshu, said many of its attractions, including rides, are similar to those at Shanghai Disneyland.

Evening events at the Hua'an venue are up to the standards of those at Shanghai Disneyland, Ada Zhang said, describing the latter venue as an "Eastern Disney". Other social media users have referred to it as a "Chinese version of Disneyland".

"Compared with their foreign counterparts, Chinese theme parks were late in starting, and most of

them are still mimicking international venues," Zhang Zheng said.

"Local theme parks can learn a lot from well-established companies, which can help give them inspiration and ideas. We can then explore icons and IPs from China's traditional culture. There's no contradiction in this, because I think we're learning how they put projects together, rather than copying their cultural content."

Ge Zhiyan, a tour guide at the Hua'an park, said: "Ultimately, we have to rely on our own culture to create unique characteristics. *Journey to the West* is a super IP with unlimited potential. We can learn from the advanced experience of international theme parks and draw on them to transform our cultural brands to create parks with distinct Chinese cultural characteristics that resonate with Chinese people."

Despite intermittent closures due to the pandemic, Ge said the Hua'an park has received some 2 million visitors since it opened, most of them in the 19 to 40 age group. Of these visitors, 40 percent were locals.

"The park endeavors to create an immersive visiting experience by integrating *Journey to the West* stories with every brick and tile at the venue to make each landscape and every corner tell a story," Ge said. "We are also promoting celebrity-endorsed check-in points and videos of interaction between characters and tourists to make the park more attractive."

In addition to adapting traditional icons, China's theme park industry is aiming to build attractions based on current cultural assets.

For example, a district in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, is themed on *The Longest Day in Chang'an*, a Chinese novel published in 2017 that was adapted into a TV series two years later. Tang Shiliangchen Cultural Tourism Development Co conceived the themed district, which opened last year in Xi'an. The company said the district received more than 2 million visitors in its first year of operations and has attracted more than 11 billion hits on online platforms.

"The Longest Day in Chang'an" themed district in Xi'an is just a miniature version of a theme park, so the use of technology is a little thin," Zhang Zheng said.

"But I'm sure China's theme parks will gradually find a way to create unique and immersive experiences for visitors by tapping into the country's rich cultural heritage."

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Left: Visitors watch a portrayal of life in the Tang Dynasty (AD 618-907) at a district in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, themed on the Chinese novel *The Longest Day in Chang'an*. ZOU JINGYI / XINHUA **Right:** Performers dressed as characters from *Journey to the West* pose at Changchun Zoological and Botanical Garden, Jilin province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



TOP NEWS

Speech: Actions of US govt do not match Biden's words

From page 1

Biden also allocated some time to discussing issues related to the developing Global South and Sino-US relations. However, beneath the glare of the spotlight, Biden's agenda to address the development needs of the Global South during this year's General Assembly remained disappointingly predictable and uninspiring.

His proposals, shrouded in clichés and lacking substance, barely scratched the surface of the urgent challenges faced by developing nations. Through this calculated diversion, Biden inadvertently communicated a message to the Global South: Washington's genuine interest in assisting these nations remains questionable, perpetuating a perception of indifference when it comes to supporting the world's most vulnerable populations.

Yet, amid these theatrics, Biden's grandiose gestures managed to conceal his rather hollow proposals for addressing the development needs of the Global South — the central theme of this year's General Assembly. By diverting the attention of the assembly, Biden sent a clear message to the Global South that Washington's commitment to assisting developing nations remains conspicuously lacking.

Biden's failure to recognize that the Ukraine crisis, despite being an urgent issue, is not the primary concern of most developing nations at the General Assembly reflected a misguided approach. These countries are turning to the UN to address their pressing development issues, not to witness the US exploit the platform to breed discord and to fracture unity, potentially inciting resentment among countries of the Global South.

Despite his boasts about US global leadership, Biden's lack of substantive proposals to advance the development agenda for the Global South was glaring. His vague call for everyone to "do more" to accelerate progress on the UN's Sustainable Development Goals fell short of the concrete action required. This raises questions about the sincerity of his administration's commitment to global development and solidarity, leaving many skeptical of his leadership on the world stage.

Similarly, on the question of Sino-US relations, Biden appeared to be quite ambiguous. Ever since assuming office in early 2021, he has seemingly adhered to the playbook of his predecessor, Trump, by placing a pronounced emphasis on prioritizing competition with China within

the realm of US foreign policy.

Yet, on the recent occasion of his address, he suggested that Washington aims to steer clear of direct confrontation with Beijing. "The United States will conduct itself as a reasonable leader. We do not seek conflict. We do not seek a Cold War. We do not ask any nation to choose between the United States or any other partner," he said.

However, recent actions by the Biden administration tell a contrasting tale. This stark contrast between words and actions raises significant doubts about the genuine nature of US foreign policy objectives and Washington's reliability in managing relations with China. It fosters an atmosphere of skepticism about the direction in which the bilateral ties are headed.

Biden talked about the need for cooperation between Beijing and Washington on climate issues, drawing attention to recent natural disasters like crippling heat waves, continuous droughts and catastrophic floods worldwide. He presented these events as a "snapshot" illustrating the reasons for more cooperation between Beijing and Washington to safeguard the planet from the ravages of climate change.

However, from a factual standpoint, when considering the US' recent self-interested stance, this emphasis on cooperation suggests a deeper apprehension about US dependence on China. It alludes to a narrative in which US leadership appears to recede, relinquishing the US role in confronting global challenges. Sustaining dialogue and collaboration between China and the US on climate change holds immense importance for both nations and the global community.

China has repeatedly expressed its readiness to enhance communication, foster deeper cooperation with the US, and collectively advance climate governance, thereby playing a more substantial role in human development. However, the sticking point is the fact that the Biden administration appears to be lacking the political resolve necessary to place trust in Beijing and forge ahead on these vital global challenges. This perceived hesitance raises concerns about the prospects for meaningful cooperation in addressing pressing issues on the world stage.

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Visit: Green growth emphasized

From page 1

In the pursuit of green and sustainable development, Xi urged Zhejiang, where he first put forward the concept that lush mountains and lucid waters are invaluable assets, to steadfastly promote the transformation of its development model toward ecological sustainability.

He stressed the establishment and improvement of an economic system characterized by green, low-carbon and circular development.

Xi emphasized that Zhejiang should take the lead in promoting common prosperity by prioritizing steps to narrow the gaps between urban and rural areas, regions and income levels.

The province should pioneer the

way in pursuing the opening-up of the services sector, digital development and environmental protection, he said.

Xi also reaffirmed the nation's resolve to unwaveringly encourage, support and guide the development of the private sector, calling for steps to encourage private businesses to actively take part in the global economy and enhance their core competitiveness.

The private sector accounted for 67 percent of Zhejiang's GDP and 71.7 percent of its tax revenue last year, according to provincial authorities.

The president also visited farmers at a pomegranate orchard in Zaozhuang, Shandong province, on his way back to Beijing.

Xinhua contributed to this story.

Seeking relief from heat



Beachgoers hit the water at Macumba Beach on a blisteringly hot Sunday in the west zone of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Since the beginning of last week, an unusual heat wave has engulfed the country, with temperatures soaring to 39.9 C.

TERCIO TEIXEIRA / AFP

China, EU will work to safeguard supply chains

They also agree to promote two-way openness in financial sector

By WANG KEJU
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China and the European Union have agreed to work against decoupling and put in place an export control dialogue mechanism, as part of efforts to safeguard resilient and stable industrial and supply chains, Vice-Premier He Lifeng said on Monday.

He made the remark at a joint news conference after co-chairing the 10th China-EU High-level Economic and Trade Dialogue with European Commission Executive Vice-President Valdis Dombrovskis in Beijing.

China is willing to expand imports from the EU and hopes it will remove restrictions on exports of high-tech products to China, the vice-premier said.

Both sides agreed to establish a financial working group at the vice-ministerial level and further promote two-way openness in the financial sector, he said.

The dialogue came on the heels of the launch earlier this month of an anti-subsidy investigation by

“We see China as an important partner, one with whom the EU wishes to work toward a more balanced trade and investment relationship.”

Valdis Dombrovskis, executive vice-president of the European Commission

the European Commission, the executive arm of the EU, into China's electric vehicle makers.

In response to the probe, China reiterated its high concern and hopes the EU will proceed with caution and continue to maintain a free and open market, Vice-Premier He said.

China and the EU agreed to jointly maintain and strengthen the WTO-centered, rules-based multilateral trading system and guard

against unilateralism and protectionism, he added.

Dombrovskis said at the news conference that the EU will work with China to set up a working group on financial regulation and advance two-way opening up, in order to ensure more extensive cooperation on sustainable finance and financial technology.

In addition, the EU and China should join hands to address global challenges such as climate change and food security under multilateral frameworks such as the United Nations and the World Trade Organization, Dombrovskis added.

Meanwhile, in a speech on Saturday at the annual Bund Summit in Shanghai, Dombrovskis said the EU has no intention of decoupling from China.

However, the EU will pursue a policy of “de-risking” by minimizing its dependence on China for certain strategic products, he said.

“Our long-term interest is to embrace reforms and stay open to international cooperation. ... We see China as an important partner, one with whom the EU wishes to

work toward a more balanced trade and investment relationship,” he said.

Dong Yifan, an assistant research fellow at the Institute of European Studies at the Beijing-based China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations, said that stretching the concept of national security and politicizing of business engagements by the EU is much to blame for the current challenges in China-EU economic and trade ties.

It is in the interests of China and the EU to work together to maintain stable economic relations, and this is also the best course of action for global economic growth, at a time when the world is experiencing great economic fluctuations and rising geopolitical tensions, Dong said.

Statistics from the General Administration of Customs show that trade between China and the EU reached \$847.3 billion in 2022, a 2.4 percent year-on-year increase.

After years of development, China and the EU have developed mature and stable trade structures and fostered different labor divisions within the same industrial chain, said Cui Hongjian, director of the China Institute of International Studies' European Studies Department.

The cooperation over the years shows that the comparative strengths of China and the EU in such sectors as automobiles, civil nuclear energy, aviation and aerospace have not only been leveraged, but also have room for improvement, Cui said.

University decision on English test result hailed

By CHINA DAILY

The recent decision of the Xi'an Jiaotong University in Xi'an, Shaanxi province, to do away with the requirement of clearing the College English Test for degrees and diplomas has been hailed by education experts, who said the move would lead to a genuine focus on language proficiency and practical ability.

The institution, one of the top-tier universities in China, said on Thursday that a student's results in any English proficiency exam will no longer be a determining factor in awarding a graduate degree, and the decision will be retroactively implemented starting on Sept 1.

Chu Zhaohui, a senior researcher at the National Institute of Education Sciences, said the CET should not be the only way of testing a student's English proficiency.

“When the CET was first introduced in the 1980s, the quality of English teaching in primary and secondary schools was poor. However, students at Xi'an Jiaotong

“English teaching is changing from being exam-oriented to ability-oriented.”

Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute

University today are proficient in English. Thus, it's no longer necessary to push them to take such exams,” said Chu.

The Ministry of Education never made proficiency in English a mandatory requirement for graduation. However, many universities have used the CET as a prerequisite for awarding degrees. Clearing the CET-4 is typically a must for undergraduates, while CET-6 is often required for a master's degree and doctorates.

In 2005, to stop higher education institutions' overdependence on CET results, the ministry

stressed that the test was only an auxiliary way of teaching English, and later introduced the test's first reform, changing the total score from 100 to 710 and replacing grades with actual scores.

At that time, several prestigious universities, such as Tsinghua University, Renmin University of China and China University of Political Science and Law, did away with or adjusted their English language requirements for graduation. However, some universities continued to insist on CET results for awarding degrees and decided on their own pass scores, which is usually 425 points in most places.

Over the years, changes have taken place in the test structure and type of questions asked. For instance, a spoken English section was added and the written English segment became an independent paper. Test of audio comprehension abilities now comprise 35 percent of the total test questions. The moves were aimed at enhancing a student's practical application of the English language.

“English teaching is changing from being exam-oriented to ability-oriented,” Xiong Bingqi, director of the 21st Century Education Research Institute, told Beijing News.

More and more universities have been attempting to explore new ways of teaching English. Peking University, for instance, divides its students into five categories according to their majors and the results of post-admission exams. The higher the scores, the fewer English courses students are required to take and the fewer credits they need to earn for English learning.

“This latest decision will not have any immediate impact on the level of language proficiency. However, less rigid requirements and more diversified teaching methods will definitely pave the way for combining English learning with high-tech development,” Chu said.

Li Menghan contributed to this story.

CHINA



Three of Angel An's astronomy photos (from left): *The Ultimate Romance of the Cosmos: The Rosette Nebula*, *A Date with Perseids Meteor Shower in the Desert*, and *Moon Surrounded by a Double Halo over Lake Wanaka*. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Photographer finds joy in dark nights

By CHEN LIANG
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Chinese photographer An Jiu was among the winners of the Astronomy Photographer of the Year 2023 awards announced online on Sept 14.

An, who also goes by the name of Angel, was honored for *Grand Cosmic Fireworks*, an image she took of sprites that topped the prestigious event's "Skyscapes" category.

Sprites are an extremely rare phenomenon of atmospheric luminescence. Triggered by lightning, the electric discharges are actually plasma that appear as fireworks. They are spotted from the ground, appearing as high as 9 kilometers above the Earth.

An's prizewinning photograph was taken from a mountain pass in the Himalayas at an elevation of more than 5,000 meters, in the Tibet autonomous region on May 19 last year.

Her work is currently on display as part of a special exhibition at the National Maritime Museum in London, along with over 100 other winning and short-listed photos from the annual competition, which showcases the world's greatest space photography.

When the winners of the awards were announced at the ceremony at the Royal Observatory in the Greenwich section of London, An was on a mountain road in Cape Sounion, Greece, where she was filming a short-video documentary series and taking astronomy photos.

"I finally won an APOY award, often considered as the Oscars of astrophotography. It has been seven years since I started my journey to chase the stars," An posted on her WeChat Moments.

"I still remember setting this goal for myself back in 2019, when I was nominated for the Royal Observatory's Photographer of the Year. In the process of chasing this goal, I realized that the journey is far more important than the result. Finding meaning and purpose is not an easy task, but it allows us to confront the existential emptiness and make the most of our limited time to experience everything."

The award has added her to the list of China's best professional astrophotographers. Although barely 30 years old, she has also become a social media influencer on content related to astronomy and, because of her work, a seasoned globe-trotter.

Meeting galaxy and stars

An's journey began at a stargazing outing organized by two astrophotographers in Beijing, she told China Daily.

Working at a consulting company after graduating from college, she felt pressured by her job and pessimistic about the future, which led her to think about quitting.

When she joined the outing on the outskirts of Beijing, she saw the night sky clearly for the first time in her life and took her very first astrophoto — a picture of star tracks.

She instantly fell in love with stars, dark nights and astrophotography. "Facing the galaxy in the dark night, I felt as tiny as a speck of dust," she said. "It was kind of faraway and yet so close. The pressure I felt from work was released, and I was sort of cured."

She started learning more about taking proper astrophotos with various cameras and lenses, and about how to process her photos with complicated computer software.

"I needed to use a couple of different types of software to edit the photos well, and it took me a long time



Grand Cosmic Fireworks, by Angel An, won her the Astronomy Photographer of the Year 2023's "Skyscapes" category award.

to master them," An said. "It was frustrating at the beginning. To be honest, I nearly had a meltdown during the process."

Not long after the stargazing outing, she quit her job and began pursuing a career as a professional astrophotographer.

She overcame resistance from her parents, who live in Jiangsu province. "My mother refused to talk to me for a month," An said. "She worried about my livelihood and safety, and now, she's mainly concerned about my health."

A fast learner, she soon mastered her equipment and software, and the quality of her photos improved. She became one of the first members of the China StarVision Alliance, a platform for nearly 1,000 Chinese astronomy photographers and businesses related to dark sky tourism that was founded in 2020.

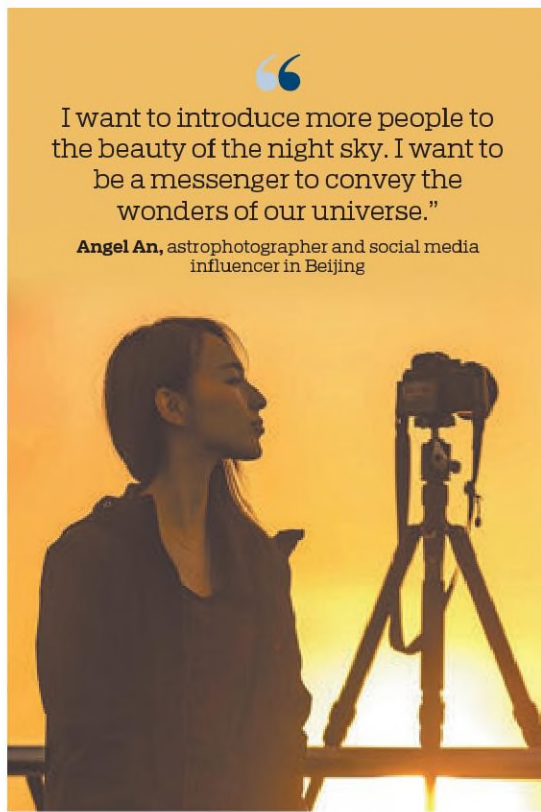
In the winter of 2018, she went to Murmansk, Russia, to take photos of the northern lights. It was her very first stargazing trip to a foreign country.

During the trip, she managed to take some excellent photos of the lights. Her success led her to explore dark skies in other parts of the world, including Iceland, Norway and Greece.

Obviously, some of her mother's worries were not groundless, An conceded. A petite woman, she

"I want to introduce more people to the beauty of the night sky. I want to be a messenger to convey the wonders of our universe."

Angel An, astrophotographer and social media influencer in Beijing



often travels alone, driving around at night to capture images of the heavens.

She has experienced several moments of peril during her excursions: She was once surrounded by stray dogs while photographing the northern lights in Russia; she tumbled and almost fell off a cliff while recording a meteor shower in Scotland; her car got trapped in heavy snow in Norway, and she had to wait to be rescued. She also encountered wolves while taking photos of sprites in Tibet.

Online influencer

It wasn't long before An's photos made her a hit on social media, transforming her into a Generation Z icon and role model for independent women.

She began appearing in magazines and receiving endorsement deals, and she was invited to be a guest on some TV shows to serve as a stargazing guide for such celebrities as film star Zhou Xun.

An now has 4 million fans across various social media platforms and has achieved financial independence. "Because of my commercial income, I was able to afford to upgrade my photographic equipment and fund my travels," she said.

More importantly, she said, she can "influence more people with my

photos, vlogs and short-video documentaries".

"I want to introduce more people to the beauty of the night sky. I want to be a messenger to convey the wonders of our universe," she said.

In 2019, she started thinking about designing an astronomy exhibition. After three years of preparation, her *Cosmology Elements* show, featuring a collection of photographs, films and other related installations, debuted in December in Shanghai. It was moved to the Beijing Times Art Museum in July and will run until the end of the National Week holiday next month.

An has contributed four of her photo collections to the show. One of them is named *Under One Sky*, a collection of astrophotos she took from 2017 and 2022, and it consists of not only images of night skies that she shot in hundreds of cities, but also the stories behind them.

"By capturing these moments, seeing light cast from objects light-years away, and photographing for hours to expose more light through the lenses, I keep throwing myself into the wild to document all kinds of spectacular surprises from the sky," she wrote in the introduction of the work.

Many of the photos she captures are originally in black and white, and she later uses software to colorize them, she said. She said her works can help viewers visualize the chemical composition of deep space objects and provide information on how stars and planets form over time.

"Through this exhibition, I hope everyone becomes curious about the stars and starts to contemplate the origins and unseen future between the universe and humanity by looking up at the night sky," she said.

Meanwhile, an album of her astrophotos will be published next month.

Always prepared

Though she now works as a curator in Beijing, she still spends a lot of time traveling overseas taking astrophotos and shooting documentaries about her trips.

In March, she went to the Arctic to capture a geomagnetic storm. In the ensuing months, she traveled to Iceland to film a documentary, Australia to shoot a total solar eclipse, South Africa to take unique photos of the southern night skies, and the Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region to snap Perseids meteor shower. This month, she traveled to Greece, England and Scotland.

Since 2017, she has been to nearly 30 countries and 100 cities in China and abroad.

"I feel at ease in the wild and under the dark night skies, never lonely or afraid," An said. "I'm always prepared to go out to take photos."

She believes she won the APOY award because she was better prepared than fellow photographers.

Usually, an astrophotographer will use three sets of cameras and lenses to work in the wild — one for photos, one for videos and one for time-lapse work, An said, usually using wide-range lenses.

"But on that day, I prepared a fourth set of cameras using a 135-millimeter lens," she said.

"That's a long-range lens for astrophotography. With a very narrow angle, it's almost impossible to capture sprites flickering in the night sky. But I was lucky. The set worked and managed to capture the red sprites in vivid detail. For the first time, we can view the natural wonder at such a close range through the photo."

WORLD

Editor's note: As the US takes multiple measures to contain China's development, the relations between the two countries have reached a low point, prompting observers to call for a reset in their ties, and the need for Washington's active cooperation in science and technology.

More efforts needed to restore Sino-US ties

Washington's role of 'selective cooperation' with China condemned

By CHEN YINGQUN
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Thirty-five years ago, Ben Zhang from eastern China's Jiangsu province went to the United States for education and has since made it his home, founded an import company and become a naturalized US citizen. But he never forgot his roots, fervently hoping the two countries build an enduring friendship and cooperation.

Zhang, founder of Greater Pacific Industries, headquartered in Seattle, Washington state, a supplier to the advertising industry, said the current relationship between China and the US is "not healthy".

"Current Sino-US relations experience a lot of tension and back-and-forth political maneuvering that make day-to-day business tough," Zhang said. "Although I am a US citizen and our company is an American company, our 28-year history is rooted in China where we have many long-term partnerships with great vendors. My hope is for the restoration of normal economic, trade, and diplomatic relations between the two countries."

In the past few years, the Sino-US relationship has reached its lowest point since the establishment of diplomatic ties, as the US has taken measures in multiple fields to contain China's development, such as unilaterally initiating "trade wars" and promoting decoupling from China, said He Yun, an associate professor in the School of Public Administration at Hunan University in Changsha.

These moves not only slowed down the economic and social development on both sides but also disrupted the normal pace of the world economy, she said.

Zhang said that economic competition is generally good for prices and innovation, but it has to be healthy competition, otherwise, it will not only harm the two countries' economies but also the neighboring countries' economies. For instance, the Donald Trump administration imposed tariffs on many Chinese-made goods back in 2018, essentially creating "a trade war".

"Politically this was done to challenge China, but it benefits no one, as US consumers ultimately pay the cost of the tariffs. Additionally, the tariffs act like a tax on the world economy, pushing up inflation and higher consumer products prices worldwide," he said.

Zhang said his company used to import all the advertising promotional products and consumer products from thousands of suppliers throughout China, but after the US imposed tariffs on Chinese goods, he had to purchase about 30 percent from countries outside China, such as Vietnam and Cambodia.

"Last year we had some hope the new administration would roll back some or all of these tariffs, but this still has not happened and seems



A protester interrupts H.R. McMaster, former national security adviser to former president Donald Trump, as he testifies during the hearing of a special House committee dedicated to countering China, on Capitol Hill in Washington on Feb 28. ALEX BRANDON / ASSOCIATED PRESS

“My hope is for the restoration of normal economic, trade, and diplomatic relations between the two countries.”



Ben Zhang, founder of Greater Pacific Industries, headquartered in Seattle, Washington state

not happening anytime soon, which is very disappointing," he said.

"These factors all pose challenges for our business model," said Zhang. "We are more familiar with Chinese culture, markets, ports, and infrastructure. In addition, the China market offers huge potential for foreign companies. The buying power of China's middle class is massive. There is so much potential to grow our business with China and expand partnerships there. This is much more attractive than more risky sources outside China."

Since the beginning of this year, a series of visits by high-ranking US officials were expected to bring hope for the recovery of bilateral relations, including those of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, and US Presidential Special Climate Envoy John Kerry.

During the recent visit of US Secretary of Commerce Gina Raimondo to China, both countries took significant steps toward improving their

bilateral relations. They announced the establishment of new communication channels, a working group to address trade disputes, and an exchange of export control information to enhance transparency.

China's central bank said on Friday that China and the US will establish two working groups — the Economic Working Group and the Financial Working Group — to strengthen communication on economic and financial matters.

Reassessing strategy

"The gesture shows that America has been reassessing its detrimental China strategy," He Yun said. After all, regardless of whether the US wants it or not, China has already become the world's top manufacturing country, and it's impossible for the US enterprises to rearrange their locations in the short term, she said.

The US' imports from China shrank after tariffs and sanctions were introduced five years ago — the US efforts to shift trade to its allies had some results. However, trade between US allies and China is rising, "suggesting that they are often acting as packaging hubs for what, in effect, remain Chinese goods," said the British weekly *The Economist*.

In the past five years, the return rate of FDI in China reached 9.1 percent, and in the first half of this year, 24,000 foreign-invested firms were established in China, and investment from France, the UK and Japan in the same period went up 173 percent, 135 percent and 53 percent, respectively, according to official figures.

Kenneth Pomeranz, a professor of Modern Chinese History at the University of Chicago, said that at this point, the relationship is so bad that almost any high-level contact is a

good thing; so is the establishment of more communication channels.

Diao Daming, a professor at the School of International Studies at Renmin University of China, said the trend of accelerated and positive dialogue between high-level officials of China and the US has continued since this May.

"It can be said that, at least in areas of common interest in the economic and trade fields, both the US and China now hope to avoid a worsened situation and minimize losses, and based on that, could even improve the current situation," he said.

The US attitude toward China has become quite clear: it wants a kind of selective cooperation. In certain areas where they think cooperating with China benefits the US, they will engage. In other areas where they believe working with China may impact their so-called competitiveness, they will avoid cooperation, claiming it carries risks, Diao said.

"This selective and unilateral approach is completely self-centered and presumptuous," he said. "China has always emphasized mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation. But the US tries to unilaterally determine how to cooperate and in which areas to cooperate, which is a complete lack of mutual respect."

Diao said that the US' unilateral actions driven by a pursuit of its own maximum interests, are the main reasons for the current state of Sino-US relations. Even when the US emphasizes cooperation, it is not an equal and mutually respectful partnership that will lead to a win-win outcome.

Edward Tse, founder and CEO of Gao Feng Advisory Company, said that despite the US government's efforts to decouple from China in



US congressman Jamaal Bowman speaks as TikTok content creators gather outside the Capitol to voice their opposition to a potential ban on the app in Washington on March 22. NATHAN POSNER VIA GETTY IMAGES



US Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer speaks alongside a bipartisan group of senators after the passage of the CHIPS Act at the Capitol in Washington on July 27 last year. SAUL LOEB / AFP

recent years, big US companies have not fully followed this strategy, largely due to the importance of the Chinese market and their existing investments in the country.

After the COVID-19 pandemic this year, entrepreneurs such as Microsoft co-founder Bill Gates, and Tesla CEO Elon Musk openly visited China, and many low-profile entrepreneurs have also come. For many multinational corporations, China is still crucial. So, even though the US government talks about decoupling from China and limiting supply chain networks to allies and friendly countries, many large companies are quietly opposing it.

Tse said the US government's attempts to rally its allies against China have also faced challenges, as there are voices both in Europe and elsewhere that are not willing to blindly align with the US in confronting China. Moreover, the rapid rise of the Global South, the strengthening of BRICS, and China's extensive relationships with Africa all demonstrate China's growing importance in the Global South.

"Therefore, I believe that after a few years, the US will realize that it cannot contain China's development and must reach some level of compromise, or at least maintain communication with China," he said.

'Chaotic political arena'

Tse said the US political arena, with divided and chaotic viewpoints, currently lacks serious thinking about what stance it should adopt toward China. "The idea of decoupling or de-risking is considered impossible," he said.

He said that global companies have already experienced the process of globalization, with interdependence

being an undeniable reality. The global trend is for countries to embrace globalization and interconnectedness. "It is impossible to exclude China from the global industrial and supply chains. Suppressing and containing China's development is futile," he said.

Diao Daming said that though US officials' visits have had positive implications, the effect is still limited, and is not sufficient to restore normalcy in China-US relations.

"As China has repeatedly emphasized, for Sino-US relations to truly return to the right track, it is necessary to uphold the principles of mutual respect, peaceful coexistence, and win-win cooperation. However, it appears that there is still some distance to go at present," he added.

He Yun said that amid deteriorating relations and poor communication at the top, the Biden administration has shown no signs yet of relenting in its crackdown on China in the areas of technology and trade. US President Joe Biden signed an executive order in August, limiting US investments in advanced technology industries in China.

"The US is also unwilling to give up unfair and unreasonable economic and trade measures such as tariffs imposed on China," she said. "The two sides still have a long way to go before the overall turnaround of China-US relations can be realized."

During her visit, Raimondo voiced Washington's willingness to strengthen cooperation with China on artificial intelligence, climate change, and combating fentanyl. She also reiterated the pledge that the US does not seek to decouple from China or hold China's economy back.

"The US side should live up to its words, rather than say one thing and do another," He Yun said.

Analysts call for continued exchanges in science and technology fields

By CHEN YINGQUN

The China-US Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology has brought great benefits to both countries as well as the world over the past decades, and throwing it away would be a significant step backward, analysts said.

The agreement, signed in 1979, was one of the first deals inked between China and the United States as the two countries started to normalize diplomatic ties.

Since then, bilateral cooperation in science and technology has expanded in both scope and scale, becoming a fundamental aspect of the overall China-US relationship and benefiting the global community, said He Yun, an associate professor in the School of Public Administration at Hunan University in Changsha.

However, in the past few years, the US has actively hindered the

normal cooperation and exchange of science and technology with China. This was done through tactics such as curbing critical technology investments in China, targeting Chinese tech companies, excluding Chinese scientists, and unfairly labeling Chinese students in the US as spies, she said.

Recently, some US lawmakers have also opposed an extension of the agreement on national security grounds. The US State Department only extended the deal for an additional six months, just days before it was to expire on Aug 27.

Kenneth Pomeranz, a professor of modern Chinese history at the University of Chicago, said the agreement is a positive and necessary framework for technological cooperation.

"Having such an agreement with Beijing, as the US does with most technologically sophisticated countries, is a good thing for both sides

and for the advance of science and technology worldwide," he said.

There should probably be some adjustments made to the agreement to reflect changing circumstances, as many such adjustments have been made since this agreement was first signed more than 40 years ago, he said.

"But as this history suggests, any further adjustments that are needed can be handled by negotiating annexes to the agreement, as has been done repeatedly before. Throwing out the entire agreement would be a significant step backward," he said.

In late August, Stanford University physicists Steven Kivelson and Peter Michelson wrote an open letter to US President Joe Biden, which was also signed by more than 1,000 scientists and scholars from US universities, saying that the agreement has been of enormous benefit to the US.

"We can attest that cutting off ties

with China would directly and negatively impact our own research, the work of our immediate colleagues, and the educational mission of our universities," they said in the letter.

Edward Tse, founder and chairman of Gao Feng Advisory Company, said it is indeed a good thing to cooperate based on the China-US Agreement on Cooperation in Science and Technology.

"The development of humanity requires collaboration, especially in the field of science and technology, to progress together," he said.

Sayings debunked

Some people in the US said they do not want to renew the agreement, which implies that some still hope for decoupling in the science and technology field between China and the US.

"However, based on my observations, the various statements made by US officials visiting China this

year and the extension of the agreement by six months indicate that the US government is reconsidering its strategy toward China, at least in terms of scientific research," he said. "Because I believe the United States now realizes that completely suppressing China's development is not achievable."

Despite facing numerous sanctions from the US, China's leading tech firm Huawei caught the world by surprise on Aug 29 with the release of its latest flagship smartphone, the Mate 60 Pro. This smartphone, being hailed for its 5G capabilities and complete ownership of intellectual property, raised questions about the effectiveness of US efforts to impede China's progress in advanced technology.

Tse said both China and the US have their own advantages in the field of science and technology. It can no longer be said that the US is completely dominant in science and

technology globally. Both the US and China have their areas of excellence. In terms of business, China has already surpassed the US in the development of technologies in areas such as e-commerce, solar energy, photovoltaics and high-speed rail.

"China and the US both have their strengths, and it would be best for them to learn from each other, for everyone to progress together," he said.

Ben Zhang, founder of Greater Pacific Industries, said that over the past few decades, China has made rapid development and even surpassed the US in some technologies, which makes the US feel nervous, thinking that China is going to challenge the world economic order.

"I believe these are issues that can be solved and moved past with better communication and a healthier dialogue between the two nations," he said. "Less politics and more talk, more collaboration."

WORLD

Thailand rolls out carpet to woo travelers

Visa-free program unveiled to attract tourists ahead of China's holiday week

By YANG WANLI in Bangkok
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Thai Prime Minister Srettha Thavasin welcomed Chinese visitors at the Suvarnabhumi International Airport in Bangkok on Monday to mark the first day of the government's visa-free program for Chinese tourists.

A billboard welcoming visitors and cultural performances were part of the ceremony. Tourists were also presented with jasmine garlands and elephant-patterned pants — popular souvenirs in Thailand.

"The government has identified tourism as a key driver for revenue generation and job creation to relieve the economy," Srettha said at a news conference after the ceremony. "This visa-free program will help to boost the country's economy."

Jiang Ronggen, a tourist who was welcomed at the airport ceremony, said: "It's a big surprise to see the Thai PM after landing. I've been to Thailand several times and have always been impressed by people's kindness and hospitality."

Jiang said he was in Thailand for both business as well as sightseeing. "The visa-free program is encouraging, which will attract more Chinese to the kingdom."

Suvarnabhumi is one of four key airports welcoming tourists from China and Kazakhstan under the visa exemption program, which is effective from Monday until the end of February.

Srettha emphasized the importance of travelers' safety. From the moment tourists land in the kingdom, we will try our best to make their journey wonderful through our hospitality, he said.

The visa program, which allows travelers to enter the kingdom for 30 days, takes effect just ahead of the Golden Week, one of the longest holidays in China, from Sept 29 to Oct 6.

In the first week of the visa-free program, Thailand is estimated to receive 674 flights from China to the Suvarnabhumi Airport, and a total of about 120,000 Chinese visitors are expected to arrive at Don Mueang and Suvarnabhumi airports.

In the next five months, the

country is expected to receive 1.9 million to 2.8 million Chinese tourists, a year-on-year growth of about 41 to 62 percent.

With this policy, Thailand is expected to receive 4 million Chinese tourists this year and achieve the estimated revenue target of \$7 billion, said Thapanee Kiatphaibool, governor of the Tourism Authority of Thailand.

"We always prioritize travelers' safety and have been well-prepared for welcoming more tourists," she said. We hope the program will make Chinese families, tour groups, and individual travelers to "choose Thailand as their preferred destination," she added.

China is one of Thailand's important markets in terms of revenue and tourist numbers. As of Sept 17, Thailand had received 2.34 million Chinese tourists — about 37 percent of the 2019 record, making China the second-largest market after Malaysia.

To improve tourists' traveling experience, the Thai Immigration Bureau announced on Sept 13 it would dispatch more officers to the Suvarnabhumi Airport, which is expected to see a surge in tourists from China and Kazakhstan.

Sharp rise

The Immigration Bureau officials estimated a sharp rise in the number of Chinese travelers from 300,000 to 500,000 a month. About 130 immigration officers would man the 119 immigration counters during peak hours.

"It will take less than 20 minutes for each visitor," said Thatchai Pitaneelaboot, the bureau's deputy police commissioner. "Special checkpoints for tour groups will be opened and officers with language skills would be ready to help."

The Tourism Authority of Thailand arranged welcome ceremonies at four major airports in Thailand on Monday for the visa-free passengers.

At a previous news conference, Phuket Tourist Association President Thaneth Tantipiriyakij said they expect the recovery rate to double under the new visa program.



Palestinians inspect a damaged building following an Israeli army raid in Nour Shams refugee camp, northern West Bank, on Sunday. MAJDI MOHAMMED / ASSOCIATED PRESS

Innovative approach, intl aid needed to resolve Middle East's refugee crisis

By JAN YUMUL in Hong Kong
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Finding solutions to ease the refugee crisis in the Middle East is back on the international agenda, following regional rapprochements that have taken place in recent months.

However, humanitarian considerations have been disregarded, analysts said. And while an innovative approach could be involved by offering some trade concessions for countries hosting refugees, a logical reason would be to stop support for armed militants so that peaceful conditions could be realized.

At the United Nations General Assembly last week, King of Jordan Abdullah II said Jordan "will not have the ability nor the resources to host and care for more refugees" if the crisis continues, as his country is also facing growing challenges.

Jordan's case "is a microcosm of the entire region", and he said it will continue to suffer until the world "helps lift the shadow of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict".

More than 345 million people face food insecurity, daily hunger or starvation, he said. Among the most vulnerable are 108 million refugees, and 40 percent of them are children. Yet, "these numbers cannot really convey the tragedy", he added.

Ahama Siddiq, a Middle East analyst and research fellow at the Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad in Pakistan, said regional reconciliations this year were primarily driven by economic interests, impact of the COVID-19 pandemic,

continuing fiscal constraints and the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

"These factors have collectively intensified the imperative to establish sustainable channels underpinned by robust economic foundations. It is noteworthy that these rapprochements have largely disregarded humanitarian considerations," Siddiq said.

Also at the General Assembly, Mohammad Najib Azmi Mikati, president of the Council of Ministers of Lebanon, said the primary challenge for Lebanon was filling the presidential vacancy, along with reforms needed to achieve economic recovery and ease the financial crisis.

With regard to the Syrian crisis, Mikati said the international community's response "remains inadequate and falls short of a sustainable solution".

Starved of resources

Manjari Singh, assistant professor in the Amity Institute of International Studies at Amity University in India, said the influx of more refugees in Jordan and Lebanon has increased their population pressure, and these two countries are already starved of resources.

"Now that rapprochements are happening — between Saudi-Iran, Syria's reinstatement in the Arab League and thawing of relations with Saudi Arabia, Bahrain and the UAE — an expectation may have germinated in the minds of Jordanians and Lebanese that a solution to the Syrian refugee crisis will also be taken seriously," Singh said.

Dina Yulianti Sulaeman, director of the Indonesia Center for Middle East Studies, said the United States played a significant role in supporting the undemocratic armed movement that is trying to overthrow the Syrian government.

"The militant group, named ISIS or 'moderate rebels', has killed innocent people and destroyed the basic infrastructure, forcing them to leave their homeland," Sulaeman said.

The majority of areas previously occupied by foreign-supported militants remain unreconstructed because of economic sanctions on Syria, she said, and this is the main reason preventing refugees from returning to their homeland.

In addition, armed groups still occupy a number of areas, such as Idlib and Afrin, and continue to carry out attacks on civilians. US troops were even present on the ground.

"For this reason, the solution that must be taken is ... to stop support for these armed militants so that peaceful conditions can immediately be realized in Syria, as well as lifting economic sanctions on Syria," Sulaeman said, adding that improving Syria's relations with Arab countries, as well as new strategic collaboration between Syria and China, could accelerate Syria's reconstruction process.

Siddiq said a potential innovative approach could involve the European Union offering trade concessions to these countries contingent upon the formal employment of Syrian refugees.

RIDING BRI OPPORTUNITIES

Indonesia celebrates fruitful outcomes

By WANG QINGYUN
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The success of the Belt and Road Initiative, joined by more than 150 countries, lies in "mutual benefits", Indonesia's Ambassador to China Djauhari Oratmangun said, pointing out that Jakarta has gained "fruitful outcomes" from such cooperation with Beijing.

The initiative has facilitated the development of participating countries, which in turn contributes to global economy's resilience and growth, he said in a recent interview with China Daily.

This year marks the 10th anniversary of the launch of the BRI, which consists of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road.

In October 2013, President Xi Jinping proposed the idea of building the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road during his visit to Indonesia, less than a month after he visited Kazakhstan, and called for joint construction of the Silk Road Economic Belt.

In 2018, Indonesia stepped up its participation in BRI cooperation by signing with China a memorandum of understanding on jointly constructing the BRI and the Southeast Asian country's Global Maritime Fulcrum strategy. The memorandum was renewed in July last year.

The synergy between the BRI and the GMF has resulted in concrete cooperation in various fields, Djauhari said. For example, Chinese companies have taken part in the construction of Indonesia's economic corridors in North Sumatra, North Kalimantan, North Sulawesi and Bali, he added.

Another example is the Jakarta-Bandung High-Speed Railway, a cooperation project between China and Indonesia, and also the first high-speed railway in Southeast Asia.

The railway was built according to Chinese standards and uses Chinese technologies. It is expected to start commercial operations soon, and cut the travel time between Jakarta and Bandung from more than three hours to 40 minutes.

The operation of the railway will improve connectivity and further boost economic growth in Java Island, Djauhari said.

Trustworthy collaboration

"The main message here is that Indonesia and China collaboration for the high-speed railway is reliable and trustworthy," he said, adding that bilateral cooperation over the railway may "become a model of China's cooperation with other countries and set a good precedence for others to follow".

Indonesian President Joko Widodo will "hopefully" attend the third Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation to be held in China next month, the ambassador said.

Frequent high-level exchanges between China and Indonesia over the years have proved the strength of bilateral ties, he said, adding that his country hopes to see bilateral cooperation enhance in sectors such as renewable energy, digital transformation and health.

China is the largest trade partner of Indonesia, and Indonesia is China's third-largest trade partner in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations. The value of bilateral trade hit \$149.1 billion last year, a year-on-year increase of 19.8 percent.

China is also one of the major sources of tourists to Indonesia and the second-largest destination for Indonesian students to study abroad.

Djauhari said he hopes to see trade between the two countries continue to increase, and bilateral people-to-people exchanges get more vigorous.

There is still room for cooperation for bilateral relations, he said.

New book to help Kenya conserve flora

By EDITH MUTETHYA
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Researchers from Kenya and China launched a book on Monday that will greatly help in the conservation of flora in Kenya.

Flora of Kenya is the result of fruitful scientific cooperation between Chinese and Kenyan researchers, detailing the *Rubiaceae juss.*, which has a huge diversity ranging from weedy herbs to massive rainforest trees with a large array of flower types and pollinators.

At the book launch, Mary Gikungu, director-general of the National

Museums of Kenya, said most of the species described in the book are of socioeconomic value to society.

Readers will benefit and interact with plants commonly used in medicine, food and timber value chains, in addition to their underlying ecological significance, she said.

"Flora is an important research tool in taxonomy, especially by enhancing understanding of plant identity and their relationships," she said. "Similarly, flora is an important resource for students and researchers, providing in-depth geographical floristic knowledge."

Gikungu also said China has greatly contributed to the conserva-

tion of Kenya's biodiversity and the animals.

Liu Weidong, director-general of the Chinese Academy of Sciences, said the book is one of the Sino-Africa Joint Research Center's great achievements, and it will provide basic information and scientific basis for the production and sustainable use of plant diversity in Kenya and East Africa.

Wang Qingfeng, director of the Wuhan Botanical Garden and main author of *Flora of Kenya*, said the publication includes color photos to facilitate plant identification. It is also based on comprehensive field collection, he said.



Flora of Kenya's editors-in-chief Wang Qingfeng (left) and Geoffrey Mwachala (right), and Mary Gikungu, director-general of the National Museums of Kenya, unveil *Flora of Kenya* at the book launch in Nairobi, Kenya, on Monday. XIE SONGXIN / CHINA DAILY

Polls: Biden might face a strong Trump in 2024

By MAY ZHOU in Houston
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Multiple political polls show that while former president Donald Trump appears to be the front runner for the Republican presidential nomination, Democratic President Joe Biden is facing doubt from the public about his performance on the economy, immigration and his age, for the 2024 reelection that he appears to be seeking.

In a poll conducted by NBC News between Sept 15-19 of more than 800 registered voters, Biden's approval rate was 41 percent, with 56 percent of voters disapproving of his job. The very positive view of Biden stood at

only 19 percent, lower than Trump's 23 percent.

Trump appears to enjoy more support from his base, with 58 percent saying that he should continue to lead the Republican Party, while 58 percent said they would prefer to see a Democratic candidate challenge Biden in the 2024 contest.

If the election were to be held during the poll, 39 percent would vote for Trump; 36 percent for Biden.

Most voters, 74 percent of them, were concerned about Biden's age and his not having the necessary mental and physical health to be a US president for a second term, while that concern for Trump was at 47 percent. However, 62 percent of voters were

concerned about Trump facing criminal and civil lawsuits.

Another poll conducted by The Washington Post and ABC News between Sept 15-20 of about 1,000 registered voters also showed that Biden's approval rate was low at 37 percent, while 48 percent of voters said they approved of Trump's performance when he was the president.

Biden scored low on the economy with a 37 percent approval rate from the NBC poll and 30 percent from The Washington Post-ABC poll. The approval rate for his border policy was even lower at 23 percent; both numbers were his lowest.

This poll also showed that Democratic-leaning voters prefer a different

candidate to run for president in 2024 — 62 percent said they would like to see someone else nominated, with 20 percent said that just anybody will do. Support for Biden was 33 percent among Democrats.

Trump also enjoyed more base support in The Washington Post-ABC poll, with 54 percent of Republican voters favoring him over Florida Governor Ron DeSantis (15 percent).

Despite Biden's low approval numbers, more respondents, 47 percent, said that Congress should not begin impeachment proceedings against Biden, with about 44 percent in favor.

The divide between the two major political parties on this issue was huge: 70 percent of Republicans

supported the impeachment, while 80 percent of Democrats opposed it.

The public's support for aiding Ukraine also seems to be waning. About 41 percent of voters said that the US is doing too much for Ukraine.

This poll also showed that currently more voters would vote for Trump (51 percent) over Biden (42 percent). However, The Washington Post called Trump's almost 10-point lead over Biden might be an outlier. The results are quite different from the poll's previous results and the NBC poll.

"It's a ridiculous outlier (Trump up 10 over Biden — laughable)," Larry Sabato, director of the Center of Politics at the University of Virginia wrote on X. "My question: How could you even publish a poll so absurd on its face?"

Agencies contributed to the story.

WORLD

Mooncakes, traditions draw crowds to festival

By YIFAN XU in Washington
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Booths featuring traditional Chinese activities drew enthusiastic crowds, while various traditional Chinese performances won applause.

Chinese Americans and people of various ethnic groups in and around Washington DC gathered Sunday at the Chinatown Community Cultural Center to celebrate the Mid-Autumn Festival.

The event, including an indoor garden party and performances, was hosted on Sunday by the three largest Chinese schools in the Delaware-Maryland-Virginia region: Hope Chinese School, American Chinese School, and Howard County Chinese School.

As one of the "Taste of China in China Town" activity series, the event marked the coming Mid-Autumn Festival. The festival is one of China's most important traditions and falls on the 15th day of the eighth month of the Chinese lunar calendar and Sept 29 in the solar calendar this year.

Painters demonstrated Chinese painting on fans with colorful brush and ink, such as a cute panda eating bamboo and a witty kitten pouncing on a bee.

The calligrapher asked the guests their names and wrote them on the bookmarks with smooth brush strokes. Some instructors patiently taught people how to make beautiful and delicious mooncakes with colorful fillings, white sticky rice dough, and simple molds. Joyful laughter and conversation filled the garden party.

Guests also were treated to mooncake-tasting, trying on traditional Chinese clothing, and the sounds of Chinese folk instruments.

Arina, 23, got a flyer for the event as she passed the community center's entrance. She decided to visit and was mesmerized by the Chinese paintings and calligraphy and stayed in front of the booth for some time.

"I've always found Chinese culture fascinating. I'm going to start learning Chinese, like Chinese characters and more. They are so beautiful," she said to China Daily, holding up the Chinese transliteration of her name written by the calligrapher on a bookmark.

Young children enjoyed making craft lanterns, painting Peking Opera faces, holding and moving marbles with chopsticks, hitting drums for blessings, and creating a picture book in the theme of the Mid-Autumn Festival. It was a day for family reunions and harvest celebration.

Austin, 7, moved from booth to booth, holding his mom's hand. He had just finished his first handmade mooncake, proudly sharing it with her. And then he walked toward the booth where he could make a bunny lantern.

"I know next Friday is the Mid-Autumn Festival, and I'll lighten this bunny and walk around my neighborhood that night," he said.

"I've tried all of them, and they're all fun!" Kyla, 10, told China Daily with a big smile.

The audience, totaling almost 200, enjoyed performances of Chinese folk music, Chinese dance and kung fu.

Xu Xueyuan, minister at the Chinese embassy, watched the performances and experienced the cultural offerings. She wrote "Happy Mid-Autumn Festival" in Chinese script at the calligraphy booth.

Risky crossing



Maria Argentina, 32, from Honduras, crawls past razor wire after crossing the Rio Grande River without her wheelchair to Eagle Pass, Texas, on Sunday. Dozens of migrants arrived at the US-Mexico border, hoping to be allowed into the United States, with US Border Patrol reporting 1.8 million encounters with migrants in the last 12 months. ANDREW CABALLERO-REYNOLDS / AFP

Trump, McCarthy differ on shutdown

By HENG WEILI in New York
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The political machinations over whether to continue funding the US government before a Sept 30 deadline intensified over the weekend.

Former president Donald Trump, the front-runner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination, who backed current House Speaker Kevin McCarthy when the latter faced a drawn-out confirmation battle in January, said Republicans should not be concerned about being blamed for a government shutdown.

"The Republicans lost big on Debt Ceiling, got NOTHING, and now are worried that they will be BLAMED for the Budget Shutdown. Wrong!!! Whoever is President will be blamed," Trump wrote late Sunday on his Truth Social media outlet.

Asked about Trump's comments on Monday, McCarthy said: "I think we're much stronger when we stay open. I don't understand how not paying the troops and not paying our border agents... what we're trying to do is secure our border. That would be a part of funding the government."

"A shutdown would only give strength to the Democrats. It would give the power to Biden," McCarthy said in an interview last week on Fox News. "It wouldn't pay our troops. It wouldn't pay our border agents. More people would be coming across."

McCarthy maintained that he wants to pass a short-term bill, known as a continuing resolution, which would keep the government funded at the same levels until an agreement is reached. But that approach has been vociferously opposed by numerous conservatives in the House.

"You have to keep the government open. I mean, if people want to close the government — only makes them weaker," he said.

Lawmakers are scheduled to reconvene on Tuesday evening to vote on advancing four appropriations bills — for the Defense Department, Homeland Security Department, State Department, and foreign operations.

The measures include reversing an \$11 billion Biden administration climate initiative, and resuming construction of the Mexico-US border wall.

US President Joe Biden has vowed to veto at least two of the bills.

In total, lawmakers must advance 12 individual appropriations bills in the House and Senate before sending them to the president's desk. But it's unlikely both chambers will be able to advance all 12 and reach a compromise before the shutdown deadline — midnight Saturday.

A shutdown would negatively impact the country's credit, credit rating agency Moody's said on Monday, one month after Fitch downgraded the US by one notch after a debt ceiling standoff.

"If there is not an effective fiscal policy response to try to offset those pressures... then the likelihood of that having an increasingly negative impact on the credit profile will be there," Moody's analyst William Foster told Reuters. "And that could lead to a negative outlook, potentially a downgrade at some point, if those pressures aren't addressed."

A shutdown, however, would not interrupt government debt payments.

Senate Majority Leader Chuck Schumer, a New York Democrat, hopes to pass a short-term spending

bill this week ahead of the deadline, but it could be held up.

"I will oppose any effort to hold the federal government hostage for Ukraine funding. I will not consent to expedited passage of any spending measure that provides any more U.S. aid to Ukraine," he said on X on Sept 21.

Congress so far has approved about \$113 billion in military, humanitarian and economic aid to Ukraine in four packages, and Biden has been seeking another \$24 billion.

Pentagon spokesperson Chris Sherwood told Politico on Thursday that Ukraine operations would be exempt from a shutdown following a visit last week by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy to Washington to seek more aid.

Sherwood told Newsweek that the assistance to Ukraine "is an excepted activity under a government lapse in appropriations."

The news stoked some outrage on social media as to whether the Pentagon had such authority.

Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell, a Kentucky Republican, has supported bipartisan efforts to fund the government.

He was called out by Trump on Monday.

"It's time Republicans learned how to fight!" Trump wrote. "Are you listening Mitch McConnell, the weakest, dumbest, and most conflicted Leader in U.S. Senate history?"

White House press secretary Karine Jean-Pierre blamed the GOP for the situation on Monday: "This week, as House Republicans' chaos continues to march us toward an extreme Republican shutdown, we are calling out how a shutdown

would damage our community's economy and national security, and we're going to hold extreme House Republicans accountable."

US Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack said on Monday that a shutdown risks nutritional assistance for the nearly 7 million low-income women and children who rely on benefits.

He said the "vast majority" of participants in the Special Supplemental Nutrition Program for Women, Infants, and Children, or WIC program, would see an immediate reduction in benefits, with cuts in the days and weeks after a shutdown starts.

Millions of federal workers will not be paid during a shutdown but will receive back pay once there is a settlement.

Some vital services will continue uninterrupted. Social Security checks will be sent out, and Medicare and Medicaid benefits would continue.

The mail will still be delivered, as the US Postal Service is an independent agency.

Many national parks would close, although some stayed open in previous shutdowns, with fewer services.

Air traffic controllers and Transportation Security Administration agents would have to temporarily work without pay.

The president, members of Congress, and Supreme Court justices still will be paid.

The federal budget deficit totaled \$2 trillion over the past 12 months, according to the nonpartisan, non-profit Committee for a Responsible Federal Budget.

Spending has totaled 24.1 percent of US GDP over the past year, while revenue has comprised 16.8 percent of GDP, down from 19.6 percent in the previous 12 months, the committee found.

Deficits have totaled 7.4 percent of GDP over the past year — larger than any fiscal year in history in which the country did not face a war, recession or other major emergency.

Agencies contributed to this story.

US factor emerges in India's row with Canada

By YANG RAN
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Recent leaks indicate that the United States has contributed to Canada's allegation that India is responsible for the assassination of a Canadian citizen, playing a crucial role in the diplomatic tiff between New Delhi and Ottawa, experts said.

Canada-India ties recently sank to a deep freeze after Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accused Indian agents of being behind the killing of Sikh leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar on Canadian soil, which was strongly rejected by New Delhi.

Canadian CTV News network on Sunday released an interview with US Ambassador to Canada David Cohen, during which he explicitly stated: "There was shared intelligence among 'Five Eyes' partners that helped lead Canada to make the statements."

Citing "Western allied officials", The New York Times specified that "US intelligence agencies offered their Canadian counterparts context that helped Canada conclude that India had been involved."

Qian Feng, director of the research department at the National Strategy Institute at Tsinghua University, said the "Five Eyes" alliance has been closely monitoring India.

"Although India has been very close with the US recently, it's still outside of the US' core allies circle, and may never become one of it. The Anglo-Saxon bloc, historically, has been noted for its exclusiveness."

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said on Friday that he hopes India will work with the Canadians on this investigation and expects accountability from the Indian side.

According to Sun Xihui, an associate research fellow with the National Institute of International Strategy at the Chinese Academy of Sciences, "the US is reluctant to openly embroil in the row between Canada and India, because it fears such involvement could potentially disrupt its strategic objective of aligning with India as a counterbalance against China."

The Khalistan movement, which seeks to establish an independent homeland for the Sikh community in India's northwestern Punjab region, is creating a rift in relations between Western countries and India, said Sun.

The movement was ruled as illegal in India. But in countries with sizable Sikh populations such as Canada and the US, there are many supporters for the movement. Canada is home to the largest Sikh population outside India.

Indians have started to voice their dissatisfaction with the US stance in the diplomatic spat. In an editorial, The Tribune, an Indian daily newspaper, inveighed against the US, stating that "the US, that inveterate global policeman... has laid bare its bias and double standards by targeting India."

"This should be a wake-up call for India," Qian said, adding that the alleged assassination also tarnishes India's global image and may have a long-lasting negative influence on future cooperation between India and the Western nations.

Xinhua and agencies contributed to this story.

Yi embroidery wows at Italy's Milan Fashion Week

By CHEN WEIHUA in Milan, Italy

Ding Lanying, an embroiderer from Chuxiong Yi autonomous prefecture in Yunnan province, could not hold back her excitement when a show featuring Yi embroidery and culture was held at the Milan Fashion Week on Saturday.

A collection of 40 trendy designs was modeled on the catwalk, where the color black and the Yi ethnic group's favorite patterns of clouds, seeds and silver ornaments were prominently featured.

Ding, who has been doing embroidery for more than 30 years since she was 8, said she was fortunate to attend the show, and there are so many women like her back in her hometown who have

contributed to the show's success.

"The show in Milan will make the village's female embroiderers so proud of the Yi embroidery and encourage them to continue the cultural heritage for generations," said Ding, who was wearing a traditional Yi costume.

Ding's South China Colorful Yi Embroidery Company now hires 2,028 embroiderers, including 109 who have physical disabilities.

"It's an amazing collection. I like it very much. Amazing," Fabio Mascheroni, founder and owner of fashion company Ludovica Mascheroni, told China Daily after watching the show.

Li Wenjuan, head of the Chuxiong prefecture party committee's publicity department, said the thriving local embroidery industry

has enabled women to work at home and helped improve their livelihoods.

"We live in the deep mountains, but we always have the fashion genes," she said of the 1,700-year-old Yi embroidery, an intangible cultural heritage.

Historical roots

"Italian explorer Marco Polo brought Chinese embroidery to the West more than 700 years ago and now we are at the Milan Fashion Week after our debut at the New York Fashion Week. It is truly a miracle."

Yi is the sixth-largest ethnic minority group in China and it boasts a population of over 98 million mainly in the Yunnan, Sichuan and Guizhou provinces and the

Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

Zhu Weiming, managing director of Shangtex Fashion Company which coordinated the show, attributed the success to the joint efforts of Shanghai designer Ji Cheng and the embroidery artists from Chuxiong.

"The 2024 spring/summer fashion inspired by Yi embroidery has blended the Yi ethnic group's totems, such as tiger, seeds and flowers, very well with luxurious Italian fabrics," he said. "(It) is a salute to Yi culture."

Apart from Milan Fashion Week and New York Fashion Week, the Yi embroidery had already wowed attendees at the Shanghai Fashion Week and Beijing Fashion Week in China.

Puppet master



A member of the French street theater company Royal de Luxe performs with the giant dog puppet Xolo during a show in Nantes, France, on Sunday. SEBASTIEN SALOM-GOMIS / AFP

LIVING HERITAGE

There are 43 items inscribed on UNESCO's Intangible Cultural Heritage lists that not only bear witness to the past glories of Chinese civilization, but also continue to shine today. China Daily looks at the protection and inheritance of some of these cultural legacies. In this installment, we find out how the traditional craft of handmade Xuan paper still thrives in the digital era.

A cultural paper trail

Traditional craft still survives and prospers amid challenges, report Wang Ru and Zhu Lixin in Xuancheng, Anhui province.

Zhou Donghong, 56, holds a finely woven bamboo screen with his partner. They steep it in a large trough full of pulp and lift it. A piece of moist Xuan paper takes form on the screen — known as a “mold and deckle” in the West. Then they carefully separate the freshly formed sheet of paper from the screen, spreading it flat out without any creases.

The whole process, called *laoshi* (getting paper out of water) in Chinese, only lasts a dozen seconds, but the adeptness actually comes from Zhou's experience of doing it repeatedly for nearly four decades.

This is one of the major steps to make Xuan paper, a traditional handmade paper in China. Made in Jingxian county, Xuancheng, Anhui province, the paper is made from a mixture of sandalwood bark, rice straw and stream water from the mountains.

Papermaking is the crystallization of wisdom of ancient Chinese people, regarded as one of the Four Great Inventions of China — along with gunpowder, the compass and printing techniques. Among various types of handmade paper in China, Xuan paper is famous for its close links to traditional calligraphy and ink paintings.

The traditional handicrafts of making Xuan paper were inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity by UNESCO in 2009.

Although the process of *laoshi* seems simple, it is actually the most difficult step in making Xuan paper, with demanding technical details.

“The process of paper forming is the most difficult because I have to transform something intangible into something tangible, which means I need to scoop it out from the pulp and turn it into a sheet of paper. The thickness, uniformity and weight of this sheet are all controlled by my hands. In some way, my hands are just like a scale,” says Zhou.

The skill can be mastered only through long hours and painstaking practice. Zhou admits soon after he started learning the craft as an apprentice in 1986, he wanted to give it up, since his hands would be covered in chills during winter as they constantly came into contact with cold water.

He could only apply ointment to relieve his pain at night, but the next day he had to continue his work. After a time, the skin on his hands would peel away.

After eight months, in 1986, he became an employee of the China Xuan Paper Group. Although he worked hard for a whole month, he did not receive any salary, because the paper he produced was categorized as not being up to the required standard.

Luckily, after finding a good teacher, and years of practice, he has honed his skills to the extent that 99 percent of the paper he makes meets the standard.

In 1993, Zhou was given the task to restore *zhahua*, an ancient type of Xuan paper renowned for being incredibly lightweight and “just as thin as cicada wings”. One hundred sheets of *zhahua* weigh just 1.4 kilograms, less than half of the weight of ordinary Xuan paper. Zhou did a lot of reading and experiments, adjusting the concentration of paper pulp and the intensity of his movements continuously, and finally managed to re-create the paper.

Collaborative effort

Making Xuan paper is extremely demanding, and it takes nearly three years to produce a batch of it, through 108 procedures. An artisan can only skillfully master some of them in their lifetime.

For example, although he knows all the other procedures, Zhou, a master in *laoshi*, specializes in that one area and the procedures it entails, since each requires long-term practice to attain the necessary level of skill. As a result, the whole papermaking process requires collaborative effort.

Five people form a group, two for *laoshi*, two for *shaishi* (drying paper) and one for *jianzhi* (checking quality and cutting paper). Work results of the whole group are evaluated together. There are high demands for the appearance, evenness and weight of the finished products. The weight of one piece of Xuan paper has only a 1-gram margin of error. Paper that does not meet the standard will be sent back for reproduction, and we will



Checking the quality of each sheet is one of the 108 procedures in making Xuan paper. PHOTOS BY ZHU LIXIN / CHINA DAILY



Getting the paper out of water.



Drying and smoothing out the paper.



Checking the quality and cutting the sheets.



Checking printed paper pages.



Visitors get hands-on experience.

not get paid for it,” says Zhou.

“It's all about group spirit, tacit understanding and mutual trust.”

The earliest record of Xuan paper can be found in *On Famous Paintings Through the Ages*, a book written by Tang Dynasty (618-907) scholar Zhang Yanyuan, in which he described the function of Xuan paper: It is a carrier of calligraphy and painting.

According to Huang Feisong, director of the Xuan Paper Research Center at the China Xuan Paper Group, based on clues in the historical record, Xuan paper was named after its main production area, Xuancheng.

“Xuan paper has many characteristics, like the ability to show different shades of ink, its stability, its durability and its resistance to insects, of which the first is the most prominent, and that's why it has been the favorite of calligraphers and painters through the ages,” says Huang.

The other features ensure it can be kept for ages, and that enables paintings, calligraphy, ancient documents and books to be passed down to the present day.”

Chinese ink painter Li Xiaolong says that, when creating freehand brush paintings, showing ink variations is important. Some painters drip or splash ink like “winddrops, and Xuan paper is the best for showing what they want to present.

“Xuan paper and artists are just like fish and water, which means they need each other. Xuan paper can show its quality through the creation of calligraphers and painters, and artists cannot give full play to their talent without Xuan paper,” says Li.

According to Tang Shukun, director of the Handmade Paper Institute at the University of Science and Technology of China in Hefei, capital of Anhui, calligraphy and ink paintings, especially freehand brushwork created on Xuan paper, have their unique appeal. As early as the Tang Dynasty, Xuan paper was listed as a tribute to the imperial court.

Tang mentions that as Chinese calligraphy and paintings developed, so did Xuan paper. Jingxian became an important place for papermaking during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), according to Huang.

Traditionally, folk customs related to Xuan paper were common in Jingxian. For example, every year on the birthday and the date of death of Cai Lun, an official of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220) who is said to have invented paper, all the workshops in the paper industry pay tribute to Cai at a temple dedicated to him in the county.

Every year, when the workshops start work after Chinese New Year, people hold a ceremony to worship Cai as well, and gather

for a meal, in the hope of a prosperous year and a thriving business. Following this tradition, alongside the feast people nowadays also set off fireworks.

New vitality

The Xuan paper industry has seen steady development in Jingxian. Last year, about 500 metric tons of Xuan paper were produced in the county, and more than 30,000 local people are engaged with the industry.

Some younger people also play their role in this traditional industry, like Guan Jiaming, 33, who has been engaged with *laoshi* for more than a decade. “The traditional craft of making Xuan paper cannot be replaced by machines, and every day when I work, I feel like I'm passing on the precious craft with my hands,” says Guan.

The local government is building a Xuan paper cultural park and a Xuan paper town to develop cultural tourism.

Since 2008, Tang has been carrying out field surveys with his team to check the condition of handmade paper workshops across China, and visited more than 500 papermaking workshops in over 300 villages.

According to Tang, from the 1990s to 2010, the handmade paper industry suffered a heavy blow with the industrialization and the development of the internet, which led to mass, mechanized production of paper and a decline in demand for handmade writing paper.

At least 90 percent of the handmade paper companies and workshops closed in the country, but a resurgence is underway.

He finds a new coordination between supply and demand. “I'm optimistic about the development of handmade paper, like Xuan paper. Although the demand has shrunk a lot, there are still reliable customers,” says Tang. “With modern technology, the shrinking of this industry is an inevitable trend across the whole world. But China, the birthplace of papermaking, still leads in the world when it comes to the number of workshops and people engaged with papermaking by hand, according to our research.”

“Actually, over the past decade, many types of traditional handmade paper crafts have found new vitality. They attract people with their rich cultural connotations,” says Tang.

Contact the writers at wangru@chinadaily.com.cn



Online Watch the video by scanning the code.



Top: A part of *Twelve-Screen Landscapes of Four Seasons* by Qi Baishi, collected by Chongqing China Three Gorges Museum. Center: *The Splendor of Yanshan Mountains* by Fan Tianzhou, collected by the Art Museum of China Academy of Art. Above: An ink painting by Li Xiaolong. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Left and right: Foldable fans and lanterns are popular products made by the China Xuan Paper Group. Center: A paper installation created by Zhu Jinshi. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A legacy that endures

By XING WEN and ZHU LIXIN in Xuancheng, Anhui

Amid the spectacle of the 2008 Beijing Olympics opening ceremony, the colossal screen in the Bird's Nest stadium displayed the process of creating a traditional Chinese painting — from the making of Xuan paper and the delicate brushwork applied to its surface, to the art of mounting the finished masterpiece on a scroll.

The short film not only showcased the allure of China's “four treasures of the study” — namely Xuan paper, brushes, ink and ink slabs — but also conveyed the serenity of classical Chinese art.

Clad in pristine white robes, craftspeople skillfully executed the steps involved in making Xuan paper, an exquisite and enduring material closely associated with Chinese calligraphy and paintings.

The age-old craft continues to be faithfully practiced by a dedicated group of craftspeople in Jingxian county, Xuancheng, Anhui province. The enduring tradition has not only made the county one of the country's leading hubs for handmade paper, it has also breathed new life into its culture and tourism sectors.

Nestled at the base of emerald hills in Jingxian is a striking white structure, its main body built from steel to resemble a stack of gracefully arranged paper.

This is the Xuan Paper Museum. It is dedicated to the history and craft of Xuan paper production and also hosts exhibitions of masterpieces of traditional calligraphy and painting.

The museum, which opened to the public in 2016, is part of the Xuan Paper Cultural Park, where people can visit workshops to experience the traditional way Xuan paper is made. During the recent summer vacation, many primary and middle school students went to visit.

One of them was Hu Yunguo, a primary school pupil from Ma'anshan, Anhui province, who followed the papermaking masters as they dipped a bamboo screen in a pool of pulp, and then got hands-on experience by lifting a sheet of paper from the pool.

The sheet was then sent to an sun-dried and cut before being packed in the elegant box, which Hu took home as a memento. “It's truly magical to watch the tough bark of the sandalwood tree and rice straw undergo various processes to ultimately become Xuan paper. I'm going to keep the paper I made safely,” says Hu.

“With modern technology, the shrinking of this industry is an inevitable trend across the whole world. But China, the birthplace of papermaking, still leads in the world when it comes to the number of workshops and people engaged with papermaking by hand, according to our research.”

“Actually, over the past decade, many types of traditional handmade paper crafts have found new vitality. They attract people with their rich cultural connotations,” says Tang.

“The 32-year-old takes the wet paper sheets, which are lifted from the pulp pool, and carefully places them on a drying wall — a vital heating apparatus used during the sunning phase of production.

He then uses a brush to smooth out the paper's surface. During this process, the

“Xuan paper installations can transform people's perception of time. When you find yourself inside them, it feels as if you have transcended to another realm.”

Zhu Jinshi, artist

paper sheets adhere to the wall and dry gradually to become finished Xuan paper.

Yao is the youngest member of the team, and he has the demanding task of drying 500 sheets of paper every day. Once he meets his daily workload, he dedicates time to filming, short videos demonstrating the papermaking process in the various workshops, which he shares online. To his surprise, many have garnered millions of views and as a result, Yao has amassed over 120,000 followers on the short-video platform Douyin, and 25,000 on Xiaohongshu.

“I started creating these clips back in 2017 and shared them online for fun,” he explains. “Surprisingly, many of the videos became popular. Viewers would ask me how to buy proper Xuan paper for a range of uses. That has motivated me to keep producing the videos.”

Last year, Yao, who is also an employee of the China Xuan Paper Group, began endorsing Xuan paper and products through livestreaming.

Apart from producing paper in a variety of sizes, the corporation also manufactures a wide array of cultural and creative products made from the paper, such as foldable lanterns shaped like books and small paper umbrellas.

According to Huang Yingfu, deputy chief manager of China Xuan Paper Group, the corporation is also actively expanding the use of Xuan paper in areas such as stamp production, book printing, and as paper used for the restoration of cultural artifacts.

Xuan paper is known for its strength and smoothness, its capacity to absorb water and ink, and ability to be folded repeatedly without tearing and remain durable over time.

This enduring quality prompted the cultural company Sanxitang to set up a branch in Jingxian dedicated to using Xuan paper to reproduce printed treasures like *Siku Quanshu*, an encyclopedia compiled under the edict of Emperor Qianlong during the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911).

Chen Guanglan, manager of Sanxitang's Jingxian branch, firmly advocates for the trustworthiness of Xuan paper over digital methods when it comes to preserving ancient texts.

“I believe that digitalization is merely of temporary use, incapable of serving as a

lasting tool for the development and perpetuation of traditional cultural heritage. We place greater trust in preserving our cultural legacy through traditional means,” she says.

Sanxitang reproduces copies of these ancient classics in the traditional Chinese thread-bound book format and displays them in the company's exhibition hall.

In the contemporary art world, the age-old, humble material also remains a source of vitality and inspiration, inspiring artists to create unconventional installations.

For instance, among the exhibits of the ongoing Chengdu Biennale 2023, Zhu Jinshi's pillar-like installation, which stands 12 meters tall and has a diameter of 3.5 meters, is made using an internal steel frame covered with Xuan paper.

He has named the piece *Du Fu Tower*, in tribute to the famous Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Du Fu.

Zhu's exploration of the use of Xuan paper in art installations dates back to 1988. Living in Berlin at the time, he created an installation using a cubic meter of linen fabric.

Simultaneously, he asked a friend in Beijing to make a twin piece using a cubic meter of Xuan paper. When combined, the two components created a work of art known as *Fang Zhen*, which embodied the notion of East-West dialogue.

Since then, Zhu has frequently made Xuan paper installations, which have been exhibited in a number of countries, including China, Germany, Japan, Canada and the Czech Republic. In order to make these installations easier to preserve, his team developed a type of Xuan paper with fire-resistant properties.

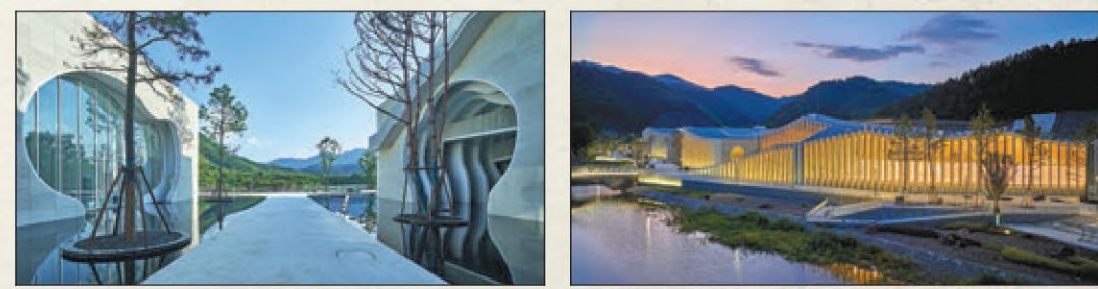
In 2018, Zhu used 14,000 sheets of Xuan paper, 1,800 fine bamboo sticks and 2,000 7-meter-long cotton threads to make a large-scale installation titled *The Ship of Time*. It resembles a tunnel through which visitors can walk to see floating specks of light on the folded surface of the Xuan paper, and creates an immersive experience that resonates both with the ancient material and the theme of time.

“Xuan paper installations can transform people's perception of time,” says Zhu. “When you find yourself inside them, it feels as if you have transcended to another realm. Many of my exhibitions have been extended due to the enthusiastic response of the audience for the Xuan paper pieces.”

Explaining why he has been using the paper for so long, Zhu says that his installations are the product of challenging traditional forms of calligraphy and painting on Xuan paper.

Their primary purpose is to defy tradition, possibly representing a new ideology in Asian art, while still honoring the historical significance of the ancient materials used, he says.

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A demonstration center displays traditional handicrafts of making Xuan paper in Jingxian county, Anhui province, as part of local government's efforts to develop cultural tourism. PHOTOS BY WANG DACHOU / FOR CHINA DAILY

LIFE



From left: A child stamps an image of the Tianning Temple at the exhibition *Curiosity Leads the Way Through Seasons*; a young visitor poses for a photo at the exhibition of ancient Chinese wisdom about time; Kunqu Opera was added to the UCCA gala in 2018 by He Wei, who has committed himself to bringing out the charm of traditional cultural icons through modern art and design. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Exhibition shows time past to present

Colorful translucent curtains hanging from the ceiling flutter in the wind at a half-open industrial space in early September. Right outside the windowless corridor, the Tianning Temple, one of the oldest of its kind in Beijing, comes into sight.

Amid the curtains, electronic screens of various sizes flicker and display animations featuring animals and plants interacting against the backdrop of changing seasons.

All of it gives off a magnified sense of time and space at the Tianning No 1 Cultural and Technological Innovation Park in the capital city's Xicheng district.

The arrangement is part of the exhibition *Curiosity Leads the Way Through Seasons* that was put together by He Wei, an artist who has committed himself to bringing out the charm of traditional culture icons through modern art and design.

"The exhibition is mainly about ancient Chinese wisdom about time," He says.

"As one walks into the exhibition, the curtains change from green to cyan, orange and red, indicating the change of seasons," he adds.

The idea is to have visitors feel the intangibility of time when they walk into the exhibition that will run until Oct 4.

Distinctive phenomena that were observed by the ancients and are characteristic of each of the 24 solar terms have been delivered on the electronic screens, ranging from fish swimming under ice to show the Start of Spring, to thunder indicating the Waking of Insects, and then the sudden disappearance of birds to mark the Start of Winter.

"We tried to bring out historical records about solar terms, including phenology, myths, folklore and poetry, onto digital screens," He says.

Each of the animations lasts from one to two minutes.

In He's opinion, the ancient records not only reflect agrarian civilization but romantic imagination and realities among the people.

In addition, a special focus has been given to landscape in the city's Xicheng district.

Local cultural and touristic landmarks have been woven into a long scroll of season-changing animation, including Xiannongtan, a historical spot where emperors took off their imperial robes and donned farm workwear to perform ceremonies; the National Centre

Electronic screens lend a modern dimension to how the societies of yesteryear recorded the passing of seasons, **Yang Feiyue** reports.

for the Performing Arts; Dashilan, one of the oldest and most distinctive commercial alleys; and Beijing Zoo.

"We integrated them into a poetic composition that delivers a vivid portrayal of Beijing's Xicheng district," says He, who was born in the area.

"I'm very familiar with everything here. Through artistic expression, the works are not just a simple show of a bus route but a story that blends with nature and offers rich narratives," he says, adding that he strives to give a sense of the past and the present coexisting.

Handicraft projects and VR experience are also put in place for visitors to immerse themselves in intangible cultural heritage related to the Year of the Rabbit this year, such as the Lord Rabbit.

"We made a virtual moon palace in the form of digital art to offer a contemporary interpretation of the ancient capital's moon-worshipping ceremony, uncovering the auspicious symbolism behind the zodiac sign for the New Year celebration," He says.

"The creative team led by He for this project uses digital technology and real-world construction to create a new form of art exhibition, and they have delivered innovations to cultural communication methods that enable young people to experience the unique charm of traditional culture," Tian says.

Every detail in the space was carefully arranged in an order that

"The creative team led by He (Wei) ... delivered innovations to cultural communication methods that enable young people to experience the unique charm of traditional culture."

Tian Lei, co-host of the exhibition *Curiosity Leads the Way Through Seasons*

Tian Lei, co-host of the exhibition, says Chinese traditional culture is profound and extensive, and the power of art should be used to integrate it into everyday life in innovative ways.

"The creative team led by He for this project uses digital technology and real-world construction to create a new form of art exhibition, and they have delivered innovations to cultural communication methods that enable young people to experience the unique charm of traditional culture," Tian says.

Every detail in the space was carefully arranged in an order that

keeps visitors engaged, which is something He has been striving for in his art career.

Now in his 30s, he studied environmental art in the category of landscape architecture at the Academy of Arts and Design, Tsinghua University, from 2005 to 2009.

"That was when I started to pay attention to nature and the environment, as well as their relation with people and other living creatures," He says.

He went on to pursue virtual museum studies for his master's degree at the academy for the follow-

ing three years, an experience that he says enhanced his understanding of the importance of the relationship between people and space.

"You have to know it, so you can come up with something that makes more sense for a certain topic," he says.

As he continued to make inroads in the art field at the Cranbrook Academy of Art in the United States from 2012-14, He got more insight into social practices in a different setting that includes galas and parties.

"I got to see how people behave on such occasions, and received more training about how to create spaces using information," he says.

His bold experimentation during school years saw him become a member of the art and science division of the New Museum of Contemporary Art in New York in 2015.

"From that point on, my research and practice began to focus on the differences and expressions of content between Eastern and Western cultures," he says.

He has made a point of exploring how visual elements from Eastern

culture can be expressed in the context of contemporary digital art exhibitions, thereby creating multidimensional, hybrid social experiential scenes.

"Specifically, I employed cross-media methods, integrating a comprehensive range of elements such as programming, design, installations, food, and theatrical performances," he says.

"The goal was to explore the possibilities of experimental artistic expression within social settings," he explains.

In 2017, He introduced Chinese elements into the Asia Contemporary Art Week that he hosted.

He wanted visitors to see how cutlery can be a communication tool to convey the depth of Chinese culture.

In 2018, He was invited to help with the gala of UCCA, China's leading institution of contemporary art, and delivered *Another Village*, an immersive performance that attempted to create a garden facing the future and a delightful farming experience.

He was inspired by an ancient Chinese tale and turned the setting into a utopian village.

"I also put in Kunqu Opera elements and ended up getting a very good effect," He recalls.

The experience marked a new chapter in his career as he started to zoom in on expressing traditional Chinese culture through new approaches.

In 2019, He returned to China and founded his art studio Chewing Theory, where he has focused on studying the 24 solar terms and their artistic conversion.

Ever since, his team has drawn inspiration from them and has come up with paintings and creative films to tell the Chinese story.

The first collection of those works went online during the Dragon Boat Festival on June 22 and received great attention, including from the Xicheng authorities.

"We will go beyond Xicheng, to the rest of Beijing and then the rest of the country, where folk customs and characteristics of the solar terms would be diverse," He says about his future plan.

"I hope I can help spread some Chinese culture from my perspective, and help make it more appealing and better understood by more," he says.



A screenshot of an animation at the exhibition *Curiosity Leads the Way Through Seasons* imaginatively showcases landmarks in Beijing's Xicheng district.

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Why this thermophobe is falling for autumn like the leaves

Mid-Autumn Festival kicks off on Sept 29 this year in China. However, the season officially begins on



A. Thomas Pasek
Second Thoughts

Autumnal Equinox, or Sept 23 this time around in the northern hemisphere, so six days in may not technically be the midpoint.

But that's beside the point. Don't fall for such calendrical calamity. The Chinese have every right to jump the gun on my favorite time of year. After all, Chinese New Year, also known as Spring Festival, often

comes weeks before the season officially gets going, which is March 19 north of the equator next year — otherwise known as Spring Equinox.

So why do I fall for autumn every September?

What's not to like? By the way, I'm not alone in my opinion, either.

I could be wrong on this detail, remind me to Baidu it later, but key ingredients to make Turkish delight ripen during Anatolian falls, and what better way to bring in the season named after the region's prior empire, the Ottoman, which I like to think was named after my favorite season, "autumn"?

So for what reason is the season

many people's fave time of year? I can count them on one hand and have not a thumb to spare.

Beijing summers are often sweltering and sodden seasons with rain and photons showering us with Mother Nature's tender heavenly touch from above. It often seems that the moment I confirm orders on food delivery platforms like Meituan or Ele.me, the firmament opens wide and gushes forth a daily downpour.

Not to flash virtue semaphores, but I can't help but feel bad for the scooter-bound delivery staff taking my orders at the time as they struggle to keep glass bottles of Laogan-

ma chili sauce from colliding mid-journey with a dozen eggs, all while dodging puddles and potholes. And with the heat comes drenched clothing and those Carpathian counts of the air. Yes, I'm talking about those nasty gnat-sized *Nosferatu* nuisances that take wing when the weather's wet and clammy, leaving us bleeding out and itching for autumn.

The third great thing about fall is the foliage. Beijing being in the temperate zone, the capital gets to enjoy four distinct seasons. And in addition to the cooler ideal-for-dozing nights, the days are graced with a kaleidoscope of color from the

city's deciduous sentinels watching over its leafy streets.

The fourth wonderful thing about the coming of the cooler months can be seen in the noticeable spring in the fall steps of the millions of parents calling the capitol home. For when September comes, the kiddies are spirited off couches, away from devices, and back to the schoolrooms where they'll spend the next five months or so.

Finally, Beijing autumns are a magical time of year for tennis fans. You see, from Sept 30, the day after Mid-Autumn Festival, all the way to Oct 8, professional tennis is back in

Beijing after a four-year hiatus! I was in attendance at the final of the China Open in September 2019,

when Japan's Naomi Osaka claimed the title with a hard-fought victory over Denmark's Caroline Wozniacki. And now, nearly half a decade on, and with the pandemic receding from view in society's rearview mirror, I can watch live tennis again without worrying about plane ticket and hotel room availability. Even though love means nothing in the sport, I love tennis in Beijing ... in autumn.

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COMMENT

Editorials

Chip 'guardrails' guarantee US companies will be collateral damage in attack on China's tech

The rules the United States Department of Commerce issued last Friday are meant to prevent China and a few other "countries of concern" from benefiting from US government financing under its CHIPS and Science Act of 2022.

As a milestone statute with unprecedented bipartisan support, the act is a major US endeavor to suppress Chinese progress in cutting-edge science and technologies. While trying to cut China off from the latest developments in semiconductor technologies, the act provides \$52.7 billion in federal subsidies for domestic semiconductor production, research and workforce development. Friday's rules are designed as additional "guardrails" for its implementation, and thus carry unusual significance.

"These guardrails will protect our national security and help the United States stay ahead for decades to come," said US Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo in a statement. "We have to be absolutely vigilant that not a penny of this helps China to get ahead of us," she told the US Congress last Tuesday.

The rules prohibit funding recipients from significantly expanding semiconductor manufacturing capacity in foreign countries of concern for 10 years. They also restrict recipients from some joint research or technology licensing efforts with foreign entities of concern.

Along with previous restrictions on the exports of chips, technology transfer and investment con-

trol, such "guardrails" seek to keep China from benefiting from US technology, business know-how and funding. As the present conditions of Chinese industry leaders such as Huawei and others indicate, such constraints indeed cause tremendous troubles for Chinese enterprises, for the time being. An undersupply of chips is a common headache across many industries these days.

But the measures not only do harm to Chinese industries. The US business community is also suffering from their government's recent efforts to throttle the Chinese semiconductor industry.

It is also naive to believe China has been a "free rider" on US technology progress and that suppressing Chinese companies in this way will naturally protect US national security.

The US business community is against harsh restrictions because about one-third of their revenues come from China. They know better than the China hawks in Washington that overly restrictive measures will disrupt supply chains and hamper their global competitiveness. China's robust market is not only a source of profits, but a peerless catalyst to technological innovations and applications.

The idea to keep China lagging behind the US by means of such restrictions is unrealistic. Not only because of the impossibility of a complete US monopoly of the global technology market, but also because Chinese science and technology won't be held at a standstill.

Sino-EU dialogue opportunity to reset relations

The development of the interdependent relationship between China and the European Union has not been smooth-sailing in recent years. Progress has been hampered by disputes over various issues, which have brought increasing uncertainty to China-EU cooperation, to the detriment of both sides' interests.

In a welcome development, it appears that in the 10th China-EU High-Level Economic and Trade Dialogue, the first such dialogue since 2019, the two sides have reached a broad consensus on many of the key issues, which is conducive to helping them straighten out some misunderstandings that have emerged over the past four years.

According to a brief the China Chamber of Commerce to the EU released on Monday night and those familiar with the matter, the width and depth of the two sides' discussions, which commenced in Beijing on Monday, have gone beyond the expectations of many.

The six fields they talked about — macroeconomic coordination, the multilateral trade system, the stability and resilience of global supply chains, the respective business environment of the two sides, mutual opening-up of the financial sector, and trade and investment facilitation — concern almost all the major aspects regarded as crucial in their economic relations.

The range of concrete measures and cooperation projects they have reportedly agreed to carry out —

which include food, agricultural produce trade, e-commerce, investment, dispute settlement, raw materials, intellectual property rights protection, hotel marketing, cosmetics supervision, registration of formula powder ingredients, futures regulation and green finance — indicate the discussions have been focused and efficient. Apparently, there was a tacit agreement beforehand on the sectors that require an institutional breakthrough to transform cooperative potential into tangible benefits.

The two sides also seem to have dedicated a considerable part of their discussions to exchanging views on the EU's trade policies, foreign subsidy review and carbon border adjustment mechanism, as well as China's subsidies to its electric vehicle industry.

The Chinese side urged the EU to refrain from using trade remedy measures and to continue to keep its market free, open and inclusive, as this will help stabilize the expectations for China-EU trade development. It would also be conducive to boosting European consumption and its green and low-carbon development, which in turn would contribute to the global response to climate change.

China-EU economic and trade cooperation enjoys a solid foundation and huge potential and the dialogue comes at a time when both sides have agreed on the urgency to untangle some of the knotty problems in their economic relations. If they are able to unravel at least some of them, it will be a positive development not only for their own relations, but also for the global economy.

Summit treats Pacific island countries as pawns

The US-Pacific Island Forum Summit US President Joe Biden is hosting in Washington on Monday and Tuesday is the second such gathering. It has apparently failed to fire the same enthusiasm among the Pacific island countries as the first.

Not only have the leaders of two major countries in the region — Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare and Vanuatu Prime Minister Sato Kilman — skipped the summit, but even some of the other non-US participants seem lukewarm about the event.

After the first summit, the White House said the United States would invest more than \$810 million in expanded programs to aid the Pacific islands. However, Congress has still to approve the funds. Yet what the Pacific island countries have received posthaste is diktats from the US, with visiting officials of the Biden administration telling them the dos and don'ts.

White House "Indo-Pacific" coordinator Kurt Campbell and the State Department's top officials for Asia visited the Solomon Islands in April last year, urging it to reconsider the cooperation pact it had signed with China. They visited the country again in March this year for the same purpose. Last month, two Republicans from the US House of Representatives, one being a member of the select committee on strategic competition with China, met with opposition leaders in the Solomon Islands, seeking to cultivate pro-US proxies.

That the high-level interagency mechanism the

US Department of State has set up for the US' aid to the region mainly comprises officials of the National Security Council and the Department of Defense speaks volumes of the fact that infrastructure aid is only a cover for the US' true intention of excluding China from the region. For example, Kiribati, one of the most remote Pacific island states, 4,000 kilometers southwest of Hawaii, is still using an airstrip built during the World War II. But when it said this year it plans to upgrade it with Chinese assistance, the US tried to block the project.

And when the Pacific island countries were in a dire need of essential medical supplies during the COVID-19 pandemic, the US was deaf and blind. Yet it is quick to respond whenever it sees China extending a helping hand to countries in the region or hears of it planning to do so.

Nor should it be forgotten that the US has not yet fulfilled its responsibility to compensate the losses of the Marshall Islands caused by its hundreds of nuclear tests in the region in the 1940s and 1950s. That is in sharp contrast with the efficiency and zeal of Washington renewing agreements this year with Palau and Micronesia that give it exclusive military access to strategic parts of the Pacific.

For the US, the Pacific island countries are simply pawns to be played in its geopolitical games. If the US truly cared about their development as Biden claims, it would not only honor the pledges of assistance it made at the first summit but also repay its historical debt.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

India cannot trust friends who keep their eyes on its activities

India should never have thought that the United States and other Western countries are trying to do it while the "Five Eyes" alliance keeps it under surveillance.

India has close ties with all the members of the Five Eyes, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand, and yet, at a crucial juncture, it finds itself in the crosshair of this Anglo-Saxon alliance.

According to the intelligence disclosed by Canada, the assassination of a Canadian citizen at a Sikh temple in British Columbia by Indian government agents exposed how Canada is secretly spying on Indians, including on Indian diplomats. Tension between the two countries has been high ever since Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau told Parliament that Canada has "credible intelligence" linking agents of

the Indian government to the killing of Sikh separatist leader Hardeep Singh Nijjar.

However, New Delhi called the Canadian accusation "absurd and motivated" and urged it to instead take legal action against anti-Indian elements operating on its soil. As the tension escalated, Canada and India expelled each other's diplomats, while India suspended the processing of Canadian visa applications while issuing a travel alert for Indian nationals.

The critical intelligence came from the Five Eyes. The question is, which country provided the intelligence? There is speculation in the Indian media that from the way the US is backing Canada, it might have been the one providing the intelligence. In a recent interview with Canada's CTV news channel, US Ambassador to Canada David

Cohen admitted that "intelligence sharing between the Five Eyes partners" helped Trudeau make the statement. In other words, it is not just Canada that spied on Indian diplomats, the US did too.

On the surface, the US and other Western countries want to have closer ties with India, but behind the scenes, they spy on it. As the leader of the Five Eyes alliance, the US most wants to win over India, but in the aforementioned dispute, it provided Canada with key evidence against India, which fully shows how Canada, and not India, is the true friend of the US. Of course, the US has not publicly condemned India, and it cannot be ruled out that it wants to use this incident to suppress India and then draw New Delhi closer in its game of rivalry against China and Russia.

— NIUTANQIN WECHAT ACCOUNT

Standard needed for precooked school food

Many parents are unhappy at the decision taken by some primary and middle schools to allow precooked food for students' lunches, as they worry that it might not be as safe as food cooked on the spot.

But precooked food is not necessarily less safe than food cooked and served on the spot, if the manufacturer of the precooked food strictly follows prescribed procedures for cooking, sterilizing and storing.

A majority of parents are wary of precooked food and not without reason: Without a transparent national standard in place, making

it mandatory for the precooked food companies to carry out quality checks, no one can be sure they tick all the boxes for safety. The measures are there, of course, but who knows whether the companies are adhering to them and not bypassing them to save some money. Besides precooked food actually costs less but some businesses charge consumers as high a price as food cooked on site.

Data show that by the end of November 2022 there were 69 standards for precooked food nationwide, introduced by local

governments, business societies or the companies themselves. However, having so many standards in place does not necessarily ensure safety.

The solution lies in introducing a national standard that is mandatory and applies uniformly, so that parents are sure about the safety of what their children are eating in school, and know how to complain in case there is any issue. Gaining consumers' trust is the only way the precooked food industry can flourish.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Biden administration out of touch with reality

During their meeting at the White House on Thursday, US President Joe Biden told visiting Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy that the United States will continue to support Ukraine in its conflict with Russia for as long as it takes to defeat Russia and hold it accountable for "human rights abuses" and "war crimes".

Two days after that, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis, one of former US president Donald Trump's rivals for the Republican presidential nomination, spoke against the Biden administration's support for Ukraine as well as Ukraine being admitted as a member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization.

DeSantis stressed that Ukraine becoming a member of NATO is not in the interests of the US, saying, "All that would do (is) add more obligations to us, so if you're adding more obligations, then what are (the) benefits that we're getting in return?" The Florida governor does not believe the US should write Ukraine a blank check "unless it's (Kyiv) using lever-

age to bring the conflict to a conclusion", saying that the Russia-Ukraine conflict is not a priority for the US.

Although DeSantis' identity as a potential Republican presidential candidate must be taken into consideration when it comes to his stance on the Ukraine crisis, what he said has at least hit the nail on the head on two critical issues.

Since the US cannot wipe out Russia, it has to learn to co-exist with it, and vice versa. DeSantis is correct in pointing out that if Ukraine joins NATO with the support of the US, it will not be the end of the tensions, but a beginning for a new round of proxy conflict between the US and Russia, and that will necessarily add more obligations to the US and further worsen the security situation in Europe.

As such, as he noted, the Biden administration must also give serious thought to the question of how the conflict should be brought to a conclusion. The military support that the US is providing Kyiv is actually pushing the situation to

develop in the wrong direction that serves no party's interest.

The blank check it has written for Kyiv will become a moral burden the US will have to shoulder in the future as the Ukrainians by no means want to see their blood shed simply to serve the US in its rivalry with Russia.

Biden should heed DeSantis' words, even if they come from one of his potential competitors in the upcoming presidential election. It is high time his administration carried out a thorough and objective evaluation of the US' gains and possible losses from the Ukraine crisis.

The US should know that its priority should be the same as that of the rest of the world, that is, bringing the conflict to an end as soon as possible. The US will only bolster its claim to be the leader of the "free world" by playing its due role in helping to restore peace and order in the region at an early date. And that should be done with vision, flexibility and wisdom, rather than missiles, tanks and drones.

— LI YANG, CHINA DAILY

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COMMENT

Mahesh Pathak

Historical bond turned into modern partnership

In the complex realm of international relations, diplomatic visits and collaborative projects often serve as markers of burgeoning partnerships. Chinese President Xi Jinping's visit to Nepal in 2019 and the ongoing visit of Nepali Prime Minister Pushpa Kamal Dahal Prachanda and delegates to China bear testimony to the intertwined fate of the two countries connected by the splendor of their natural landscapes.

An important subject of the two countries' discussions has been the mutually beneficial prospect of a modern network of infrastructure and the Belt and Road Initiative. During his visit to Nepal in 2019, President Xi emphasized the age-old connection between the two nations, symbolized by their shared mountains and rivers. This sentiment reflects the deep cultural and historical ties that have shaped Sino-Nepalese relations. Acknowledging this shared heritage lays the foundation for closer cooperation in contemporary times.

While high-level meetings have taken place between the two sides, the progress of the Belt and Road Initiative in Nepal has been rather sluggish. Despite the grand promises of infrastructure development, there have been challenges in translating commitments into tangible outcomes. These challenges often stem from issues related to funding, bureaucratic hurdles and logistical complexities on the Nepalese side. Nevertheless, these setbacks should be seen as opportunities for recalibration rather than the end of the road.

Nepal's enthusiasm for the Belt and Road Initiative is palpable, as the country expects to gain substantial benefits from improved infrastructure and connectivity. But the additional financial burden the Belt and Road projects will create, given Nepal's limited resources, poses a big challenge to the sustainability of such collaborative projects.

This display of solidarity not only showcased China's commitment to its neighbors' well-being but also deepened mutual respect.

The current discourse revolves around an ambitious proposal that encompasses various facets of cooperation between Nepal and China. Foremost among these is the intention to harness Nepal's abundant hydroelectricity potential, coupled with the establishment of a robust transmission line connecting Nepal to China.

At its core, this proposition entails tapping into Nepal's vast hydroelectric potential to contribute to both countries' energy security and sustainability. By forging a high-capacity transmission line that extends to the Tibetan Plateau, Nepal can channel its surplus hydroelectricity to meet China's burgeoning energy demand, thereby fostering a symbiotic energy partnership.

In return for Nepal's hydroelectricity and resource sharing, the establishment of the railway link with Kathmandu with Shigatse crossing the China-Nepal border at Gyirong-Rasuwa stands as a pivotal agreement. This railway has the potential to significantly enhance regional connectivity, spurring the growth of trade and economic activities not only between Nepal and China but also across the broader South Asian landscape.

One bright spot in the Sino-Nepalese partnership is the reliability of Chinese contractors completing projects on or before time in Nepal. This efficiency is crucial for fostering trust and mutual respect. The timely completion of projects not only demonstrates China's commitment to promoting common

development but also will help Nepal reap the benefits of the improved infrastructure network sooner rather than later.

Another promising area of collaboration is the proposal to open seamlessly the Kyirong and Zhangmu border crossings between the two countries. Hassle-free operation of these entry-exit points could raise trade and people-to-people exchange to the pre-2015 earthquake period. Also, the proposal aligns with the broader regional integration efforts which would improve cross-border connectivity and economic cooperation.

Infrastructure development, however, is not limited to ground-based projects. Improving Nepal's aviation sector, particularly the Pokhara International Airport built with China's aid and the Gautam Buddha Airport constructed by Chinese State-owned enterprises, can facilitate a seamless influx of tourists, raising the tourism revenue to pre-pandemic levels, and will not only boost Nepal's economy but also strengthen ties with China.

The bond between China and Nepal extends beyond the realms of infrastructure collaboration. In times of adversity, China's unwavering support for Nepal has fortified the ties between the two countries. A significant example of such support was witnessed in 2015 when a devastating earthquake hit Nepal: China promptly provided relief materials and medical aid for the quake survivors, and sent rescue teams to assist local rescue and relief teams, and experts to help restore and/or renovate historical monuments. This display of solidarity not only showcased China's commitment to its neighbors' well-being but also deepened mutual respect.

Furthermore, during Nepal's economic blockade in the same year, China emerged as a vital partner. It increased supplies to Nepal, helping alleviate the scarcity of essential goods. China's help-

ing hand eased Nepal's economic difficulties, as well as underscored the importance of dependable regional partnerships during crises.

However, China's support for Nepal goes beyond crisis management. It transcends the diplomatic realm and extends to economic cooperation. In recent years, China has been instrumental in promoting Nepal's handmade products on the international stage. The endorsement of products like black cardamom, handicrafts, dog chews, statues, caterpillar fungus (*cordyceps sinensis*) and herbs have given Nepalese entrepreneurs access to a larger market.

The discourse on railway development, electricity generation and supply infrastructure, and the Belt and Road Initiative underscores the shared aspirations for improved connectivity and progress between the two countries. President Xi Jinping met with Nepal's delegation on Saturday and vowed to help Nepal transform itself from a landlocked country to a land-linked nation by facilitating infrastructure connectivity and transit transportation cooperation under "Trans-Himalayan Multi-Dimensional Connectivity Network" and other "Belt and Road" projects.

As Nepal navigates the financial challenges of participating in these ambitious projects, strategic planning, innovative financing and a steadfast commitment to mutual benefit will play a key role in making a decision. By capitalizing on efficient project execution, cross-border integration, and the potential of the tourism sector, China and Nepal can transform their historical bond into a modern partnership, enriching both countries and their peoples.

The author is an independent expert in international relations based in Nepal. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

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Looking forward to a safer, faster 'kingdom of bikes'

Bicycles are making a comeback in China in a big way and a new avatar. China, in the recent past, used to be called the "kingdom of bicycles" because it had the largest number of bicycles in the world — 200 million. Bicycles were also the primary means of transport for the people.

Bicycles were introduced in China about 150 years ago. And they were considered a luxury until a bicycle-manufacturing factory was set up in Tianjin in 1936. To meet the increasing demand, new bicycle-making plants were established in Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenyang in the 1950s and 1960s, which produced millions of bicycles every year.

Despite the increasing output and high prices — for decades a made-in-China bicycle cost between 130 yuan (\$17.81) and 200 yuan, that is, about five months' income of an average worker. For many years, owning a bicycle was akin to winning the heart of your lover.

To strike a balance between the rising demand and limited supply, a coupon system was introduced. And only the lucky ones could lay their hands on a new bicycle.

For commuters who have to cover relatively long distances from home to workplace and vice-versa, e-bikes have become their top choice.

I bought my first bicycle — a second-hand one — when I was in high school. I didn't have a new bicycle until I came to work in Beijing. That bicycle took me to all corners of the capital for interviews and on work for five years until it was stolen.

If China was called the "kingdom of bicycles", Beijing was certainly its capital. In the early 1990s, it had more than 4 million bikes, averaging one bicycle for every two Beijing residents. During rush hours, even the 100-meter-wide Chang'an Avenue would be chock-a-block with bicycles.

While manufacturers in other countries were trying to make lighter bicycles, their counterparts in China were working hard to produce heavier bicycles because for many Chinese people, especially those in the rural areas, bikes were also used to transport their products.

With improvements in public transport — Beijing, for instance, now has 27 subway lines and 28,000 buses — people started deserting bicycles. Also, the increasing number of privately-owned cars — about 6 million last year — made roads in Beijing increasingly unfriendly to cyclists. Side or service roads, which were traditionally used by cyclists, started turning into parking lots for cars. As a result, bicycles began vanishing from the streets in Beijing and in other cities.

While many believed bicycles' future was doomed, the two-wheelers made a strong comeback thanks to the progress in science and technology. The fact that one could use an app on the smartphone to unlock and lock a bike gave birth to the shared bike business six years ago. So big is the business today that Beijing alone has 1 million shared bikes; across the country, there are 20 million such bikes in 360 cities which are used nearly 50 million times each day. And for each ride for less than half an hour, one pays 1-2 yuan depending on the location.

For commuters who have to cover relatively long distances from home to workplace and vice-versa, e-bikes have become their top choice. When we calculate the total number of shared bike rides, it will be equal to the total number of bicycles in China two decades ago.

However, the renewed craze for bicycles has created some new problems. The huge numbers of bikes parked near subway stations, bus stops and close to the entrances to residential compounds block the way, making normal movement impossible. Also, when e-bike riders move forward at a speed of say 40 kilometers an hour, accidents are unavoidable. In fact, of the about 200,000 traffic accidents each year, more than 60 percent involved e-bike riders.

Beijing announced last month that it is working to make its roads cyclist-friendly before the end of 2027 by freeing bicycle lanes of cars and creating dedicated bicycle lanes. The authorities should also ensure shared bike operators hire more people to orderly park their bikes and launch publicity campaigns to remind riders to follow traffic rules and keep in mind the convenience of residents.

We are looking forward to a future where people in the "kingdom of bicycles" can enjoy not only faster and more convenient rides but also greater safety.

Liu Feng

Huawei's Mate 60 Pro a remarkable breakthrough

While Huawei's official website does not call Mate 60 Pro a 5G smartphone, the phone's wideband capabilities are on par with other 5G smartphones, raising a pertinent question: As a leader in 5G technology, has Huawei managed to develop a 5G smartphone on its own?

The answer is not simple. Huawei, as a pioneer in global 5G communication equipment, has played a leading role in the commercialization of 5G technology, with its robust system design and fields such as baseband chips, baseband processors and 5G modems.

However, basebands and modems are not the only aspects that define 5G wireless communication. The stability and high-quality signals of a 5G smartphone also depend on other critical components such as RF transceivers and RF front ends and antennas. These components are largely dominated by four US high-tech giants — Qualcomm, Avago Technologies, Ansem and Qorvo — which account for a staggering global market share.

Huawei has faced significant challenges in sourcing critical components because of the sanctions imposed by the United States which are primarily responsible for the inability of the Chinese company to launch 5G smartphones in the past three years. However, Mate 60 Pro, despite not being labeled a 5G device, exhibits mobile network speeds comparable to Apple's latest 5G-enabled devices, offering a stable communication experience. This suggests Huawei has, over the past three years, overcome the 5G development and production constraints due to the US sanctions by collaborating with domestic partners, and establishing an independent and controllable stable supply chain.

Considering that Huawei has not explicitly marketed this device as a 5G smartphone, it is possible that it is yet to fully overcome some key core technological and componential shortcomings. For the time being, we can consider Huawei's Mate 60 Pro as a "4.99G" CT protocol. But when combined with the satellite communication capabilities of Mate 60 Pro, it is clear Huawei has been trying to find more advanced wireless communication solutions for smartphones and making significant progress in this



LI MIN / CHINA DAILY

endeavor. This should be recognized as a remarkable endeavor, even a breakthrough.

Another point to note is Huawei's in-house development of Kirin 9000s chipset by using the 7 nanometer advanced process. Reverse engineering analysis carried out by Canadian company TechInsights suggests that Mate 60 Pro was likely developed with the help of

Semiconductor Manufacturing International Corporation. The SMIC has leveraged existing DUV (deep ultraviolet) lithography equipment and its N+2 process to achieve 7 nm manufacturing, thereby narrowing the gap between China's integrated circuit manufacturing capabilities and the world's most advanced levels from eight years to five years.

However, the Kirin 9000s chipset's process technology still lags behind the global standard by two generations. And Apple unveiled a new flagship iPhone powered by a 3 nm chipset recently. This highlights the fierce competition in the semiconductor industry, where the race to produce smaller, more efficient chips is driving innovation and pushing technological boundaries.

While the current gap between the semiconductor manufacturing capabilities of Chinese companies and leading global firms is just two generations, it's important to recognize that 7 nm chips represent the limit for DUV lithography. To manufacture 5 nm and more advanced chips, it's imperative to develop or gain access to EUV (extreme ultraviolet) lithography technology.

So China has still to catch up with the cutting-edge global standards of nano chips. And huge amounts of money and efforts are needed to intensify research and development to do so. Yet closing the technology gap in the semiconductor industry is a challenging but achievable task, because it's essential for China and Chinese companies to stay competitive in the global market.

In the context of the highly globalized semiconductor industry and against the backdrop of intense competition in the technology-driven global economy, the big question is: How can we foster constructive collaboration to reduce costs and risks in this industry and propel the healthy development of the global economy?

In summary, Huawei's Mate 60 Pro and Kirin 9000s chipset demonstrate the significant strides China and Huawei have made in the domains of 5G and advanced chips. They also shed light on the challenges China and Chinese companies still face and what directions they should take to develop high-tech, including 5G technology and nano chips. In this globalized and fiercely competitive technological world, we must continue to explore, innovate and cooperate to achieve bigger breakthroughs and facilitate the advancement of technology and the economy.

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GLOBAL VIEWS

FAJAR B. HIRAWAN

Catalysts for growth

New avenues for cooperation between China and ASEAN are accelerating the region's economic integration and post-pandemic recovery

The 43rd Association of Southeast Asian Nations Summit, led by Indonesia as the ASEAN chair, proved successful. It yielded several significant outcomes. Indonesian President Joko Widodo underscored the shared responsibility of ASEAN and its member countries to prevent the emergence of new conflicts, tensions or wars while simultaneously working toward reducing existing tensions.

In addition to the summit, ASEAN held several bilateral meetings to explore potential economic collaborations, including the ASEAN-China Summit. At that summit, Chinese Premier Li Qiang reaffirmed China's commitment to supporting Indonesia's chairmanship and bolstering ASEAN's economic integration and regional connectivity. The ASEAN-China Free Trade Agreement and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership were highlighted as catalysts for accelerating an inclusive and open trade and investment framework in the region, contributing to the region's economic integration and post-pandemic economic recovery.

Reflecting on the events of 1997-98, it is evident that ASEAN and China have made substantial strides in fortifying their ability to address potential financial crises. These include bolstering economic fundamentals, expanding foreign exchange reserves, diversifying economies and enhancing financial regulations. Moreover, they have reinforced regional financial cooperation and established mechanisms to address financial risks. However, persistent challenges remain, such as high levels of debt and the potential repercussions of a global economic slowdown. The COVID-19 pandemic has also ushered in new challenges for ASEAN and China, including its impact on global trade and supply chains, necessitating proactive economic measures.

As a comprehensive and contemporary agreement, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership stands as a potent instrument to assist Asian economies in rebounding from the pandemic's effects. Beyond regulating market access, the RCEP

encompasses crucial provisions for cultivating a conducive electronic trading (e-commerce) ecosystem and empowering micro, small and medium-sized enterprises. This includes facilitating their entry into the marketplace and the regional supply chain. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, ASEAN's short-term and medium-term economic outlook has been disturbed. Supply chain disruptions have accelerated trends toward reconfiguring global value chains. Consequently, there is a heightened focus on supply chain diversification and resilience efforts and the adoption of transformative innovations, particularly in digital and automation technologies.

The institutional arrangements of the RCEP and the potential development of the 3.0 version of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement present numerous opportunities for economic and trade collaboration between China and ASEAN. These arrangements could enhance market access, bolster regional economic integration, stimulate trade and investment flows between China and the ASEAN members, and foster supply chain connectivity. Additionally, they may facilitate the growth of e-commerce and other collaborative areas, ultimately benefiting ASEAN businesses and consumers. Nevertheless, these institutional arrangements pose challenges, such as addressing non-tariff barriers and safeguarding intellectual property rights. There is a need to ensure equitable benefits across sectors and countries, as well as to enhance the business environment within ASEAN.

From the digital cooperation perspective, in January 2021, the inaugural ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting embraced the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025, envisioning the transformation of ASEAN into a premier digital community and economic bloc empowered by secure and innovative digital services, technologies and ecosystems. Subsequently, in 2022, the Action Plan for implementing the ASEAN-China Partnership on Digital Economy Cooperation was approved. Projections indicate that ASEAN's digital economy will surge

from 1.3 percent of its GDP in 2015 to 8.5 percent by 2025. Concurrently, China's digital economy achieved a milestone of 50.2 trillion yuan (\$7 trillion), securing its global position as the second largest. Despite prevailing economic challenges, Southeast Asia's digital economy is steadfast, with expectations to approach nearly \$200 billion in gross merchandise value by 2022, marking a 20 percent increase. This insight is gleaned from the latest e-Economy SEA report by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company.

More recently, at the Southeast Asia Regional Cooperation Conference in Jakarta, Indonesia, on Sept 1, an initiative was unveiled for the development cooperation of Southeast Asia's digital economy. China Mobile, a leading Chinese telecommunications operator, spearheaded the initiative in collaboration with partners from Southeast Asia, including Singapore, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Brunei. The core objective of this initiative is to propel the digital transformation of industries within Southeast Asia and nurture the region's digital economy. It strives to advance and expedite collaboration between the digital economies of China and Southeast Asia, focusing on digital economy infrastructure, network resources, 5G applications and the digital ecosystem.

The COVID-19 pandemic, alongside the evolution of digital technology and increased regional cooperation, has expedited the establishment of digital trade in the Asia-Pacific region. This digital transformation presents new avenues for economic development, eliminating barriers for global sellers to participate in international trade. Continuous enhancements in digital infrastructure promise to resolve two major obstacles affecting cross-border trade: logistics and payment processing.

Moreover, as digital technology continues to advance, its integration into trade becomes more comprehensive. Global trade is entering an era of intelligence where data plays a pivotal role. Critical infrastructure such as 5G will facilitate the development of new data distribution plat-



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

forms and network architectures, enabling the internet of everything. Accumulating big data and harnessing artificial intelligence will play essential roles in informed decision-making. Consequently, global trade is undergoing a profound transition from digitization to the intelligence phase, with "digital commerce" emerging as the latest development.

ASEAN could contemplate strategies for addressing these opportunities and challenges, including improving infrastructure and logistics connectivity, primarily through the Belt and Road Initiative, to facilitate trade and investment flows. Furthermore, negotiations and dialogue could be pursued to reduce non-tariff barriers and enhance intellectual property rights protection. Additionally, enhancing the business environment can be achieved through reducing bureaucracy, streamlin-

ing regulations, and promoting healthy competition. Finally, ASEAN and China could collaborate to mitigate the economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and support businesses in adapting to evolving market conditions. By leveraging these complementary advantages, China and ASEAN can work together to promote economic development in the region. Cooperation should be based on mutual respect, shared goals and the recognition of each country's unique strengths and challenges.

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NISIT PANTHAMIT

Revitalizing ASEAN development

New decade of cooperation with Thailand on Belt and Road & RCEP will stimulate and increase China's role in the region

In 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping announced an initiative for China to work with member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations for the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road in order to build a closer China-ASEAN community with a shared future. In the 10 years since the launch of the Belt and Road Initiative, China and ASEAN members have enjoyed growth in connectivity, deepening economic integration and robust business ties of trade, investment and financial partnership.

With the in-depth implementation of the BRI and the establishment of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area, China's investment in ASEAN has increased year after year. As of 2022, the total trade in goods between China and ASEAN was close to \$975.34 billion, and ASEAN has become China's largest trading partner since 2020. At the same time, China has continuously increased its investment and industrial transfer to ASEAN countries.

The development of Belt and Road will provide even better opportunities for cooperation between China and ASEAN. ASEAN is developing, more capital is needed, and China's outbound direct investment has grown rapidly. A flood of Chinese foreign direct investment steadily arrived to carry out projects in the ASEAN economies with cumulative turnover of more than \$380 billion by the end of July.

The growing investment between the two sides is a result of deepening economic ties between China and ASEAN members, as well as active diplomatic exchanges, which gave rise to many cooperative projects. China-ASEAN two-way investment would increase further with the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership. ASEAN is an important participant in the BRI, which has pushed the construction of many China-invested infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia, such as the China-Laos Railway.

With more than 650 million consumers and as a supply chain hub for major industries, ASEAN has become an important strategic market. Chinese investors increasingly view Thailand and other ASEAN countries as potential markets for their

products and services. Thai businesses should thus see more opportunities for expanding the market at the local and regional level, but they may also face a more competitive business environment. The overall sentiment for Thailand among Chinese investors remains very bullish, despite the COVID-19 setback.

China and Thailand can lead the way and also combine the real evidence of the BRI into the RCEP in empirical ways.

First, a direct effect will come from the increase in the volume of trade between Thailand and the RCEP member countries, while an indirect effect will come from ASEAN and five other countries reducing

their tariffs for the first time. And RCEP will benefit from its member countries' market access to their bilateral agreements, which would reduce the tariff barriers and benefit trade opportunities from both Thai goods and services, including increased investment causing economic expansion. Second, the RCEP brings opportunities and intense competition. Skilled labor and cheap products will feed into both normal trade channels and e-commerce trade, which is expected to affect small and medium-sized enterprises and Thai farmers in particular. Both the public and private sectors need to tweak work plans to increase their competitiveness to meet the challenges.



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Cooperation between China and Thailand will help ASEAN revitalize regional development. Greater cooperation between China and ASEAN will stimulate and increase China's role in ASEAN.

ges. The RCEP will be a free market that will intensify competition in the service sector. Especially, the financial sector will be pressured to reduce the level of protection from the law. Regulations may be relaxed to allow flexibility, which may cause financial services to be moved by labor and capital.

Third, rising geopolitical risks and the impact of COVID-19 have accelerated global supply chains rearrangement in order to make it more resilient. Thus, the global supply chains are likely to rearrange in two fundamental ways: diversification and regionalization. The diversification trend will see more companies adopting multi-sourcing and reducing aggressive reliance on sole-source in order to protect their supply chain against future disruptions such as geopolitical conflicts, pandemics and natural disasters.

Meanwhile, the regionalization trend will observe more relocation of production networks at the regional level. In addition, some critical production such as pharmaceuticals and hi-tech sectors may be moved back to the home country to lessen supply risks as well as increase the product's speed-to-market. As a result of this regionalization trend, more multinational companies have in recent years adopted a strategy called "China Plus One" as a means of diversifying risks from sole operations in China by setting up alternate production bases or seeking more supply sources in at least one other country. Due to their large market size and efficient production bases, ASEAN countries, including Thailand, have attracted much interest as a major destination for foreign investors.

Cooperation between China and Thailand will help ASEAN revitalize regional development. Greater cooperation between China and ASEAN will stimulate and increase China's role in ASEAN.

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BUSINESS

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HIGHER GROUND

Worst over, A shares will recover in fourth quarter, analysts say

By ZHOU LANXU
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China's A-share market may have bottomed out already, so a marked recovery in the fourth quarter of the year might ensue, given the improving economic momentum and investor sentiment, said analysts of investment banks and asset management firms.

Wendy Liu, JPMorgan's chief Asia and China equity strategist, said the CSI 300 Index may register a marked rally in the fourth quarter as the A-share market has hit the bottom in the medium term.

The CSI 300 Index may rise to a range of about 4200 points to 4600 points in the fourth quarter, led by consumer stocks and new-economy companies that have seen stable earnings growth, Liu said.

According to Liu, the most notable earnings recovery is mainly seen in leading players in the discretionary consumption sector and the internet industry based on second-quarter financial results. Business prospects in sectors such as tourism, sporting goods, education and new energy vehicles are all showing a positive trend.

On Monday, the CSI 300 Index shed 0.65 percent to close at 3714.6 points, dragged by financials and real state companies after the index hit 3664.77 points on Friday morning, the lowest level since early November. A target range of

4200 points to 4600 points would indicate a rise of about 13 percent to 24 percent from Monday's close.

James Wang, head of China strategy at UBS Investment Bank Research, said China's equity market may have bottomed out following recent corrections, as hinted by some technical indicators and leading economic indicators.

The A-share market historically generated an average return of 8 percent in the three months after the market saw foreign monthly capital outflows as much as what was recorded recently, Wang said.

A net total of 89.68 billion yuan (\$12.26 billion) flowed out of the A-share market in August via northbound trading of the connect programs between the mainland and Hong Kong exchanges. The pace of outflow has slowed this month as the amount of outflow came in at 27.97 billion yuan from the beginning of the month to Monday, according to market tracker Wind Info.

"Furthermore, economic fundamentals such as the manufacturing purchasing managers index and credit impulse have shown improving trends — historically there has been a reasonable correlation between these factors and the equity market performance," Wang said.

The official manufacturing PMI came in at 49.7 in August. Though the figure remained in the contraction territory, the index has

increased in three consecutive months amid improving business prospects and may return above the boom-bust line of 50 this month, experts said.

David Huang, a senior investment strategist at AllianceBernstein, a global asset management firm, said recent market corrections have actually created a good timing for bottom fishing given Chinese listed companies' robust long-term growth potential.

Huang said: "China is now still at the middle-income stage, and its future economic growth is likely to exceed most developed countries, which means that the profit growth prospects of many (Chinese) listed companies are still promising."

"Therefore, we believe that given that right now the valuation level of A shares is below the long-term average, it's actually a good time to look for valuable investment opportunities."

Wang at UBS added that historically, the best-performing sectors following market troughs were internet, including e-commerce, and various consumer subsectors such as restaurants, leisure and beer.

"Our portfolio construction is geared toward those sectors though we have included expressways for defensiveness," Wang said, adding that the least preferred sectors remain airlines, banks, materials and autos.

As loan rates fall, housing perks up

By WANG YING in Shanghai
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Chinese cities started implementing lower mortgage rates for first-time homebuyers on Monday.

Housing industry experts said they believe the rate adjustment, along with various optimization policies, will help boost market sentiment as well as demand for upgraded housing among existing homeowners.

More than 40 million mortgages would benefit from the latest first-home mortgage interest rate adjustments that would see an average cut of 0.8 percentage point in interest rates, with total value of mortgages possibly amounting to 25 trillion yuan (\$3.4 trillion), Xinhua News Agency reported.

Monday's implementation is a follow-up measure to the Aug 31 joint statement by the People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, and the National Financial Regulatory Administration, a new super regulator that subsumed the China Banking and Insurance Regulatory Commission. Their statement said interest rates of existing mortgages for first-home purchases will be lowered, and banks and borrowers are encouraged to negotiate a rate change or a swap for new home loans starting Monday.

In Beijing, mortgagors can now hope to save an additional 2,000 yuan per month or thereabouts on repayment of a loan of 2 million yuan taken in January 2019 from Industrial and Commercial Bank of China, according to PBOC estimates.

Similarly, mortgagors in Shanghai can hope to pay 3,000 yuan less on a monthly basis on repayment of a loan of 5 million yuan taken in 2022 from Bank of China, which means some 600,000 yuan can be saved in the following 15 years.

"It is expected that more than 90 percent of the borrowers would be

able to enjoy the benefits of the policy right away, with the rest of them tipped to get the benefit of the adjustment by the end of October," Zou Lan, head of the monetary policy department at the People's Bank of China, was quoted as saying by Xinhua.

More than 30 Chinese cities, including the four first-tier cities of Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong province, as well as cities like Chengdu in Sichuan province, Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, Xiamen in Fujian province, Changsha in Hunan province and Suzhou in Jiangsu province have redefined "first-time homebuyers" and implemented fresh measures based on the new definition, according to Shanghai Securities News.

The new measures identify people who do not own any residential properties in the respective region at the moment as first-time home buyers, which makes them eligible for lower mortgage rates.

As many as 100 real estate policies have been issued by cities across the nation this month, a new record, said Zhang Dawei, chief analyst at Centaline Property Agency Ltd.

Zhang said he believes transac-

tions will peak in Beijing's housing market this month and in October.

Some 30 Chinese cities have eased their home purchase restrictions as of Sept 20, with 13 of them having scrapped all the limits on home purchases, according to the Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center.

"The local measures have hugely restored market sentiment and boosted expectations, particularly in first-tier cities like Beijing and Shanghai, and pent-up demand is likely to emerge rapidly," said Chen Wenjing, director of research with the China Index Academy.

The easing of home purchase requirements in major Chinese cities, combined with lower mortgage rates, will likely support the real estate market's further recovery, Chen said.

As China's economy is in the process of recovery, the implementation of the real estate policy adjustments and optimization measures is expected to have a positive effect, gradually improving real estate investment, sales and market operations, said Fu Linghui, spokesman of the National Bureau of Statistics, during a recent State Council Information Office news conference.



Potential homebuyers size up a property model in Taiyuan, Shanxi province. WEI LIANG / CHINA NEWS SERVICE



Andy Lau, a Hong Kong entertainment star and Huawei's brand ambassador, seen at a launch event for Huawei's new products in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, on Monday. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Huawei unveils premium Ultimate Design handset

Latest launch represents growing reset, comeback for Chinese tech heavyweight

By MA SI and CHENG YU

Huawei Technologies Co unveiled a string of new products, including brand-new high-end smartphone brand Ultimate Design, on Monday, as the Chinese tech heavyweight strives to further revive its consumer device business.

The move came as the company's Mate 60 series smartphones are being warmly received by Chinese consumers, which triggered countless discussions on Huawei's strong smartphone comeback despite US government restrictions over the past three years.

Yu Chengdong, CEO of Huawei's device group, said at a launch event in Shenzhen, Guangdong province, that the company is racing against time to produce Mate 60 series handsets.

Its latest high-end Ultimate Design brand has Andy Lau, a Hong Kong entertainment star, as its brand ambassador. On Monday, Huawei unveiled its latest smartphones and smartwatches under the brand, which represents the most recent push by the company to further expand its presence in the premium segment.

Meanwhile, Yu said there are now more than 600 million users of its self-developed Harmony operating system, and the brand-new HarmonyOS Next system is ready to kick off.

Yu added that the company's lat-

est auto system is "as smooth as Mate 60 Pro" and its AITO M7 electric vehicle will support intelligent driving assistance in urban areas nationwide by December.

Founder of Huawei Technologies Ren Zhengfei said earlier that more than 30 operating systems in China are currently developed based on the open-source Harmony version.

Ren said the operating systems cover areas including industry terminals, smartphones, tablets and home terminals.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecom industry association, said Huawei's comeback will cut into Apple's market share in China and also weigh down its domestic peers — especially Honor Device Co Ltd, which was spun off from Huawei some three years ago.

Yu Zhongyuan, a 59-year-old businessman engaged in foreign trade, said he was very excited to attend the launch event. Having witnessed how Huawei has emerged stronger after four years of US government restrictions, he is confident that Huawei can overcome future challenges.

Zhang Quanyi, a retailer who owns more than 10 smartphone stores in Suqian, Jiangsu province, said Huawei's Mate 60 series smartphones have become the most sought-after product in his stores and almost

every consumer who comes to his stores asks first about the series.

Zhang is thrilled to see Huawei's comeback.

Though challenges still exist, the hardest time has passed, he said.

Industry sources said that in addition to regaining popularity in the Chinese smartphone market, Huawei is planning a comeback on the global stage.

Though Mate 60 Pros will not be available in overseas markets, Huawei's smartphone models such as the P60 Pro, Mate X3 and a string of wearable products were released in Germany, the United Arab Emirates, Malaysia and elsewhere.

According to Huawei's financial report, its consumer products business, which includes smartphones, saw first-half sales rise 2.2 percent year-on-year to 103.5 billion yuan (\$14 billion).

In the second quarter, Huawei's share of the Chinese smartphone market jumped to 13 percent from 7.3 percent a year ago, despite market-wide declines, said market research provider International Data Corp. More importantly, Huawei ranked second in the high-end sector, IDC added.

As Huawei continues beefing up its research and development prowess amid restrictions on its access to US technologies, Huawei's phones are now equipped with more domestic components than ever, experts said.

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Reform Holdings to launch \$14b fund

By LIU YUKUN
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China Reform Holdings Corp Ltd, a central State-owned enterprise specializing in promoting SOE reform, will establish a fund to support the development of emerging industries, with a target size of over 100 billion yuan (\$13.7 billion).

The initiative has garnered support from more than 20 central SOEs, local governments and various social capital entities who showed investment intent. The fund is set to be fully established and operational within this year, said Mo Dewang, general manager of China Reform.

The move aligns with China's focus on nurturing cutting-edge industries for new growth engines and is part of its broader SOE reform efforts, experts said.

Emerging industries, also known as strategic emerging industries, refer to sectors that are in the early stages of development and show significant potential for growth and innovation. These industries often

leverage new technologies and business models, such as artificial intelligence, biotechnology and new materials.

The SOE regulator, the State-owned Assets Supervision and Administration Commission of the State Council, said at a recent forum that it has introduced action plans and implementation schemes for nine strategic emerging industries and six future industries. Additionally, it is in the process of drafting tailored guidance policies for each strategic emerging industry and setting up specialized funds.

Wang Hongzhi, vice-chairman of SASAC, said, "SOEs are willing to work with enterprises of all ownership types to seize the opportunity from accelerated global industrial chain restructuring, expedite the construction of a modern industrial system, vigorously develop strategic emerging industries, actively nurture future industries, promote the deep integration of the digital economy with the real economy, accelerate the formation of new productive forces, and jointly

enhance the resilience and competitiveness of China's supply chains."

According to a recent report by SASAC's research center, central SOEs have achieved an average annual investment growth rate of over 20 percent in strategic emerging industries over the past three years.

In the first half, central SOEs' investments in strategic emerging industries surged by more than 40 percent year-on-year, accounting for over a quarter of their total investments.

At present, SASAC is rolling out initiatives to accelerate the development of emerging industries, with a focus on 15 key sectors, including next-generation mobile communications, artificial intelligence, biotechnology and new materials. The goal is to increase the proportion of strategic emerging industries among all business sectors of central SOEs by over 2 percentage points by 2023.

Zhong Nan contributed to this story.

Briefly

Annual WMC in Hefei leads to \$49b deals

The five-day 2023 World Manufacturing Convention closed in Hefei, capital of Anhui province, on Sunday with 587 deals signed, entailing investment of around 350 billion yuan (\$48.6 billion). The past five annual conferences drew over 14,824 exhibitors from

home and abroad, and 3,021 manufacturing projects were signed, with actual investment surpassing 1 trillion yuan, helping elevate Anhui's manufacturing prowess. The WMC aims to display high-end manufacturing achievements in major manufacturing countries and bolster manufacturing ties between Anhui and the outside world.

CR24 makes progress on housing project

China Railway 24th Bureau Group Corp, a unit of State-owned China Railway Construction Corp, said its builders have completed capturing work of the Chenyingzi placement housing project in the Yongqiao district of Suzhou,

Anhui province, thus finishing the construction of the main building bodies. As the builder of 2,300 housing units in the community, CR24 said the project — it is a key local livelihood endeavor of the municipal government — leverages various construction techniques to ensure quality, safety and efficiency.

Sinopec's Fuling shale gas field hits milestone

The Fuling shale gas field in Southwest China's Chongqing municipality, the nation's largest such field, has produced over 60 billion cubic meters of shale gas over the past decade, since it was discovered in 2012. According to China Petroleum

& Chemical Corp or Sinopec, the Fuling asset is China's first large-scale shale gas field to enter commercial development in 2014. It has brought green and clean energy to more than 70 cities along the Yangtze River Economic Belt over the years.

BUSINESS



A Riyadh Air jet is displayed during the Paris Air Show in France in June. LEWIS JOLY / AP

Riyadh Air eyes operations in '25, plans direct flights to China

New Saudi Arabian carrier bullish on travel demand between two countries

By ZHU WENQIAN
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Riyadh Air, the newly established national carrier of Saudi Arabia, plans to begin operation in 2025, with direct flights to Chinese cities launching in early 2026, as the airline is bullish on growing business and leisure travel demand between China and Saudi Arabia.

The airline, which was set up earlier this year, said after it goes into operation, it plans to launch direct flights connecting Riyadh and key Chinese cities — first Beijing, then Shanghai; Guangzhou, Guangdong province; Chengdu, Sichuan province, and other cities over time.

"We are the largest aviation start-up in the past 30 years. As the new national carrier of Saudi Arabia, we plan to connect 110 cities globally within five years of operation," said Tony Douglas, CEO of Riyadh Air, who visited China this month to held talks with the Civil Aviation Administration of China and various Chinese carriers.

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There is a big demand for business connectivity between China and Saudi Arabia. We have also seen huge leisure travel demand as people have curiosity about Saudi Arabia."



Tony Douglas, CEO of Riyadh Air

ple have curiosity about Saudi Arabia," Douglas said.

Douglas, who has more than 40 years of experience in the aviation, transportation and logistics industries, said Riyadh lacks direct connections with Chinese cities, making it necessary to rapidly expand such connections.

Relations between Saudi Arabia and China have seen stronger, more important developments in recent

years, with China being a top trading partner of Saudi Arabia, the Middle East and North Africa.

China has remained Saudi Arabia's top trading partner, with bilateral trade hitting \$116.04 billion in 2022, up 33 percent year-on-year. In the first quarter of 2023, bilateral trade surpassed \$27 billion, up 9.7 percent compared with the same period last year, according to the Ministry of Commerce.

Riyadh Air, fully owned by the Public Investment Fund in Saudi Arabia, said the company positions itself as a full-service carrier with attention to detail. The airline will also fully utilize digital technologies and develop its business with environmental sustainability at its core. The airline has ordered 72 Boeing B787 widebody aircraft and plans to order more single-aisle planes to expand its fleet. Within half a year of establishment, it has received some 600,000 resumes from applicants globally who wish to join the company.

"The resumes come from 142 countries, and China is well-represented. We will need Chinese employees on our teams. We will not just have a demand for cabin crew and ground staff, but we need a variety of employees in the ecosystem," Douglas said.

Meanwhile, Saudi Arabia's existing national flag carrier Saudia Air-

lines launched direct flights between Jeddah and Beijing in August. The flights connecting the two cities operate four times per week. Jeddah, which is located close to Mecca, will help meet the large religious travel demand.

Fueled by an ambitious tourism plan, which is underpinned by the Saudi Vision 2030 strategic framework, direct flights between Jeddah and Beijing will facilitate Saudi Arabia in welcoming over 4 million Chinese visitors to the country by 2030, said the Saudi Tourism Authority.

Riyadh Air said that with two different cities in Saudi Arabia as their hubs, the two airlines will complement each other in flight services.

The International Air Transport Association said the post-COVID recovery momentum continued in July for passenger markets. Middle Eastern airlines posted a 22.6 percent increase in the July traffic compared to a year ago. Its capacity rose 22.1 percent and load factor climbed 0.3 percentage point to 82.6 percent, the IATA said.

"Planes were full during July as people continued to travel in ever greater numbers. Ongoing ticket sales indicate that traveler confidence remains high and there is every reason to be optimistic about the continuing recovery," said Willie Walsh, IATA's director general.

Foreign pharma firms excited about new biz opportunities at CIIE

By ZHOU WENTING in Shanghai
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Many foreign pharmaceutical companies said that they will fully engage in business opportunities at the China International Import Expo, of which the sixth edition will be held in Shanghai in early November, to help accelerate innovation in China.

The CIIE has functioned as a launchpad to debut innovative products and cutting-edge technologies to support the Healthy China initiative for the past five years, and many medical exhibits have received approval for commercial launch in China to benefit Chinese patients as well as affected animals, they said.

German Biopharmaceutical company Boehringer Ingelheim announced that it will present for the first time eight pioneering products and solutions in both human and animal health at this year's CIIE.

"The CIIE stands as a significant platform fostering integration and insight exchange between China and the global markets. Our continuous participation in the CIIE for five years underscores our strong confidence in the Chinese market and reinforces our commitment to align with China's new paradigm of high-quality development," said Pavol Dobrocky, president and CEO of Boehringer Ingelheim China.

"We look forward to leveraging the CIIE to expedite the introduction of our cutting-edge global products, solutions and visionary ideas in China," he said.

For human pharmaceuticals, the company will present innovative products for rare skin diseases, obesity, pulmonary fibrosis, mental health and cancer.

In May, Spevigo, a monoclonal antibody medication for treating rare skin diseases, filed for a new indication — the prevention of generalized pustular psoriasis. It is the first new drug with simultaneous research and development, and new drug application ahead of global markets, an unprecedented move in the industry.

Over the past years, the company has debuted nearly 30 innovative products and solutions at the CIIE. For example, the first-of-its-kind swine respiratory disease monitoring tool SoundTalks was globally launched as a concept product at CIIE 2019. Last year, it went into full commercial production, helping the swine farming industry in reducing costs and increasing efficiency.

Over the next five years, Boehringer Ingelheim plans to invest over 4 billion yuan (\$547 million) in R&D in China. The company aims to achieve more than 30 new medical approvals in human



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Pavol Dobrocky, president and CEO of Boehringer Ingelheim China

pharmaceuticals by 2029. In the next five years, more than 15 new products and indications in animal health are expected to be approved in China.

After its debut at last year's CIIE, Israel-based global pharmaceutical company Teva, which said that the CIIE is a perfect window to showcase innovative medicines, will also join this year's expo.

Among them, there will be an innovative therapy that is only injected once every three months to treat migraines, which may help improve convenience and patient compliance. The company will also bring its first health consumption goods to China at the expo.

Having signed up to participate in the CIIE next year, Teva said it will take advantage of the CIIE to deepen its diversified business layout in the country to better benefit patients.

An exhibitor at the CIIE since its first edition, United Kingdom-based pharmaceutical company AstraZeneca said that the CIIE is not only a platform to bring innovative medical products and industrial ecological systems into China, but also to promote China's innovations to the world.

The strategic layout of AstraZeneca's global R&D center will be exhibited at the company's 1,000-square-meter booth. There are currently more than 180 projects in its China R&D pipeline, and 100 percent of the key R&D projects are synchronized with the world.

The company said it plans to introduce at least 15 new drugs in China within five years and about 80 new drugs or indications are expected to be approved.

The company will also showcase at the CIIE its measures and results of increasing investment at its three production and supply bases in China. The three bases in Wuxi and Taizhou, Jiangsu province, and Qingdao, Shandong province, have delivered medicines to about 70 markets around the world — global demonstrations of smart, zero-carbon factories.



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

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BUSINESSFOCUS

Expo sector back in biz after pandemic hiatus

Shanghai's trade, industry fairs put on impressive performance; new records achieved

By SHI JING in Shanghai
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The China International Industry Fair, an annual manufacturing sector gathering that had been suspended for the past two years due to the COVID-19 pandemic, was back offline from Sept 19-23 with record highs in terms of both exhibition area and the number of participating companies.

Rong Zhiqin, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Economy and Informatization, announced the record-high performance during a news conference in late August. Covering over 300,000 square meters, the CIIF was attended by more than 2,600 companies from 27 countries and regions, of which over 70 were Fortune Global 500 firms or industry leaders.

What made the CIIF extra special was the 50,000-sq-m area set up for robots, which was the world's biggest exhibition of its kind to date, and it attracted the largest number of industrial robot companies in one single fair, according to Rong.

The new records set at the CIIF are just one snapshot of the recovery of the expo sector in Shanghai.

According to data released by the municipal government in late July, the total exhibition area reached 7.59 million sq m in Shanghai in the first half, which was about 80 percent of the level seen in 2019, before the pandemic.

The total exhibition area of all trade and industry fairs held in Shanghai stood at 6.29 million sq m in the second quarter, up 13.1 percent from the same period in 2019. Meanwhile, six mega expos with exhibition areas of at least 100,000 sq m were held in Shanghai in June. The total exhibition area of the six shows came at 1.11 million sq m, up 42.2 percent from the figure recorded in June 2019.

Zhang Guohua, deputy director of the Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce, said that the city's expo sector has seen an overall recovery since the beginning of this year. The total exhibition area of all shows to be held in Shanghai in the second half is expected to be around 8.8 million sq m, approaching over 90 percent of the level in 2019.

The turnaround in Shanghai is not an isolated event.

The Guangzhou Municipal Commerce Bureau said the local exhibition industry in the Guangdong provincial capital has even exceeded pre-pandemic levels. Up to 140 expos were held in the city in the first half, 2.3 times the figure regis-



Above: The China International Industry Fair, an annual manufacturing industry gathering, makes a comeback from Sept 19-23 in Shanghai with record-high exhibition space and the number of participating companies.

FANG ZHE / XINHUA
Left: An aerial view of the National Exhibition and Convention Center (Shanghai) in November 2021. XINHUA

“... the country's huge investment in exhibition venues over the past decade, during which available expo area doubled, has laid a solid foundation for sustainable growth in the sector.”

Jochen Witt, president and CEO of trade fair and conference consulting firm JWC

tered for the same period last year. The exhibition area of these shows totaled 5.6 million sq m, which was 1.8 times the number recorded during the first half of 2022. The total number of expo visitors spiked 8.6 times to 7.66 million.

The China Import and Expo Fair, a highly coveted event better known as the Canton Fair, marked its 133rd edition in mid-April. The fair was held offline for the first time in three years due to the pandemic. By hosting 34,933 attending companies, the exhibition area approached 1.5 million sq m, with

the two figures representing new records.

The latest edition of The Canton Fair has not only seen its scale expanded and quality improved, but also its exhibition theme optimized and online and offline services better integrated, said Xu Bing, deputy director of the China Foreign Trade Center. The exhibition has made its due contribution to the high-quality development of the local economy, he said.

Likewise, Shenzhen, Guangdong province, is expected to hold 189 exhibitions this year, up 3.6

times year-on-year, according to the city's commerce bureau. The total exhibition area is expected to top over 8 million sq m, setting a record.

Recovery in the exhibition industry can be seen all over China, said Zhang Guosheng, deputy head of the Department of Trade in Services and Commercial Services at the Ministry of Commerce. Zhang was speaking during the Global Exhibition CEO Shanghai Summit 2023 in late June, an annual industry gathering that began in 2014 and which

has also been held up for three years due to COVID-19.

As calculated by the ministry, up to 1,448 exhibitions were held in China in the first five months, up 6.7 times year-on-year and 4.2 percent higher than that in the same period of 2019. The number of large-scale expos, with exhibition areas of over 10,000 sq m, reached 834 in the first five months, up 23.4 percent from four years ago.

David Zhong, president of VNU Exhibitions Asia, said at the summit that strong government support and rising market demand have served as the two major engines driving the recovery of the Chinese exhibition sector so far this year. Larger exhibitions are recovering faster than smaller ones, which can be proved by the frequently refreshed records for participants and exhibition areas, Zhong said.

In late July, the municipal government of Shanghai rolled out a three-year action plan for the city's exhibition sector. Made up of 20 detailed measures, the action plan said that the total annual exhibition area in the city is expected to reach 22 million sq m by 2025, of which 80 percent will be taken up by international shows.

During the China International Fair for Trade in Services held in Beijing in early September, Qu Weixi, head of the China Convention/Exhibition/Event Society, said they will encourage companies to hold more exhibitions in smaller Chinese cities in the second half of the year to discover business opportunities lying in industries with local characteristics. Exhibition organizers will be encouraged to hold fairs overseas to better explore the international market and help Chinese exporters win more orders.

Jochen Witt, president and CEO of trade fair and conference consulting firm JWC, is also positive about the recovery of the Chinese expo sector. “Apart from China's continued economic growth, the country's huge investment in exhibition venues over the past decade, during which available expo area doubled, has laid a solid foundation for sustainable growth in the sector,” he said.

The number of signature exhibitions, such as the Canton Fair, the China International Import Expo and the China International Consumer Products Expo, have served as important bridges between the Chinese and international markets, said Zhang of the Ministry of Commerce.

The huge size of the Chinese market is another advantage that the expo sector should better make use of to link production and consumption, and attract resources from all over the world. In this way, the overall quality of trade and investment between China and overseas entities can be further improved, said Zhang.

German executive sanguine on financial capital's event-hosting prowess

By SHI JING in Shanghai

While Matthias Strauss, deputy executive director of the BAU Network for international trade fair organizer Messe Muenchen, believes that Shanghai is already the ideal Chinese city to host international exhibitions thanks to its complete infrastructure construction, and it can also learn from European counterparts like Munich and Barcelona to better connect the exhibition and tourism sectors.

Strauss said one major reason for people to go to Barcelona, which is well-known for industry gatherings, such as the Mobile World Congress, is the option of taking holidays there. The same logic applies to Munich. When the BAU — the world's leading trade fair for architecture, materials and systems — is held in the southern German city in January, people can attend the exhibition and then go skiing and do some sightseeing in Bavaria afterward, he said.

Bringing 240 million euros (\$255 million) to Barcelona in 2022, the MWC's contribution to the local

economy rose to \$350 million euros for this year's edition, said John Hoffman, CEO of GSMA — the organizer of the MWC.

“It is easier to establish fairs in places where people also like to spend their holidays. The two purposes may be combined in Shanghai. Foreigners do not know how nice Shanghai's neighboring cities are, so maybe Shanghai could promote tourist attractions in surrounding areas. It also makes the 12-hour flight to the city more worthwhile,” Hoffman said.

Strauss' suggestions happen to coincide with the three-year action plan that the Shanghai municipal government rolled out in late July, which pointed out that overlaps and ties between the exhibition and tourism sectors should be further strengthened in the city.

By better leveraging iconic fairs, such as the Shanghai International Automobile Industry Exhibition, better known as Auto Shanghai, as well as the China Digital Entertainment Expo and Conference, also known as China Joy among gaming aficionados, exhibitions can play a bigger role in boosting consumption and driving

economic development by creating new growth engines, the plan said.

The total annual exhibition area in Shanghai is likely to reach 22 million square meters by 2025, of which 80 percent will be taken up by international shows, according to municipal government plans.

But that goal is not far-fetched. The Shanghai Municipal Commission of Commerce said 169 exhibitions were held in the city in the first half, with the total exhibition area exceeding 7.58 million sq m.

Looking back at pre-pandemic figures, 384 exhibitions were held in the first half of 2019, with 129 being international shows. The exhibition area of these fairs totaled 9.26 million sq m.

To Strauss, the recovery signs are clear. His participation in the China Architectural Design Expo held in Shanghai in early August is one example. Making his first visit to China in four years for the construction industry expo, he was more than happy to attend the show in person.

He said the past three years were “a terrible time”, as the global exhibition industry essentially shut

down. Messe Muenchen tried to establish online fairs, but “each and every one failed”.

“We learned from the mistakes to bring digitalization and things online. In China, we had working lessons on WeChat for architects, and held online sessions for talks and discussions,” he said.

“But it is not possible to bring people together in an online version. You have to touch the products for the actual feeling and talk with people physically,” he added.

Apart from discovering the fact that foreigners can use WeChat to pay for taxi rides, which has made his stay in Shanghai much easier, another great surprise to him was the fact that the entire business environment in China has not changed much after the three-year pandemic.

Although the construction industry still faces downward pressure amid China's slower-than-expected economic recovery, Strauss still noticed delightful progress within the industry — both construction companies and users are attaching greater importance to quality.



Visitors take part in the Mobile World Congress in Shanghai in June. GAO ERQIANG / CHINA DAILY

The development of waterproofing technologies, which is one highlight of this year's CADE, is an example of the high-quality development of the Chinese construction industry, said Strauss.

“Chinese architecture is starting the move from big scale with lower quality to higher quality. It is in line with the major trend that Chi-

na has been shifting its focus from rapid construction to ensuring high-quality outcomes,” he said.

Industry exhibitions, like CADE, are ideal platforms where people can better understand industry trends, design methods and product applications to help achieve high-quality development goals, added Strauss.