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# CHINA DAILY

**HOLIDAY EDITION**

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 4, 2023

## Role of BRI in Malaysia's growth hailed

Anwar highlights contributions made to rural infrastructure, job opportunities

By XU WEI and ZHANG LI in Nanning

Malaysian Prime Minister Anwar Ibrahim has highlighted the significance of the China-proposed Belt and Road Initiative in enhancing the growth of his country, lauding the BRI for creating job opportunities and building infrastructure, especially in the rural heartland.

He told reporters in a recent group interview that the BRI, first proposed by President Xi Jinping in 2013, has harnessed the collaboration between China and Malaysia and delivered wide-ranging benefits for both nations.

Malaysia has benefited from the East Coast Rail Link, a project connecting shipping ports on the country's east and west coasts, he said.

The rail link, which is Malaysia's most high-end infrastructure project so far and involves constructing 40 tunnels from Kelantan to Selangor, is being undertaken by China Communications Construction Company. It is expected to greatly enhance connectivity and bring more balanced growth to Malaysia by linking its less-developed region on the east coast to the economic heartland on the west coast.

Anwar said he hopes the project will be completed within a year. "It is a great showcase of the relationship between China and Malaysia," he added.

In 2017, the two nations signed a memorandum of understanding for BRI cooperation, and trade between them grew 15.3 percent year-on-year to \$203.59 billion last year. China has been Malaysia's largest trading partner for 14 consecutive years.

Anwar highlighted the potential of Malaysia-China relations not only in terms of trade, economy and investment, which he said are pivotal to Kuala Lumpur, but also in terms of education, training, digital transformation and food technology.

"I think the relationship between Malaysia and China, which is extended to the Association of

Southeast Asian Nations, has a great future," he said.

He mentioned China's Rongsheng Petrochemical and Zhejiang Geely Holding Group, which announced their investment commitments to Malaysia as part of the 19 memorandums of understanding that were inked between Malaysian and Chinese companies during his official four-day visit to China from March 29 to April 1.

Anwar's second trip to China within this year was in September, when he was among the leaders who attended the 20th China-ASEAN Expo and the China-ASEAN Business and Investment Summit in Nanning, the capital of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. He said the meetings he had with Chinese leaders were "cordial and beneficial", as they addressed a number of bilateral, regional and global issues.

During his talks with Premier Li Qiang in Nanning, Anwar pledged support to China in joining the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership, while expressing his readiness to enhance bilateral cooperation over infrastructure, the digital economy and green development.

China and Malaysia are both participants in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, which took effect in January last year. China has already filed its application to join the CPTPP, a trade agreement of 12 countries including Malaysia. China and ASEAN members are also conducting negotiations over version 3.0 of the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area.

Anwar said that Malaysia, as well as the other ASEAN members, will welcome more free trade agreements with China. "The more arrangements and agreements we make with China or the regional party, the more benefits we can accrue from such collaboration," he said.

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## REPAIRING THE PAST, RESTORING OUR FUTURE

Cave temple protection in Chongqing requires effort, talent and pride in rich heritage

By YANG FEIYUE in Chongqing yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

A massive array of stunning rock carvings are receiving ever more attention and protection as they regain their past glory.

Stone-paved stairs, steep but not long, lead one up to Beishan (Northern Mountain) that sits about 2 kilometers in the north-west of Dazu district, Chongqing.

A wooden corridor built against the rock wall then reveals itself.

Walking down the shaded path, hundreds of grottoes, as dense as beehives, hit the eye from the side wall.

The corridor has served as a shelter for the Buddha figurines, deities

and animals that were delicately carved out of the rock as early as the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

The rudimentary wooden structure was built in the 1950s to shelter the exposed rock carvings, says Jiang Siwei, head of the Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings based in the district.

"It looks simple but is very practical, and keeps the grottoes from the elements," Jiang says, adding that a similar structure would have been in place when the grotto was first built in ancient times.

"Moreover, it blends in with the surroundings."

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## Xi congratulates Muizzu on election as Maldives president

By CAO DESHENG caodesheng@chinadaily.com.cn

President Xi Jinping has congratulated Mohamed Muizzu on his election as president of the Maldives, saying he is willing to work with Muizzu to promote bilateral relations.

In a congratulatory message sent to Muizzu on Tuesday, Xi said that China and the Maldives enjoy a long history of friendly exchanges. The two countries are not only sincere and trustworthy friends who help

each other, they are also partners who join hands to pursue shared development and prosperity, he said.

Noting that he attaches great importance to the development of China-Maldives relations, Xi said he is willing to work with Muizzu to carry forward their traditional friendship, deepen pragmatic cooperation and push for new progress in the future-oriented, all-round friendly and cooperative partnership between the two countries.

Muizzu, 45, candidate of the coalition of the Progressive Party of Mal-

dives and the People's National Congress, won the presidential runoff on Saturday.

The election witnessed a head-to-head contest between incumbent President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih and Muizzu, who is also the mayor of Male, the capital city.

Muizzu won nearly 54 percent of the votes, while Solih received about 46 percent, according to figures released by the Election Commission of the Maldives.

No candidate won more than 50 percent of the votes in the first

round of the presidential election on Sept 9, during which Muizzu secured over 46 percent of the votes, while Solih followed with 39 percent. Solih congratulated Muizzu on social media after the final results were declared on Saturday.

Solih, 61, will serve as caretaker president until his successor is inaugurated on November 17. Muizzu will serve as president of the Maldives for a five-year term, according to media reports.

Xinhua contributed to this story.



A performer, wearing a costume featuring nang bread, participates in a parade on Monday to promote local specialties among tourists at the Grand Bazaar in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur autonomous region. WANG FEU / XINHUA

## Concerts, exhibitions spurring holiday travel boom

By YAN DONGJIE yandongjie@chinadaily.com.cn

The first three days of the Mid-Autumn Festival and the National Day holiday travel period recorded 395 million domestic tourists, a year-on-year increase of 75.8 percent, according to the Ministry of Culture and Tourism.

Data also shows that the domestic tourism revenue exceeded 342 billion yuan (\$47 billion), a year-on-year increase of more than 125 percent.

Trips coinciding with music festivals and art exhibitions are most popular this year. The ministry has been supporting the development of "one-stop" integrated cultural, commercial and tourism complexes that combine "watching performances, savoring cuisine,

shopping and enjoying scenic beauty", People's Daily reported.

Mid-Autumn Festival falls on the 15th day of the eighth lunar month each year and is a one-day statutory holiday, while National Day falls on Oct 1 and is a seven-day holiday. This year, the two holidays have coincided, creating an eight-day travel period since Friday.

Last week, the General Office of the State Council issued a notice on measures to release the consumption potential of tourism and promote the high-quality development of the tourism industry.

The notice mentioned that in order to further enrich the supply of high-quality tourism, release the consumption potential of tourism, and promote the integration of culture and tourism, measures will be taken to promote the healthy

development of formats such as drama festivals, concerts, art exhibitions and cultural tourism exhibitions.

During this holiday period, various provinces and cities are increasing their supply of cultural and tourism products, striving to provide tourists with high-quality and diverse experiences.

Beijing has launched 30 themed boutique tour routes, such as "Strolling Beijing", and six Beijing "microvacation" destinations, offering high-quality cultural and tourism products to stimulate consumption, according to People's Daily.

During the first three days of the holiday travel period, Beijing's key tourist attractions received more than 6.8 million visitors, a year-on-year increase of 60.6 percent, and a 31.8 percent increase compared

with 2019. The total operating revenue exceeded 418 million yuan, a year-on-year increase of 25.2 percent and an 89.4 percent increase compared with 2019.

Wang Jiawen, who traveled from Changshu, Jiangsu province, to Beijing with her daughter, said they didn't have many opportunities to travel in the past few years.

"Although it is very crowded during this time of the year, I decided to bring my daughter to Beijing. Cultural tourism helps children broaden their horizons," Wang said.

Concerts and performances are being held in various places in the capital to offer visitors a memorable experience.

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## House speaker ousted



Kevin McCarthy (center) leaves the US House of Representatives floor after being ousted as speaker of the House at the Capitol in Washington on Tuesday. J. SCOTT APPLEWHITE / AP See story, page 4

## No letup in concerns seen over Evergrande stock leap

By WANG KEJU wangkeju@chinadaily.com.cn

The ongoing investigation into China Evergrande Group's founder and the heavily indebted property developer's offshore debt restructuring plan may continue to weigh down market confidence despite its stock price surge on Tuesday as it resumed trading following last week's suspension, analysts said.

The group's shares jumped 42 percent during morning trading on the Hong Kong Stock Exchange. The stock closed up 28.1 percent at HK\$0.41 (\$0.05).

Analysts cautioned against

extrapolation from the stock price surge, citing the probe into the suspected illegal activities of Evergrande's founder Xu Jiayin, also known as Hui Ka Yan, and the uncertain prospect of the developer's offshore debt restructuring process as factors that will continue to affect investor sentiment.

Meanwhile, shares of China Evergrande Property Service Group Ltd — a subsidiary of China Evergrande Group — initially rose by as much as 14 percent during morning trading, but experienced a downturn and closed with a dip of over 3 percent.

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Newstand prices: US \$1 Canada C\$1 UK £1.8 EU €1.8 Kenya Shilling 50 Asia Pacific: Thailand 120 thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan 210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

## CHINA

# Experts show confidence in economy

Despite temporary market woes, data indicates China on road to recovery

By WANG MINGJIE in London  
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Amid the dynamic changes occurring within China's economic landscape, the nation is currently grappling with short-term challenges primarily arising from a weakening domestic property market and the looming risk of deflation. Nevertheless, experts have maintained an unwavering faith in the nation's promising long-term economic trajectory.

In August, China reported economic data that exceeded expectations, demonstrating the ongoing recovery of the world's second-largest economy. The report comes on the heels of a set of robust yet focused measures undertaken by policymakers to address various challenges and downward pressures. China's value-added industrial output surged in August, registering a year-on-year increase of 4.5 percent. This was a notable uptick from the 3.7 percent growth observed in July.

According to the most recent data by the National Bureau of Statistics, China's official manufacturing and nonmanufacturing purchasing managers indexes both improved in September to 50.2 and 51.7, respectively, from 49.7 and 51 in August. The figures were above the 50-point mark that separates contraction from growth.

Ben Cavender, managing director of the China Market Research Group, said the Chinese economy is moving toward stabilization and is starting to show some signs of recovery.

He emphasized that China's enduring strengths lie in its substantial infrastructure and manufacturing ecosystems, which are not susceptible to rapid decline. "The government's emphasis on fostering development of new high-tech industries should also help to create avenues of growth for the economy in the coming decade," he said.

Nevertheless, Cavender pointed out that the country faces significant demographic challenges, necessitating ongoing efforts to address issues related to local government and corporate debt management. "Right now, the name of the game is stability and doing whatever possible to assure consumers and private businesses that spending and investment are not too risky now, as this would unlock the spending we need to see to get back to normal," he said.

John Beirne, vice-chair of research at the Asian Development Bank Institute, paints a cautious outlook for the rest of this year and into the next year. However, he remained optimistic about China's long-term economic prospects.

"China's income per capita ratio and urbanization rate are indicative of spare capacity in the economy over the longer term. There is ample room for additional reforms within the household registration system to help support sustainable consumption growth," he said.

Beirne underscored the adverse impact of declining property values and the increasing costs of servicing local government debt on the con-

sumption recovery that commenced this year. Consequently, he emphasized the critical necessity of implementing targeted policies to alleviate the challenges plaguing the property market, including the relaxation of bank lending restrictions and the provision of fiscal support.

"Stabilizing the property sector will be a key determining factor," he said. "While recent policy measures have helped to mitigate economic uncertainty, more stimulus may be needed to trigger consumption and investment growth, and avert deflation concerns."

While comparisons with Japan's "lost decades" have surfaced due to shared challenges such as an aging population, property market downturn and potential deflation risks, Beirne highlighted key distinctions.

"While parallels exist, China's lower urbanization rate implies higher productive capacity and growth potential," he explained. "Additionally, China's property and asset price bubble appears less severe, potentially leading to a softer correction."

Stephen Roach, senior fellow at the Paul Tsai China Center at Yale University in the United States, downplayed concerns over underlying structural imbalances and mounting debt.

Some experts have discussed the possibility of a sudden market collapse due to reckless speculation — known as a Minsky moment — or a Lehman Brothers-like crisis. But Roach argued that China's mixed economy, featuring both state and private enterprises, coupled with substantial savings and foreign exchange reserves, offer a measure of resilience.

Chris Bovis, a professor of International Business at the University of Hull in the United Kingdom, echoed this sentiment, saying: "The long-term prospects for the Chinese economy have not changed. The global economic system looks at the Chinese economy as a telltale of growth. This implies national economies will be gearing their economic forecasts to China as a benchmark."

Bovis emphasized that China's economic growth is underpinned by its strong international focus and domestic reforms geared toward bolstering exports and encouraging foreign outward investment. "These distinguishing characteristics represent the biggest difference between the Chinese economy in its current configuration and the economy of Japan before the millennium and the early '90s," he said. "Internationalization and outward investment are valid measures to balance temporary market imbalances and corrections and combat deflationary patterns."

However, China faces a higher public debt burden than Japan in the 1990s, raising concerns about a "balance sheet recession," as some experts have noted. To avoid a prolonged period of deflationary expectations, Beirne of the banking institute said that China must implement growth-enhancing policies that boost aggregate demand, support domestic consumption and encourage investment in productive sectors.

## Pulling for victory



Members of the Miao ethnic group participate in a tug-of-war as a crowd watches in Gaowen Miao village in Rongshui Miao autonomous county, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on Monday. LONG TAO/ FOR CHINA DAILY

## Concerns persist over toxic water

By JIANG XUEQING in Tokyo  
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The nuclear-contaminated water released from the crippled Fukushima Daiichi Nuclear Power Plant into the Pacific Ocean has raised concerns both in and out of Japan. Still, Tokyo plans a second release of water from the plant this week.

"A number of radioactive substances still remain in the contaminated water. I'm really concerned about the safety and health issues that may arise from the discharge into the ocean," said Michiko Ueno, 64, a woman living in Chiba prefecture.

Mayumi Shirakura, a 74-year-old Tokyo resident, said: "It is wrong to say that the contaminated water is 'safe' just because it has been processed. There are still many radioactive substances in the water, and that doesn't change the fact that the water is dangerous."

Tokyo Electric Power Company, the Fukushima plant's operator, said last week that the second release would begin on Oct 5. Similar to the first phase, about 7,800 metric tons of water stored in tanks will be released into the ocean over 17 days.

A rapid measurement of tritium concentration in seawater was conducted on Monday at 10 locations within 3 kilometers of the Fukushima plant. But since it started releasing contaminated water into the ocean on Aug 24,

the company has not updated the information on seawater samplings at several other offshore locations.

Meanwhile, public trust in TEPCO and the Japanese government has declined due to problems with the emergency response to the Fukushima nuclear accident in March 2011 and the toxic water disposal.

"They said the water is safe, but they are lying. I don't believe it. What the Japanese government and TEPCO are doing is likely to cause significant damage, not only to Japanese citizens but also to many people overseas. I can't help but think they're deliberately hiding something," said Ikuko Tameguchi, a 64-year-old Tokyo resident.

It is not known how many toxic substances are included in the toxic water treated by the Advanced Liquid Processing System, a multi-nuclide removal system, said Hikaru Amano, an adviser to the Beta-ray nuclide measurement lab of the Iwaki Citizens' Radiation Measurement Center, also known as Tarachine.

Initially, TEPCO stated that if the contaminated water went through ALPS, it would meet regulatory standards, except for tritium. However, media reports revealed that radioactive substances other than tritium remained in the water at levels above regulatory standards.

After that, TEPCO acknowledged that about 70 percent of the water stored in tanks had concen-

trations of more than 60 nuclides other than tritium exceeding the regulatory standards for release into the environment. The company then suggested a secondary ALPS treatment before dumping.

However, the nuclides tritium, C-14, I-129, Sr-90, Cs-137, Co-60, Ru-106 and Sb-125 cannot be completely removed from the contaminated water even after the second treatment, experts said.

There is also uncertainty regarding other nuclides such as Ca-41, Cl-36 and Zr-93, said Amano at a webinar earlier this year. Moreover, TEPCO analyzed only a small portion of the tanks, primarily focusing on the upper layer of the tanks' supernatant substances. The high-concentration sludge and sediments in the lower and bottom layers were not adequately examined, he said.

Given the varied concentration of radioactive substances in the three tank groups, it is questionable whether these truly represent the entire contaminated water supply, said Kanna Mitsuta, executive director at Friends of the Earth Japan, a nongovernmental organization.

"What we need to be cautious about is that the treated contaminated water in question is mixed with cooling water from debris in which the fuel has melted. Since it has come into direct contact with the debris, it contains various radioactive substances," Mitsuta said.

## Chang'e 8 probe open to foreign payloads

By ZHAO LEI  
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The Chang'e 8 robotic probe — the third to be placed on the moon during China's next lunar exploration endeavor — is open to foreign science payloads, according to the China National Space Administration.

Speaking on Monday at the ongoing 74th International Astronautical Congress in Baku, Azerbaijan, Wang Qiong, deputy head designer of the Chang'e 8 mission, said that there will be 200 kilograms of payload capacity for piggyback missions on the spacecraft.

Each piggyback payload should not weigh more than 100 kg. Preference will be given to independently controllable devices, lunar surface robots and equipment new to Chinese lunar missions, according to Wang. He said that lunar regions around Leibnitz Beta, Amundsen crater, Cabeus crater and the Shackleton-de Gerlache Connecting Ridge have been chosen as candidate landing sites.

The Chinese space administration has set a deadline of Dec 31 for letters of intent, with preliminary and final selections to be completed by April and September 2024, respectively.

According to the mission planners, the Chang'e 8 probe will consist of a lander, a rover and a robot. The spacecraft is set to land on the moon's south pole around 2028 to make on-site investigations of the environment and mineral composition of the landing site, carry out observations of the Earth and test technologies for in-situ resource utilization. In space exploration, in-situ resource utilization is the practice of collecting, processing, storing and using materials found or manufactured on other astronomical bodies, such as the moon and Mars, that could be used to replace materials that would otherwise be brought from the Earth.

The utilization of local resources will be crucial to human activities on the moon in the future, according to Wu Weiren, an academician at the Chinese Academy of Engineering and a leading scientist at the space administration.

"If we wish to stay for a long time on the moon, we need to set up stations by utilizing the moon's own materials. Lunar soil will be our raw material and will be made into construction materials using 3D printing technology," he told China Daily in April.

Wu and other space officials have said that the Chang'e 8 will follow the Chang'e 7 mission in 2026, which will also target the lunar south pole.

## Travel: 149 high-quality rural tourism routes launched

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From Thursday to Tuesday, the National Grand Theater hosted the opera *Mining Town*, while on Saturday and Sunday, a National Day concert titled *For Our Motherland, We Sing* was held at the same venue.

The China Radio National Orchestra will perform a concert at the National Grand Theater on Thursday based on the Mogao Grottoes. The Silk Road and the Dunhuang murals will be used to portray the grand theme of the era — the sta-

bility of the country is the happiness of the people.

Shanghai has lined up a string of music festivals, and the Cadillac Shanghai Concert Hall alone is hosting 13 concerts during the holiday period.

Guangzhou, Guangdong province, has launched offline and online cultural tourism activities, including a concert by Jacky Cheung. According to online booking platforms such as Damai and Ferris Wheel Ticketing, seats for the concert are sold out.

Sports and art tourism are drawing visitors to many cities.

Chen Ting, from Guangdong province, said she is participating in a yoga camp in Xiamen, Fujian province. "I'm usually very busy with work, so having a long holiday is a rare opportunity. I want to spend it on learning and self-improvement," she added.

The Ministry of Culture and Tourism, which always encourages rural tourism, has launched 149 high-quality national rural tourism routes, themed "Orange, Yellow, Orange, Green — Beautiful Countryside Scenery", to offer visitors a closer look at village life.

In Jingdezhen, a city in Jiangxi province with a rich history of ceramics, activities such as mid-autumn garden parties and intangible cultural heritage tours have become a crowd magnet.

Zibo, a city in Shandong province famous for its barbecues, is hosting a grand fair, theater shows and feasts to attract tourists.

Anji county in Zhejiang province is hosting special markets to feature local specialties such as white tea and bamboo fans, as well as intangible cultural heritage arts such as sugar blowing and fan painting.



Workers are busy making soccer balls to fulfill overseas orders at a factory of a sports gear manufacturer in an industrial park in Zunyi, Guizhou province, on Tuesday. QU HONGLUN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

## Evergrande: Analysts see increased risk of liquidation

From page 1

Trading in shares of the group and its affiliated companies was suspended on Thursday, with the company announcing that Xu, its board chairman and executive director, is subject to mandatory measures in accordance with the law due to suspected illegal activities.

Guan Rongxue, an analyst with the Zhuge Real Estate Data Research Center, said that Evergrande's return to trading will probably fall short of allaying investor concerns about the company's debt

crisis due to the investigation and rising challenges facing its debt settlements.

The group's shares saw a brief surge before paring some of the gains, along with the dip in the company's property service unit shares, signaling the still hovering market concerns, Guan said, adding that it is too early to declare that all the bearish factors have vanished.

The debt-laden developer's previous 17-month trading halt was lifted just one month prior to the most recent suspension.

Evergrande — once China's top-

selling property developer — is struggling with more than 2 trillion yuan (\$278 billion) in liabilities. Things got further complicated last week after the company said it was unable to issue new debt due to an investigation into the company's flagship subsidiary — Hengda Real Estate Group.

In August, the developer had filed for bankruptcy protection under Chapter 15 of the United States Bankruptcy Code in New York City. The chapter shields non-US companies that are undergoing restructuring from creditors who hope to sue

them or seize their assets in the US.

Yan Yuejin, director of the Shanghai-based E-house China Research and Development Institution, said as a result of the recent setbacks, the likelihood of Evergrande not being able to reach an offshore debt restructuring agreement with its creditors and the risk of its liquidation have increased.

Nonetheless, the active steps of Chinese regulators provide hope for resolving the problem, which will to some extent help safeguard market stability and the interests of homebuyers, Yan added.

## COVER



Left and right: Rock carvings at a cave temple in Beishan cluster in Dazu district, Chongqing. Middle: A girl examines the Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara, the goddess of mercy, in Baodingshan, Dazu district. PHOTOS BY JIANG DONG / CHINA DAILY

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The Beishan cluster is part of the Dazu Rock Carvings, which were inscribed onto the UNESCO World Heritage List in 1999, the second grotto temple entry from China, after the Mogao Caves in Dunhuang, Gansu province.

Those grotto temples were believed to have been introduced into China from India via the Silk Road in the third century. As the Buddhist art form evolved, it absorbed local artistic elements.

In addition to exquisite Buddha images and scriptures, characteristic of the country's grotto temples elsewhere, Dazu carvings highlight mundane scenes that urge people to be filial, conduct themselves properly and refrain from greed.

The carvings have also enjoyed a unique status for mixing Buddhism with indigenous beliefs like Confucianism and Taoism.

To date, more than 50,000 statues or carved images on the cliffs in the district have been put under protected cultural relic status, among which the most characteristic are the carvings in Beishan, Baoding, Nanshan, Shimen and Shizuan mountains.

Beishan boasts the largest rock carvings.

Wei Junjing, governor of Chongzhou, was the initiator of the first carvings at the site in the late Tang Dynasty. More carvings were added under the auspices of officials, the gentry, scholars and monks. The cluster on its present scale was completed during the Southern Song Dynasty (1127-1279), consolidating the reputation of the statues for exquisite and elegant craftsmanship.

Archaeologists have proved that they showcased the development in the nation's folk Buddhist beliefs and stone carving art styles during the 9th to the 13th centuries.

Over the past decades, workers have tried to restore them to their original beauty.

Since mountains in the area have large quantities of sandstone, cracks have appeared due to geological movement, while the damp and hot southern climate results in underground water with natural chemicals, endangering the stone carvings and their carrier — the rock.

"You can see some crack lines and calcium precipitations have formed over parts of the cave walls," Jiang says.

Various approaches were tried to prevent the groundwater from encroaching on the carvings, such as digging diversionary tracts, but these efforts were in vain due to the complex water distribution in the mountains.

"It worked on the mountain water on the surface but failed to keep off the water flowing from the distant mountain area," Jiang explains.

It was not until 1992, when they ingeniously came up with the idea of digging holes and tunnels right below the caves to divert water from the temple areas, that the water erosion problems have been effectively addressed.

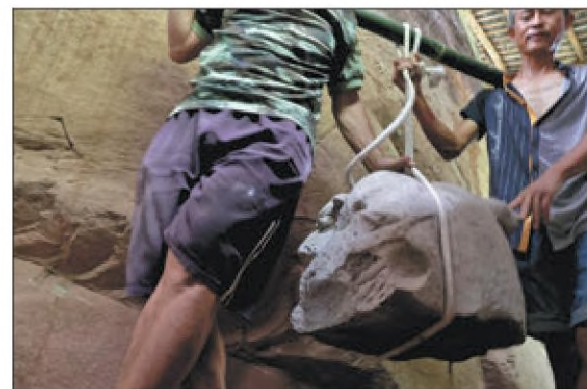
Since then, they've kept close tabs on any new cracks appearing, the biggest threat to those rock carvings.

"They affect the stability of the rock body," Jiang explains.

The initial observations used rough but ready methods, such as measuring the lengths of those cracks.

In 2015, they started to work on

## Unique: Relic status shows importance of work



Top: Visitors appreciate rock carvings in Baodingshan, one of the five major clusters in Dazu district, Chongqing. Above left: Local restorers work on rock carvings at Xiaofowan site in Dazu. Above right: Workers carry heavy segments at the Shuchengyan site in the district's Zhongao town.

caves where the cracks were classified as hazardous.

"We have to make predictions over the development of any cracks on the cave, like what is the borderline point that would comprise steadiness and under what conditions the cave might collapse," Jiang says.

"It requires calculations, and equipment monitoring and practical experience before coming up with intervention measures and removing the hazards," he says.

Cave No 168 is one example and it took three years to finish reinforcement procedures.

The Institute of Geology and Geophysics, the Chinese Academy of Sciences, was invited to survey the land first before operations were carried out.

"The theoretical calculation alone is not enough, since many problems can arise during practice," Jiang says.

For example, exactly how much grouting pressure should be applied to fill the cracks in the rocks needs constant experimentation.

"If it's too small, it can't reach certain fine cracks, but if it's too big, new cracks will open," Jiang says, adding that the time for the grout to solidify between the rocks also needs to be observed and modified.

Cave No 168 has had a concrete beam and bolt system placed to secure its thin roof, while an advanced electronic monitoring system has been installed to keep track of changes, such as crack growth, wall pressure and air, over the fol-

lowing five years in the cave.

All the data are transported to an electronic monitoring center at the Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings.

The center was established in 2012 and has been equipped with the advanced monitoring system since 2019. It has received data on 70 indicators of artifacts and surrounding environment from all major stone carvings protection sites across Dazu.

"Some data have to be acquired by our inspectors," says Feng Xuemei, an officer who has been working with the center for five years.

All of the previous data have been collected and moved to the new system, which has now amassed more than 7 million data entries.

"One of our responsibilities is to compare new data with the past to

ensure everything is all right," Feng says.

Caps have been set on tourist numbers and the environment, ranging from humidity, temperature to air quality.

"When any anomaly comes up, we will assign personnel to the site and conduct an intervention," Feng says.

One of the most prominent restoration projects involves an eight-year restoration of the Thousand-Armed Avalokitesvara, the goddess of mercy (known as Guanyin in Mandarin), in Baodingshan, one of the five major rock carvings sites in Dazu.

The statue, a stone carving with gold plating and color elements, had suffered damage, ranging from broken fingers and peeled-off gold foil, after it stood the test of time for

more than 800 years.

"Observed at close quarters, it looked pocked with scars," recalls Chen Huiji, director of the academy's conservation center, who led the restoration project.

She and her team did a good deal of research and experiment before settling on the repair materials and methods.

"They have to best fit the Guanyin statue, which is of sandstone texture, as well as take into account high temperature and humid environment," Chen explains, adding that every decision and move were made based on studies of the statue and related history and scientific papers.

For example, she and her team used to go to Sichuan, Hebei and Shandong provinces to study rock carvings, trying to draw inferences for mending the statue's broken right hand.

"It was repaired by the ancients, but was inconsistent to the original," Chen says.

She then proposed to create a detachable hand based on the symmetric features of the statue, because there is still one minor inconsistency in the angle of the remaining bracelet buckle.

"Therefore, future fixes can be easier to be applied, when more is discovered," Chen says.

Now, the restored statue looks solemn and shines, and has become a major attraction.

The Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings has also worked with international organizations to repair local rock carvings.

At Shuchengyan site in the district's Zhongao town, a cave temple has recently finished preliminary restoration, thanks to joint efforts between a cultural heritage cluster from Italy and the Academy of Dazu Rock Carvings.

The project started in 2018, and a series of experiments and analysis were then conducted by both sides on gold foil, paint, rock and microorganisms, as well as repairing techniques, for a year before restoration eventually kicked in.

"The temple was very popular in the old times and visited a lot by locals," says Ruan Fanghong, an official with the project.

As a result, many rock carvings were damaged.

The two sides applied synthetic enzymes to remove impurities from the paint, and used polyvinyl alcohol to paste the gold foils back.

"Now, several years have passed, and the restored parts have maintained very well," Ruan says.

In the last decade, 246 million yuan (\$33.1 million) has been put into 24 restoration projects in Dazu, according to local authorities.

In addition to the major rock carving sites, a comprehensive conservation and research project has been launched since 2020 to cover more than 60 medium- and small-sized sites.

According to the Dazu academy's plan, about 700,000 yuan will be allocated for the renovation of each site. By 2025, all potential hazards to these medium- and small-sized sites will be addressed.

After years of hard work they are on the homestretch of completion, Chen says.

"We'll lay more of a focus on restoring them to the original beauty in the future, while keeping them under close watch for their safety."

Contact the writer at yangfeiyue@chinadaily.com.cn

## WORLDUS

## McCarthy ousted as US speaker of the House

Republican first to be removed from post as party rival pushed for vote that went 216-210

By AI HEPING in New York  
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For the first time in US history, the House of Representatives on Tuesday ousted its speaker, Republican Kevin McCarthy, plunging the lower chamber of Congress into turmoil and paralysis until a new leader is elected.

"The office of speaker of the House of the United States House of Representatives is hereby declared vacant," said presiding Arkansas Republican Steve Womack after the 216 to 210 vote to remove McCarthy.

Hours after the vote, McCarthy said at a news conference:

"I will not seek to run again for speaker of the House. I may have lost a vote today, but I fought for what I believe in — and I believe in America. It has been an honor to serve."

At a news conference after the vote, McCarthy wouldn't confirm whether he will stay in Congress. "I'll look at that," he said.

He said he was removed because of politics and blamed Democrats. "I think today was a political decision by the Democrats. And I think the things they have done in the past hurt the institution," McCarthy said.

Republican Representative Patrick McHenry of North Carolina was named interim speaker under a law passed after the Sept 11 attacks in the event of a vacancy in the office. He recessed the House so both parties can find a path forward. McHenry told GOP lawmakers they will hold a candidate forum next Tuesday and an election for speaker next Wednesday.

But it was unclear who might seek to succeed McCarthy.

The vote came weeks before Congress must act to avoid a government shutdown.



US Representative Matt Gaetz walks away from the US Capitol after his motion to vacate the chair of House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and end McCarthy's continued leadership succeeded by a vote of 216-210 in Washington on Tuesday. JONATHAN ERNST / REUTERS

Eight conservative Republicans voted to remove the California representative in what was called a motion to vacate, many of them angry that McCarthy days ago worked with Democrats to avert a government shutdown. But all 208 Democrats voted against him.

Over the weekend, McCarthy refused to offer Democrats any concessions in exchange for their support so he could keep his post.

Before the vote, House Minority Leader Hakeem Jeffries said in a statement that McCarthy had brought the vote to oust by using his short tenure as speaker — 269 days — to cater to extremists in his party.

He pointed to the 15 rounds of voting that the House went through in January to pick McCarthy as speaker, noting that, "McCarthy made concessions to far-right Republicans, including allowing any one member to force

a motion to vacate.

"Given their unwillingness to break from MAGA (Make America Great Again) extremism in an authentic and comprehensive manner, House Democratic leadership will vote yes on the pending Republican motion to vacate the chair," Jeffries said.

All that was needed to oust McCarthy was a simple majority under a rule pushed by conservative Republicans that any single member could

seek to remove him from office.

On Tuesday afternoon, Representative Matt Gaetz of Florida led the effort to oust McCarthy and introduced the resolution to vacate the office.

Speaking on the House floor, Gaetz described the debt-ceiling agreement that McCarthy forged with President Joe Biden as the speaker's "original sin".

Heading into the vote on the

motion to vacate, a series of Republicans took to the floor to blast Gaetz and his allies.

"They're willing to plunge this body into chaos and this country into uncertainty for reasons that only they really understand," said Oklahoma Republican Tom Cole.

Gaetz said it was the other way around. "Chaos is Speaker McCarthy. Chaos is somebody we cannot trust with their words," he said.

After the vote, many GOP supporters of McCarthy expressed anger at the rebellious colleagues who stuck together to oust him. Some said Gaetz should be expelled from the House.

But Gaetz celebrated the ousting of his Republican colleague on the steps of the Capitol moments after the vote.

"It's to the benefit of this country that we have a better speaker of the House than Kevin McCarthy," Gaetz said. "Kevin McCarthy couldn't keep his word."

McCarthy has argued that Gaetz's motion to remove him as speaker is little more than personal payback for McCarthy's failure to interfere with a long-running investigation by the House Ethics Committee into Gaetz's conduct. The committee has been looking into allegations of sexual misconduct and alleged misuse of funds by Gaetz.

Gaetz has asserted that the more than two-year inquiry into his conduct is the work of McCarthy and his allies, who he has argued are bent on smearing him.

McCarthy lost an earlier vote on Tuesday when 11 Republicans and all Democrats opposed stopping the motion to vacate the speakership.

The last time the House had a vote to oust the speaker was in 1910. That vote stemmed from angst among progressive Republicans that the speaker at the time, Joseph Cannon, a conservative known as "Uncle Joe", refused to bring progressive legislation to the floor for a vote. He survived that vote but was weakened as a result.

## Trio shares Nobel Prize in physics for study on light

STOCKHOLM — The Nobel Prize in physics was awarded on Tuesday to three scientists who look at electrons in atoms during the tiniest of split seconds.

Pierre Agostini of The Ohio State University in the United States, Ferenc Krausz of the Max Planck Institute of Quantum Optics and Ludwig Maximilian University of Munich in Germany and Anne L'Huillier of Lund University in Sweden won the award.

Their experiments "have given humanity new tools for exploring the world of electrons inside atoms and molecules", according to the Royal Swedish Academy of Sciences, which announced the prize in Stockholm. They "have demonstrated a way to create extremely short pulses of light that can be used to measure the rapid processes in which electrons move or change energy".

At the moment, this science is about understanding the universe rather than practical applications, but the hope is that it will eventually

lead to better electronics and disease diagnosis.

L'Huillier is only the fifth woman to win a Nobel in physics.

"This is the most prestigious and I am so happy to get this prize. It's incredible," she told the news conference announcing the prize. "As you know there are not so many women who got this prize so it's very special."

## Inventor's bequest

The Nobel Prizes carry a cash award of 11 million Swedish kronor (\$1 million). The money comes from a bequest left by the prize's creator, Swedish inventor Alfred Nobel, who died in 1896.

Last year, three scientists jointly won the physics prize for proving that tiny particles could retain a connection with each other even when separated. The phenomenon was once doubted but is now being explored for potential real-world applications such as encrypting information.

The physics prize is the second Nobel of the season after the medicine prize on Monday went to mRNA researchers Katalin Kariko and Drew Weissman for their groundbreaking technology that paved the way for messenger RNA, or mRNA, COVID-19 vaccines.

Nobel announcements will continue with the chemistry prize on Wednesday and the literature prize on Thursday. The economics award will be announced next Monday.

The laureates are invited to receive their awards at ceremonies on Dec 10, the anniversary of Nobel's death.

AGENCIES—XINHUA

## Criticism on AUKUS pact strikes a chord

By KARL WILSON in Sydney  
karkwilson@chinadailyjapac.com

Analysts have high regard for Sri Lankan President Ranil Wickremesinghe's recent description of the AUKUS security pact linking Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States that it is a "mistake".

"It is a military alliance moved against one country — China," he said at an event hosted by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in New York on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly on Sept 18.

Lloyd Cox, a senior lecturer at Macquarie University's Macquarie School of Social Sciences in Sydney, agreed with the assessment.

"Yes, I absolutely agree that AUKUS was and is a mistake," he told China Daily.

Wickremesinghe also used the occasion to take a swipe at the so-called "Indo-Pacific" — a term widely used by the US-led West — by referring to it as "an artificial framework". The term is often used when talking about the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, better known as Quad, a strategic security dialogue among

Australia, India, Japan and the US.

"I think it's a strategic mistake. I think they made a mistake," he said, calling the alliance "unnecessary".

The AUKUS pact was set up in September 2021. At the time, it was described by the US as a security partnership involving information and technology sharing on nuclear-powered submarines, artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and additional undersea capabilities.

But central to the pact is Australia establishing a nuclear-powered submarine fleet of up to eight boats to replace its aging Collins Class diesel submarines.

The controversial decision by Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines has placed a question mark over the country's position as a signatory to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and has deeply divided the nation.

"If we set to one side the enormous financial burden of the project — A\$368 billion (\$232 billion) plus an additional A\$50 billion for contingencies", Cox said, there are other principal reasons why

AUKUS should be scrapped.

"The deal will so closely align Australia's defense and foreign policy with those of the US that the country's 'sovereignty' will be largely effaced. Our military will be further integrated into the command-and-control structures of the US military, and we will be totally dependent on the latter for technical expertise," Cox said.

"The alleged threat that China poses for Australia is hugely overblown, and the deal cannot help but to irritate Australia's relationship with its largest trading partner and source of much of its prosperity."

Cox also cited the great uncertainty around Washington's long-term position in Asia as the third reason.

"To bet all of one's geopolitical chips on a country marked by entrenched political polarization and the radicalization of one of its main political parties is to take a huge risk. The adherents of AUKUS largely ignore such risks," he said.

## Provocative term

Alison Broinowski, an academic and former diplomat, said names

like "Indo-Pacific" are "artificial and inconsistent".

"The 'Indo-Pacific' term reflects two oceans, not specific countries. Wickremesinghe is no doubt aware that the term originated in recent years in response to the US' interest in building a constituency of supportive countries to contain China's growing influence," she said.

"India is a key member of the Quad, as well as of the BRICS. So 'Indo-Pacific' became the term used by the US and its allies."

As for Wickremesinghe's view on AUKUS, Broinowski said: "It's worse than a mistake because it is a deliberate decision by the US, the UK, and Australia to create a 'defensive' fortress in Australia with an array of weapons aimed at China. This is provocative, it makes Australia a target."

She noted that US-led activities in the East China Sea and South China Sea have been directed at China for years, and "AUKUS is the latest".

As all member states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations are nonaligned, she said: "Most regional states are more concerned about AUKUS setting off an arms race."



## Back in court

Former US president Donald Trump gestures outside Trump Tower as the trial of himself, his adult sons, the Trump Organization and others in a civil fraud case brought by state Attorney General Letitia James continues in New York City on Tuesday. CAITLIN OCHS / REUTERS

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CHINA DAILY (ISSN 0748-6154) is published daily except weekends by China Daily USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

Periodical postage paid at New York, NY and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Send address changes to CHINA DAILY USA, 1500 Broadway, Suite 2800, New York, NY 10036.

## PEOPLE



**Clockwise from top left:** The last long house in Yanuo village, in Jinghong of Yunnan province, in the 1980s, which no longer exists; sociological scholar Zheng Xiaoyun (center) with Zi Chunlan and her husband Wu Yinghua, in Yanuo in 2019; a Jinuo village in the 1980s; Zheng (right) in a field survey in the 1980s; Zheng (left) with Jinuo people in the early 1980s. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## The peak of his profession

Sociological scholar and university professor has spent the best part of four decades on Jinuo Mountain, living among and surveying the ethnic group that calls it home, **Wang Ru** and **Li Yingqing** report in Kunming.

Even after more than 40 years, Zheng Xiaoyun, a sociological scholar who now works as a professor at Hubei University, clearly remembers the first time, in 1982, that he entered the long house, a communal dwelling, built on stilts and made of bamboo and wood.

Located in Yanuo village, on Jinuo Mountain in Jinghong, Yunnan province, it is home to members of the Jinuo ethnic group.

"It really opened my eyes. I entered the building from one side, and without a lamp, I saw dozens of fire pits in the middle of the space. Many residents were cooking by the pits, and children ran back and forth. The atmosphere of a big family, which I had never seen before, was really impressive," recalls Zheng.

Then a student at Yunnan University on the brink of graduating, Zheng took the journey with his classmates as part of a field survey.

The 20-day trip initiated his bond with Jinuo people. Since then, he has embarked on a long-term research program to study the group.

By spending much of his time over the past four decades staying with local people, he has witnessed their modernization with his own eyes, and recorded great changes taking place within the group.

The Jinuo people were the last to be categorized as an ethnic group in China, listed as such in 1979. The group lives on Jinuo Mountain, speak their own language but have no written text.

When Zheng first arrived at the place, local people lived a slash-and-burn life, with many families in one large long house, a traditional way of dwelling for this group, but which has since disappeared.

One year after Zheng first visited the Jinuo people, in 1983, he was recruited by Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences to officially carry out his field research of the group.

During the whole of the 1980s, he

visited every one of the more than 40 Jinuo villages, stayed with local people for up to eight months a year, and continues to visit them today.

Every time he arrives at a Jinuo village, he lives, hunts, forages for wild vegetables and farms with them. During the process he observes, befriends and talks with them. He also participates in important sacrificial, wedding and funeral ceremonies, striving to know every facet of their lifestyle.

Zheng is impressed by Jinuo people's solidarity and equality.

According to him, when he first visited the group, hunting was still an important way to make a living, just like their ancestors before them.

"They often hunted with several other villagers. When they successfully caught their prey, even it was only one pheasant, they followed a primitive egalitarian ritual, dividing the meat evenly so that every participant could share a portion," says Zheng.

And they often help each other in daily life.

"When one family has problems, all others offer a helping hand," Zheng says.

"I visited an old man in his 70s, who was almost blind and didn't have children or spouse. All the families in the village took turns to help him till his land and harvest his crops. When he passed away, villagers stopped all work for one day to hold the funeral. They all regarded it as an important issue.

"Old people and children seem to live a carefree life there, and people live harmoniously together," he adds.

Jinuo people attach great importance to education. According to Zheng, in 1984, when one village relocated, the first thing villagers did when they arrived at their new location was not to build houses to live, but classrooms for the children, so that they could go to school as usual. After that, they started to plan their new home.



Zheng Xiaoyun (left) dining in a Jinuo village in Jinghong, Yunnan province, in 2018. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Speaking about the focus of his research, Zheng says, "on the one hand, it is concentrated on recording their traditions, like their customs, daily activities and people's lives from birth to death. I made a very detailed study on such things and recorded them carefully.

"On the other hand, I have tried to figure out how this group develops, and how people's traditional lives can connect with the modern society, and what problems they face in the process," he adds.

### Path to modernization

When Zheng first started visiting Jinuo villages, they were extremely impoverished and remote.

"In the past, people could only walk to their villages. It took me two to three days hiking on the mountain to reach some of them. People's lives at that time are hard to imagine today. They had almost no belongings at home," says Zheng.

He lived like a local. They mostly ate half-cooked rice with some hot pepper. Only when there was a successful hunt was there meat.

Zheng's research of the Jinuo ethnic group was related to their modernization, and that confused him a

lot at first.

"I remember one evening in the 1980s, when I sat on the balcony of a local's residence. There was no electricity. I watched the stars all over the sky, and the firelight from the fire pits in people's houses. Thinking about the status of these villages, I found it really difficult to imagine how the group could be modernized," recalls Zheng.

But changes do happen. At the end of the 1970s, with help from local government and other institutions, planting techniques for *Wurfbainia villosa*, better known locally as *sharen*, were introduced to the Jinuo Mountain, and people gradually mastered the skills.

According to Zheng, at the end of the 1980s, the mountain became the second largest production base for the plant in China. Following that success, rubber and tea industries were later developed in the area.

In 1984, the first trade fair was held in the Jinuo Mountain area. Before that, people lived mostly in a self-sufficient manner, and sometimes businessmen from other places would visit Jinuo villages to exchange mountain products with salt, medicine and iron tools. Jinuo

people themselves, though, had never sold their products at a market.

The fair marked a milestone for the group on the march toward a commodity-based economy, according to Zheng.

With the development of the local economy, roads were laid between villages and electricity infrastructure was installed. Brick buildings replaced the bamboo and wooden buildings, and modern necessities like television sets, computers and cars are now a part of everyday life. In 2019, it was announced that the Jinuo ethnic group was officially lifted out of poverty.

That same year, at a seminar discussing the development of the Jinuo group over the past four decades, Zheng attributed its progress to the value it places on education and ability to master new skills.

"Stressing education and being able to master new techniques seems to be a strong inborn awareness of Jinuo people," says Zheng.

### Deep bonds

When Zheng first visited Yanuo village in 1982, the local leader, Buluzhou, who has since passed away, helped arrange his stay and helped him accomplish his work.

Zheng stayed in Buluzhou's home and observed how the man, who worked as the head of the village from the 1950s until 1990s, governed the village.

He found Buluzhou to be very wise when he was required to distribute communal property for private use, and was impressed by the way he solved disputes during the process.

Zheng got on well with Buluzhou's son-in-law Zi Qie, who took care of Zheng when he stayed at their home.

"We were just like brothers. He took care of me in every possible way. Every time I arrived, he went hunting to get some meat, or collected other ingredients to improve my meals. He often cleaned the

room I lived in, so that I could feel more comfortable. Later, as I visited them frequently, he ensured the room was for my use exclusively," says Zheng.

When Zi's daughter was born in 1983, at the request of her father, Zheng chose the name Zi Chunlan for her, and he has witnessed her growth.

According to Zi Chunlan, Zheng visited her home often in the 1980s, and later when he passed by every year. Since there was no telephone in her home, Zheng could not contact the family members in advance before his visits, and sometimes arrived to find nobody home.

"We lived a poor life at that time, but uncle Zheng often brought oil, sugar and biscuits for us. He often had no time to wait for us to return home, and would leave the gifts for us. When we found these things we knew that he had been to visit," says Zi Chunlan, who now works as a successful tea merchant in her hometown.

"He's just like a family member to us. Now my father has passed away, he is just like another father caring for me and my child, and helps me a lot in daily life," she adds.

Recalling his bond with Zi Chunlan's family, Zheng says Buluzhou was the governor of a traditional society, Zi Qie's generation was transitional, between the past and the modern. And Zi Chunlan is a good example of the new generation who is tough, smart and diligent, and that's why she has greatly improved her life.

Over the years, based on his field survey, Zheng has written a number of essays and books on many facets of the Jinuo group's lifestyle, including festivals, traditional dwellings and cultural comparisons between the Jinuo and Dai ethnic groups.

"Although it was arduous work, I have found much pleasure in this process," says Zheng.

Contact the writers at wangru1@chinadaily.com.cn

## Picturing a life that's long disappeared to keep it in the present

By **WANG RU** and **LI YINGQING**

With his 40-odd years of field research on the Jinuo ethnic group, sociological researcher Zheng Xiaoyun, who now works as a professor at Hubei University, has recently published a photo collection, titled *Jinuo Group*, featuring more than 300 vivid photographs taken by Zheng that depict the transformation of Jinuo villages in the 1980s.

The book shows many facets of Jinuo people's lives, including the natural environment in which their villages are located, traditional "long house" dwellings, their farm-

ing and production work, their social lives and the group's traditional customs.

According to Zhao Hu, editor-in-chief of Yunnan Education Publishing House, they found out about Zheng's collection of photos in 2019. Believing them to be a meaningful record, they sought permission to publish them.

Zheng says, "I had several thousand old photos, and I thought it was a good chance to organize them."

Zhao says, "The book is a true and detailed record of a lifestyle that has since completely disap-

peared, which can also provide visual support for the protection and development of the culture of Jinuo ethnic group.

"It plays an important role in rescuing and protecting their outstanding traditions, maintaining the cultural and historical memory of them, and enhancing their cultural confidence," he adds.

Zhao is particularly taken with a photo of an old woman holding a packet of bean sprouts, sporting a big smile and looking at the camera.

The woman was selling the bean sprouts, which she had grown her-

self, at the first trade fair of the Jinuo group in 1984, which was a significant event in the group's history. Prior to that, local people mainly lived a self-sufficient life without a commodity economy.

Zheng notes that taking photos was not a cheap way of recording the group's activities in the 1980s. He says that, at that time, a roll of film was expensive, and the Yunnan Academy of Social Sciences, where he worked, only provided five rolls of film every time he went to the Jinuo Mountain. He often bought his own film in order to take more photos.

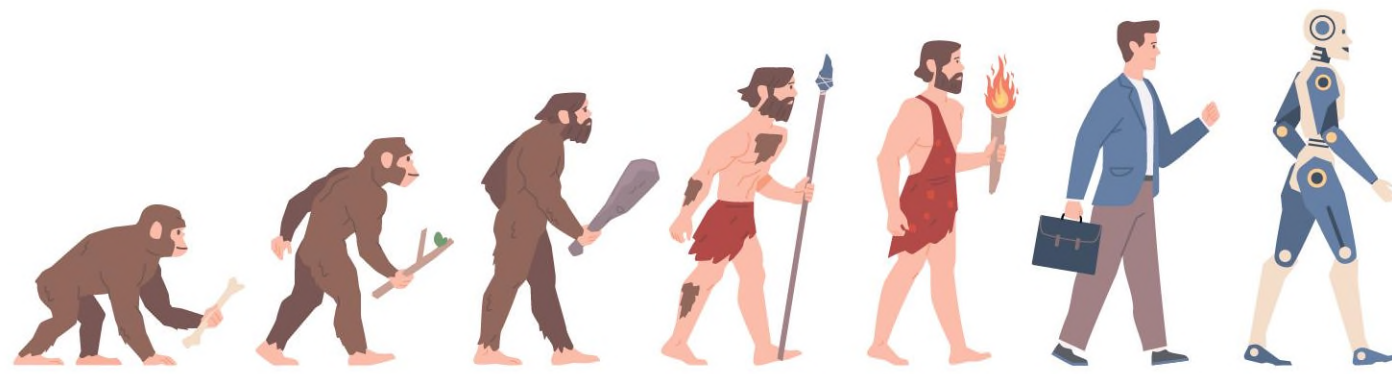
Organizing and restoring the photos was also an arduous task. Since so many years have passed, many of Zheng's photos have become fragile, with many scratches. Zheng scanned over 2,000 of them, and chose more than 300, restoring each one digitally so they could be used in the book.

Among all of the books he has published about the Jinuo ethnic group over the years, the new photo collection is special in Zheng's eyes as "it attempts to tell the story of the Jinuo ethnic group in a visual language, which cannot be expressed in words."



*Jinuo Group* is a visual record of the Jinuo ethnic group in the 1980s. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

## READ



# Tracing the steps of early migration

Fossil finds suggest modern humans were in Southeast Asia 86,000 years ago, leaving Africa much earlier than scientists previously thought

By KARL WILSON in Sydney  
karwilson@chinadailyupac.com

Deep in the lush green hills of northern Laos a group of international scientists has been piecing together the evolution of man's migration from Africa to Southeast Asia and, eventually, Australia.

For decades now, scientists have been working in a limestone cave called Tam Pa Ling, which translates to "Cave of the Monkeys", brushing away sediment around fossil remains that over time have been adding pieces to solving the puzzle.

The latest find by a team of Lao-tian, United States, French and Australian scientists is a collection of fossil bones dating back 86,000 years.

These tiny fragments are the oldest example of our ancestors yet found in Southeast Asia.

In 2012, scientists uncovered parts of a skull dating back 46,000 years in the same cave.

A paper published on June 13 in the scientific journal Nature Communications said the "find demonstrated beyond doubt that modern humans spread from Africa through Arabia and to Asia much earlier than previously thought".

"It also confirms that our ancestors didn't just follow coastlines and islands. They traveled through forested regions, most likely along river valleys, too. Some then moved on through Southeast Asia to become Australia's first people."

Fabrice Demeter, a paleoanthropologist at the University of Copenhagen who was one of the paper's lead authors, said in a media release that coincided with the release of the paper that "Tam Pa Ling plays a key role in the story of modern human migration through Asia, but its significance and value is only just being recognized".

Kira Westaway, a geochronologist with Australia's Macquarie University and one of the lead scientists involved in the project, said the significance of the fossil find at the Tam Pa Ling cave should not be underestimated.

"Human fossil evidence is very rare in Southeast Asia, so a site that contains seven individual skeletal parts over a 56,000-year period is incredible," she told China Daily.

"But another fascinating part of this research is the location of the cave — it's not a coastal location, it's not on an island, but right in the middle of mainland Southeast Asia at least 300 kilometers from the sea.

"It is also in an upland region and would have been heavily forested."

Westaway added: "We know that hominids (the group consisting of modern humans, extinct human species and all our immediate ancestors) tended to move along river valleys inland, but this location confirms our suspicions that early *Homo sapiens* had the capacity to adapt and disperse through upland forested regions much earlier than anticipated."

"Surviving in forested regions requires a very different skills set than coastal living and the fact that they had acquired these skills by such an early time is surprising and significant," she said.

Another geochronologist, Renaud Joannes-Boyau from Australia's Southern Cross University, has spent the best part of 10 years working with colleagues from around the world at the site.

"The cave is really quite beautiful," he told China Daily.

"It is painstaking work. When you look around the cave there are various levels where fossil fragments have been found over the years.

"You spend so much time brush-



**Clockwise from top:** The thick 7-meter-deep sediment that forms the Tam Pa Ling cave floor; KIRA WESTAWAY / FOR CHINA DAILY An extensive array of decorations can be seen on the cave roof and floor; scientists take sediment samples from the excavation pit in Tam Pa Ling cave; VITO HERNANDEZ / FOR CHINA DAILY The deepest excavation pit is found at the rear of the cave close to a wall. KIRA WESTAWAY / FOR CHINA DAILY

**The Tam Pa Ling fossils suggest an earlier presence of modern humans in Asia, but further research is needed to establish their specific relationship to the migration into Australia."**

**Renaud Joannes-Boyau,** geochronologist from Australia's Southern Cross University

ing away sediment that has been laid down for thousands of years to eventually uncover a fragment of bone, but it is an incredible moment in time," he said.

He believes *Homo sapiens* started leaving Africa as early as 200,000 years ago.

"The Tam Pa Ling fossils suggest an earlier presence of modern humans in Asia, but further research is needed to establish their

specific relationship to the migration into Australia."

The presence of modern humans in Australia dating back 60,000 years is supported by various lines of archaeological evidence, including the discovery of stone tools and ancient human remains.

Johannes-Boyau said what has been found so far in the cave is another piece in the evolution of man in Southeast Asia.

Nothing has been found in the cave such as drawings of stone tools to suggest it was a settlement.

"If anything, it was probably a transit route," he said.

"The remains are significant in that little is known about our journey (out of Africa). Every time we find new fossils we basically rewrite what the human evolution journey has been," he said.

Macquarie University's Westaway said that when trying to reconstruct the migration of *Homo sapiens*, it always comes down to a question of timing.

"We know what happened; we just don't know exactly when it happened," she said.

"Sites like Tam Pa Ling help us to place *Homo sapiens* at a certain location at a certain time and this

helps to reconstruct how and when they dispersed."

She said finding earlier-than-expected arrival sites in unanticipated locations helps to appreciate the ability of *Homo sapiens* to adapt to different conditions and to exploit varied and often extreme environments.

Finding evidence of *Homo sapiens* in Southeast Asia 86,000 years ago also poses a problem for scientists.

Westaway said it calls into question "the accepted timing for the exit out of Africa ... at least according to genetic evidence".

"Human dispersal across the globe is not a simple linear path — we believe it's a more complex spread of different migrations; some very early and some much later," she said.

The fossil finds in Laos suggest that the prevailing theory of modern humans moving out of Africa in a single wave about 50-60,000 years ago was incorrect.

"The 50-60,000 years migration across Southeast Asia that contributes to our current gene pool may not have been the first — there may well have been earlier migrations that were not successful and there-

fore did not contribute their genetics to our modern populations," Westaway said.

"Sites like Tam Pa Ling, Lida Ajer (Sumatra) and Madjedbebe (northern Australia) may well represent these early unsuccessful migrations, but this does not discredit the fact that they had arrived in this region by this time — a truly remarkable achievement."

Westaway added: "This really is the decisive paper for the Tam Pa Ling evidence. Finally, we have enough dating evidence to confidently say when *Homo sapiens* first arrived in this area, how long they were there and what route they may have taken."

Tam Pa Ling cave is very close to the recently discovered Cobra Cave, which was frequented by Denisovans approximately 70,000 years earlier.

Despite the previous lack of evidence for early arrival in mainland Southeast Asia, this area might have been a dispersal route among our ancestors, long before *Homo sapiens*.

"We have much to learn from the caves and forests of Southeast Asia," Westaway said.

*Prime Sarmiento in Hong Kong contributed to this story.*

## Academic digs deep to uncover our past

By KARL WILSON in Sydney

From the outside, the cave at Tam Pa Ling in northern Laos does not look impressive. But descend the path into the cool interior and a natural cathedral is suddenly revealed.

For more than 20 years scientists from around the world have been working with their Lao colleagues to trace the evolution of man's journey into the region.



Renaud Joannes-Boyau, an associate professor at Australia's Southern Cross University, said just walking into the cave is a "humbling" experience.

He has been working on and off at Tam Pa Ling for around 10 years, and each visit is as "exciting as the last", he said.

"The site itself is like a cathedral with the ceiling 6 to 7 meters high. And the arc lights set up around the various excavations cast an eerie glow. It is quite beautiful ... almost biblical."

Joannes-Boyau's specialty is geochronology, which is the science of determining the age of rocks, fossils and sediments by using "signatures" embedded in the rocks.

### Worldwide efforts

He is just one of dozens of scientists from around the world who have been working at the Tam Pa Ling site.

A leading researcher on the dating of the human evolutionary journey and understanding the life strategies of our ancestors, Joannes-Boyau's work has taken him around the globe.

Born in France, he studied at the University Bordeaux where he gained degrees in science, archaeology, and a master's in applied physics.

After completing his master's in 2006, he moved to Australia where he completed his doctorate in geochronology and geochemistry at the Australian National University in Canberra.

His passion for geochronology started when he was at school in France.

"I had this fascination about age and just how important it is to understand the succession of species in human evolution.

"I guess I knew then that this was the path I wanted to take," he said.

Joannes-Boyau said his biggest influence was probably his grandmother.

"She was very influential in my life. She took me around Europe to see many archaeological sites. She needed knowledge, academic endeavor, archaeology and history."

The geochronologist said he still has the same passion and excitement for every new project he works on.

The first project he took part in was in North Africa at a cave called Jebel Irhoud in Morocco, which contained the oldest well-dated evidence of *Homo sapiens*.

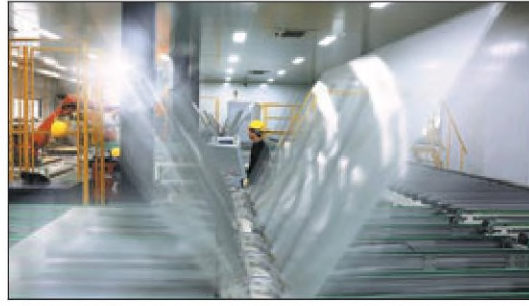
Joannes-Boyau's research focuses on the development and application of direct dating methods and micro-analytical techniques to key questions in archaeological sciences, such as the timing of human evolution, interaction with the surrounding environment as well as hominids' diet and early life history.

So far, his work has taken him to every continent apart from Antarctica.

"I have been fortunate to have a job which has taken me to many incredible places and where I have met many amazing people. It has introduced me to new cultures and ethnic groups," Johannes-Boyau said from his office at Southern Cross University.

But the most important thing he has gained so far from his career, he said, has been the "emergence and adaptability of our genus and species and how we have adapted and shaped our environment".

# IMAGE



**Left:** Workers assemble products at the Ganzhou Dehuida Technology Co Ltd in Anyuan county, Jiangxi province, on Aug 15, 2023. **Middle:** Workers produce ordered products at a smart manufacturing workshop of Jiangxi Ganyue New Materials Co Ltd in Dingnan county, Jiangxi province, on Aug 15, 2023. **Right:** Hakka tour guides explain the Hakka culture to tourists at Dingnan county in Jiangxi province, on Aug 15, 2023. FENG YONGBIN/CHINA DAILY



Tourists enjoy an immersive theatrical performance that blends with the local culture in Qianxin town of Longnan city, Jiangxi province, on Aug 16, 2023. FENG YONGBIN/CHINA DAILY

## Ganzhou and Longnan power Jiangxi's growth

**G**anzhou, located in Jiangxi province, is forging a new path and transforming old regions. In recent years, Jiangxi has strategically taken advantage of its position adjacent to Guangdong, Fujian, Zhejiang, and Jiangsu provinces, actively participating in the Belt and

Road Initiative and the development of the Yangtze River Economic Belt. By connecting with the Yangtze River Delta and the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area, the region is embracing openness and experiencing remarkable growth.

-CHINA DAILY



**Left:** Workers are busy packaging food at the Jiangxi Guoran Food Co Ltd, on Aug 15, 2023. **Right:** Actors from the Anyuan county theater troupe entertain tourists in Dongshengwei, on Aug 15, 2023. FENG YONGBIN/CHINA DAILY



**Left:** Villagers demonstrate traditional rice cake-making skills to tourists in a village of Longyuanba town in Quannan county, Jiangxi province, on Aug 18, 2023. **Right:** Workers harvest organic vegetables at the natural star vegetable farm in Yaxi village of Longyuanba town, Jiangxi province, on Aug 18, 2023. FENG YONGBIN/CHINA DAILY

## TREND



A secluded house with a bridge and a stream seems to epitomize many young people's ideal escape from bustling city life. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Erhai Lake in Dali, Yunnan province, is known for its scenic landscapes. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A young visitor sips coffee at a bar in Lijiang, Yunnan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



The ancient city of Lijiang is set at the foot of a sparsely populated mountain range. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

By CHINA DAILY

The rolling Lesser Khingan Mountains are shrouded in mist brought by drizzling days that rinse Heilongjiang province's Yichun city. The broad Tangwang River runs through the settlement's farms that punctuate the forest. Redbrick houses are strewn among the trees and meadows.

This relatively obscure town in the country's far-flung northeast is where celebrity travel blogger Xu Yun announced in a video that he would live in seclusion.

The 33-year-old seemed to suddenly transform from a nomadic cyclist known to his millions of followers as "Xu Yun Roaming China" into a hermit.

Yichun is truly suited for quiet living. The sparsely populated settlement across the river from Russia is colloquially known as the "forest capital".

Yet Xu is but a high-profile figure within a growing trend in which more Chinese are moving to smaller cities, like Rushan in Shandong province, Shaxi in Yunnan province and Hui'an in Fujian province, where housing is cheaper yet infrastructure is adequate to provide sufficient comfort.

Many Chinese who seek such lives join online groups like "Baidu Yinju (living in seclusion) Ba". The digital community was founded in 2012, but its followers have more than doubled from 550,000 to 1.12 million over the past two years, during which time the number of posts have grown from 7 million to over 9 million.

This coincides with the "lying flat" trend, in which followers save money until they have enough to move to a place with affordable housing.

Four days after arriving at the Yichun Forest Farm, Xu bought a decent house at the foot of the Lesser Khingan Mountains and got enough coal and firewood to last three years. He planned to renovate the property into a place where he could cook and farm, and raise cats and dogs.

It was in a similar spirit that Zou Nanpeng left the company he founded in East China's Shandong province for Dali, in Southwest China's Yunnan.

He couldn't pinpoint exactly when this idea was planted in his heart.

"All I can say is that, since childhood, I'd always lived within society's framework and fulfilled others' expectations. I hadn't done anything for me."

## Happy hermits

A growing number of young people are abandoning frantic urban lifestyles to enjoy seclusion in smaller settlements. Many say the trend is less of a 'great escape' than the pursuit of inner peace



People sit on a dock in Erhai Lake in Dali, Yunnan. More young Chinese people are moving to smaller settlements like those near Dali to find peace outside of society's confines. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

These restrictions seemed to tighten once he turned 30, until, after returning from a trip to Dali this spring, he decided to "loosen the reins" that bound him.

After careful consideration, he chose to rent a downtown house with four bedrooms and bathrooms, a living room and a large terrace. On clear days, he can see the Cangshan Mountains and Erhai Lake.

Before long, Zou opened a home-stay there. While this may seem to contradict the "lying flat" spirit, he explains: "I have to accept reality. We still need to support ourselves and counter risks."

Zhang Fengyuan has followed

"Baidu Yinju Ba" for 14 years, which is half of the 28-year-old's life.

"It seemed interesting. So, I clicked on it. It was exactly the kind of life I'd wanted since I was younger."

Back then, the online community was mostly about sharing the daily experiences of members who were scattered in small settlements throughout the country. They posted photos of crops, and talked about raising animals and building grass huts. Many conversations evaluated the pros and cons of different remote locations.

"Maybe it's because I've been a bit introverted since I was young,"

Zhang says.

"I don't like interacting with others. I worked in e-commerce, which doesn't require social skills. So, I thought about finding a small mountain village to live in."

But other members of the group opposed his idea. They said he was too young to live in such isolation and should see the world first, and that "lying flat" was about inner cultivation rather than escape, be it in a tranquil forest or a bustling city.

Zhang heeded their words and stayed in the city to run his online-sakes business. But he had to switch careers, as the field became overrun with competitors. He tried several

other jobs but finally decided to become a mortuary beautician.

That was 10 years ago. Today, Zhang is enjoying the secluded life of his dreams, doing work that doesn't require interpersonal interactions and living with plenty of his own time in the countryside.

Most of his friends and family disapprove.

"It's impossible to please everyone. I'm prepared to pay the price to live outside the mainstream," Zhang says.

"Lots of folks think people who want to live in seclusion are grappling with pain or setbacks or the ugliness of humanity — that they're

too fragile and are escaping from reality and responsibility. But most aren't like that. They've thought about it for a long time."

Actually, rather than coming from a place of fear, it requires, instead, courage, he says.

Only occasionally, when he wakes up from a nap and sees dusk fall outside his window, does he feel a strange loneliness.

Since he doesn't have anyone to talk to, he instead browses "Yinju Ba" and also shares photos of his meals and cats with other members.

Sometimes, users praise his cooking. Other times, they chat with him about recent happenings. And many times, there's no response at all.

But no matter what, the group offers him some kind of satisfaction.

Zou's favorite in-person social activity is watching the local torch festival. The flames carried by crowds light up the land like stars and illuminate the night sky. Two-story-high torches stand on the street corners. And young people sing and dance around bonfires while smearing one another's faces with ashes to convey blessings.

As the number of "hermits" in "Yinju Ba" grows and many of them are young like Zhang and Zou. Their typical motivations are also changing with the times.

The earlier practitioners were more like homesteaders, who left cities to work from sunrise to sunset to build houses and farms in remote areas — a lifestyle that's not only old but ancient, as recorded by Eastern Jin Dynasty (317-420) poet Tao Yuanming (365-427). And this way of life is certainly busy, although self-reliant, rather than hectic and highly interdependent like people in cities.

Compared with the escapism of fleeing the pressures of urban life that largely defined the trend a decade ago, today, more young people are "lying flat" in small settlements as acts of spiritual rebellion, to find peace outside of society's confines.

Zhang doesn't know how long his seclusion will — or, ultimately, can — last. But a decade into the experience, he's not worried about this aspect of his future.

He recalls the words "Yinju Ba" users offered him a decade ago that changed his life in ways that have lasted until today: "Seclusion is a process of inner cultivation — not of escape."

Yan Bingjie contributed to this story.

## An American shares his 'Chinese homeland' with world

KUNMING — American Brian Linden first came to China at the end of August 1984. That month of this year, the 61-year-old man visited his hometown, Chicago. But wherever he is, Linden always holds China dear in his heart as his "spiritual homeland".

His plans for September called for visiting Japan and delivering lectures with a focus on China, before returning to Xizhou town in the Dali Bai autonomous prefecture in southwestern China's Yunnan province to oversee the operation of the Linden Center — his namesake hotel brand and cultural exchange hub founded in 2008.

The building that hosts this flagship Linden Center was previously the old mansion of local merchant Yang Pinxiang.

Since 2008, Linden Centers have also been opened in other places like Dali's Shaxi town and Jiangsu province's Suzhou.

"The initial intention behind establishing the Linden Center was to construct a bridge for cultural exchanges between China and the world," says Linden.

That's why they're called "Linden Centers" rather than "Linden Hotels". "What China has accomplished in 40 years is a miracle for humanity," says Linden. "I want to tell a better story of China to the world."

Speaking of his arrival in the country in the 1980s, he quotes the 2,500-year-old Confucian maxim: "It is such a delight to have friends come from afar."

Linden is from Chicago. Before coming to China, he was a part-time night school college student, who cleaned carpets for a living. One day, he went to clean the carpet of the home of an instructor who had just returned from China. The lecturer asked him to help place a marker on China on a world map. Linden replied: "I'm sorry. I don't know where China is."

He was captivated by the teacher's stories about China. Soon after, he saw a poster announcing scholarships to study overseas in China and applied.

"It changed my life," he says. During his stay, Linden had the opportunity to star in a movie that told the story of an American student

who loved China. He later interned at CBS News and was fortunate to witness China's process of opening up to the world.

While undertaking graduate studies at Nanjing University, he met Jeane, a Chinese-American woman who became his wife.

The couple embarked on train journeys across the country, not only exploring China's magnificent landscapes but also feeling the people's warmth and kindness.

"When the Chinese people see someone like me who makes an effort to speak their language and respect the Chinese people and traditions, they have always given me more respect than I deserve," Linden says.

China has given so much to Linden that he, in turn, wanted to contribute to China's growth and promote the country to the outside world.

Because of his China experience, a Swedish company hired him to engage in cross-cultural education work in 1990. This led him to realize how lacking Western understanding of the country was.

This prompted the couple to return

to the US and found an art gallery showcasing Asian artworks in Door County, Wisconsin.

The couple moved back to China in 2004, this time, with their two sons. "I wanted to expose them as well to China's cultural richness," he recalls.

They spent two years traveling much of the country before deciding to open their first center in Xizhou.

Linden's team renovated the courtyard into a hotel according to the principle of "preserving the old as it was", conserving the ethnic Bai architecture, layout, wooden carvings and murals.

International visitors not only booked guestrooms at the center but also explored the surrounding Bai villages under the guidance of its staff.

"We have thousands of people coming every year," Linden says.

"I live in the hotel, so my passion for Xizhou and China is immediately shared with these people."

Linden hopes to go beyond enhancing global understanding of China in general to proactively boosting people-to-people exchanges with the US in particular.



Brian Linden introduces local culture to visitors in Dali, Yunnan province. CAO MENGHAO / XINHUA

Last year, he published his memoir of his 40 years in China, *One Village at a Time*.

Before the pandemic, the Linden Center hosted visiting programs for students from the DC-based Sidwell Friends School, a private school previously attended by several former US presidents, among other top international schools.

Some students stayed for several months, conducting field surveys in Xizhou and writing papers about their stays.

"I felt that, if I could influence the younger people to have a deeper experience and understanding of China, maybe they would carry that respect and understanding into their future careers," says Linden.

Linden plans to publish an English version of *One Village* in the United States next year.

"What I want is for Americans to know that there is so much more to China," he says.

XINHUA

# BIZ LIFE

## High-end gaming talent in high demand

By OUYANG SHIJIA

The gaming industry has been witnessing a flurry of activities with an increase in opportunities, though there is still a shortage of talented staff capable of meeting rising demand for high-end technicians, according to a new report.

As a rising number of gaming companies have been actively embracing emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, demand for properly trained technical talent has been increasing over the past three years, said the report by Chinese professional networking platform Maimai.

While the overall talent pool in the gaming sector is currently sufficient, there is still a shortage of high-end technical talent, the report said.

Compared with other gaming fields, the technical subsectors of audio, video, graphics and image development have seen the broadest gaps in terms of sufficient talent supply. The ratio in the first seven months came in at 0.53, which means there are two job openings for each applicant, pointing to an acute talent shortage in the industry. There is also a rising demand for talent in fields such as algorithms, natural language processing and system safety technology.

Lin Fan, founder and CEO of Maimai, said he believes the extent to which individuals in the workplace adapt to AI will determine their salary levels in the future.

Lin said middle to high-end professionals are set to establish collaborative working relationships with giant AI models, and collaborating with AI-generated content and technologies will become the norm. And the talent gap in the AI field at the mid to high-end levels will continue to widen, according to Lin.

With blossoming AI technological breakthroughs, 2023 marks a breakout year for AI in gaming development.

According to Maimai, nearly 95 percent of people who work in the gaming industry are actively embracing AI, with over one-fifth already considering AI tools as their work partners.

Notably, over 74 percent of gaming professionals have already used AI tools in their work, with over 7 percent using AI tools every

day. While nearly 20 percent of professionals currently are not using AI tools, they are actively learning about them.

As AI technology is gradually applied in various aspects such as gaming design, programming and operations, AI talent has also witnessed an earnings boost.

During the January-July period, AI-related new postings including algorithm researchers, natural language processors, AI engineers and AIGC algorithm engineers made their names on the top 5 list in terms of new job postings, with some of the highest average monthly wages in the market. And postings for AI talent, such as natural language processors, algorithm engineers and AI engineers, saw a substantial monthly salary increase of over 30 percent during the past three years, the report said.

Currently, Beijing tops all other cities in terms of the number of gaming talent, followed by Shanghai, Guangzhou in Guangdong province and Hangzhou in Zhejiang province, according to Maimai.

The report said first-tier cities, including Beijing, Shanghai as well as Guangzhou and Shenzhen in Guangdong, have seen a saturated gaming talent pool. For instance, the supply-demand ratio in Beijing reached 2.83 in the first seven months, which means nearly three people are competing for every gaming job opening in the city.

Instead, non-first-tier cities like Fuzhou, Fujian province, have reported talent shortages in gaming, thus offering rising opportunities for job seekers in the gaming sector.

Meanwhile, non-first-tier cities like Wuhan in Hubei province and Zhuhai in Guangdong have seen a significant jump in the inflow-outflow ratio, attracting an increasing number of gaming talent over the past few years.

Yang Yunya, chief human resources officer at Shanghai-based Lilith Games, said the gaming sector has experienced hard times during the past two years, with a wide range of companies suspending their plans to hire more talent.

Looking ahead, she noted game companies still lack key talent, and firms need to ramp up efforts to attract and retain critical workers.



A visitor tries out a shooting game supported by the mixed reality technology during an expo in Beijing in September. PU FENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Game developers aiming for biz expansion, sales surge

Sector shrugs off COVID impact this year, resumes strong momentum

By OUYANG SHIJIA

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Better times are on the horizon for Chinese gaming firms seeking expansion, given the continued recovery trend in the domestic market, supportive regulatory policies and blossoming emerging technologies, analysts said.

They said China's gaming industry has gradually resumed strong growth this year despite headwinds and the "scarring effect" of the COVID-19 impact, with the sector set to continue a steady run for the rest of the year.

The highly lucrative market generated revenue of 28.61 billion yuan (\$3.9 billion) in July, with a nearly 40 percent year-on-year increase and an over 3 percent month-on-month rise, said a new report from Chinese gaming database Gamma Data Corp.

Mobile gaming remained the largest segment, producing revenue of more than 22 billion yuan in July, an over 50 percent year-on-year growth.

In the first half, the number of China's gaming participants hit a record 668 million, up 0.35 percent year-on-year, said Gamma Data.

Wang Xu, co-founder and chief analyst at Gamma Data, said China's gaming industry will rebound steadily in the rest of the year given rising consumer demand, better

performance of existing game titles as well as robust growth of new game titles.

The National Press and Publication Administration has granted approval for a total of nearly 700 domestic online game releases so far this year, with the latest approval of 89 domestic online games in September alone. Last year, the nation granted nearly 500 domestic online game authorizations.

In August, authorities granted licenses to 31 imported online games, including titles belonging to China's leading technology and internet companies such as Tencent Holdings and NetEase.

It was the third group of foreign online games to receive publishing licenses since December, when the NPPA approved the first group of 44 foreign games last year. It also approved 27 foreign online games in March.

Wu Baokang, an analyst at data intelligence services provider iDigital, said the country is sending positive signals for a more supportive regulatory policy toward the gaming sector, bringing rising growth opportunities for gaming companies both at home and abroad.

Compared to 2022, Wu said he expects to see more batches and a higher number of foreign online games receive publishing licenses this year, saying the country will

welcome more high-quality foreign game titles.

"With the resumption of production as well as a gradual rebound in consumption, China's gaming industry will likely witness a strong rebound in 2023," Wu added.

The National Bureau of Statistics said the official snapshot of fresh signs points to a steady economic recovery, as China's industrial output and retail sales jumped 4.5 percent and 4.6 percent year-on-year in August, respectively, up from 3.7 percent and 2.5 percent increases in July.

Looking ahead, Zhang Yi, CEO and chief analyst at iiMedia Research, said he expects to see a rising number of new game titles in the rest of the year, adding that emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence will also benefit the development of the gaming sector.

Wang Yi, senior vice-president of NetEase, said gaming companies need to continuously invest in cutting-edge technologies such as AI to promote high-quality development.

Wang said that currently, AI has helped boost NetEase's work productivity by 90 percent in key areas including concept art generation, motion capture and model generation.

Looking forward, Wang said NetEase will not only apply cutting-edge technologies to games, but also bring technologies to the outside world in fields such as industrial production, automated agriculture and digital culture and tourism.

"We are embracing a new round of technological change, which will create new growth opportunities for the gaming industry. We will be dedicated to investing in forward-looking technologies boosting innovation, jointly working with other market players to spur the development of China's gaming industry," Wang added.

Gamma Data said NetEase's relevant artificial intelligence-generated content (AIGC) services have covered all products, benefiting nearly 1 billion users. And NetEase has already unveiled several self-developed giant models, covering more than 100 application scenarios.

Gamma Data noted that AIGC technology has significantly improved user experience, and it has further strengthened NetEase's content development efficiency in multiple fields and leveraged its experience to serve other enterprises.

Citing the new report, Wang Xu of Gamma Data said AI-generated content will significantly boost the high-quality development of gaming content, adding that over 60 percent of leading Chinese gaming firms have already tapped into AIGC fields.

Among such firms, 27 apply AIGC to their research and development, marketing and operations; 12 use the relevant technologies to offer solutions for other sectors or enterprises, and nine choose to focus on fields including digital people and the metaverse, according to the report.



Visitors gather at a booth where a game show is put on by the organizer during the China Joy, a yearly gaming event, in Shanghai in July. XU PEIQIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

## Ad-tech firm Moloco bullish on China prospects

By OUYANG SHIJIA

Moloco Inc, a Silicon Valley-based ad-tech solutions startup, is eyeing huge growth opportunities in the rapidly developing China market, as a rising number of Chinese companies in fields like gaming and e-commerce are seeking global expansion.

"China is one of our fastest growing markets. China is definitely important and growing for us," said Ikkjin Ahn, co-founder and CEO of Moloco.

On the revenue front, Ahn said it is currently evenly divided among three regions — Europe, the Middle East and Africa; Asia-Pacific; and the United States, among which the China market is the fastest-growing one.

"I'm always very impressed by Chinese tech companies and app developers," he told China Daily during a recent interview. "Among all the important trends, we are seeing Chinese advertisers most advanced in performance marketing. And they are also expanding globally very well."

**\$268 billion**

market size that global gaming industry is expected to reach by 2025

Ahn said Moloco has served a wide range of Chinese clients in their going global process, including gaming companies, social media firms and e-commerce companies.

Compared to Moloco's clients in the rest of the world, he said Chinese companies, especially big tech firms, are "very far in advance in all of these new trends. And also they're not hesitant to try new media."

Looking ahead, Ahn said he believes the future global economy will center around East Asian areas with high populations, especially China. "So we are very much looking forward to working more with the Chinese clients."

Ahn's views were echoed by Zhu Xiaoxiao, head of Moloco Greater China region, who voiced

optimism over China's economic prospects and added that the company will continue to invest in the Chinese market over the long run.

"China's economy is still very resilient," she said. "China's economy has been gradually picking up. For Moloco, we are precisely the kind of company that helps Chinese companies going overseas to realize better profits. In the next five to 10 years, we will keep providing more opportunities for Chinese developers to seize new activity (in overseas markets)."

Citing an ambitious business development plan this year, Zhu said Moloco has seen that overseas markets for Chinese companies going global may be worth \$50 billion in 2025.

"That offers a great opportunity for Moloco. We hope to improve our own strength to continue to support Chinese developers (seeking global expansion)," she added.

Looking ahead, Zhu said Moloco will continue to invest in China to bring more new solutions for Chi-

nese developers to expand globally.

Founded in 2013, Moloco now has 12 offices in countries including the United Kingdom, South Korea, China, Japan and Singapore, with more than 600 employees globally. The company enables its clients to analyze their big data to customize ads for various customers and monetize those ads with Moloco's machine-learning technology.

"I think the reason why we are able to have our advertisers go to the global market is actually we are helping them to target the right user segment, and select the right creatives in each market," Ahn said.

When it comes to localization in overseas markets, Zhu added that machine learning can provide clients with supplementary suggestions based on big data.

"It may provide more support in some places that (our clients) haven't covered, which is one of the biggest boosts for machine learning in localization."

A recent report by Israeli mobile marketing analytics company



A visitor checks out a video game supported by artificial intelligence technology during the China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing in September. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

AppsFlyer said gaming is a highly representative industry for Chinese companies' overseas businesses, as mobile games steadily took up 64.9 percent of all the Chinese apps going overseas over the past four years. That is followed by financial apps and tool apps.

AppsFlyer said the fast-growing global gaming market is expected to

reach \$268 billion by 2025 and China is certain to take a huge share.

Wang Wei, general manager of AppsFlyer Greater China, said given the uncertainties in the approval of licenses for new game titles at home and the huge growth potential in overseas markets, global expansion will be increasingly important for Chinese gaming companies.

## TRAVEL

# Tourists again enjoy Tibet high life

Region's many attractions, and lifting of pandemic restrictions, entice increasing number of visitors both foreign and domestic, reports **Palden Nyima** in Lhasa.

**H**earing the news that the Tibet autonomous region would reopen to foreign tourists early this year, All Ways International, a US-based travel agency, wasted no time to place advertisements on their social media platforms and contact its clients.

The company organized the first group of 11 foreign travelers for a Tibet tour in late May. They were mostly Russians, or from other European countries, according to Vladimir Poda, a Russian who works as a tourist group organizer for the travel agency.

Poda's first tour of Tibet was in 2013 with a group of around 20 people, most of whom were Russian-speaking from different countries. He has visited the autonomous region in Southwest China as a tourist eight times in the past decade.

"Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, many foreign travelers had to cancel their plans to visit Tibet in the past three years, and some are now eager to tour the region," Poda says.

Tibet suspended inbound tourism in February 2020 in accordance with the policies of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism on controlling the pandemic.

There is an influx of international travelers into Tibet again since the autonomous region reopened to the outside world in April.

More than 13,000 foreign tourists visited Tibet in July, the number increasing by 358 percent year-on-year.

The autonomous region's international tourism receipts exceeded \$11 million in the first half of this year, up by 364 percent over the same period of last year, according to Tibet's tourism development department.

As the application process for a visa becomes less difficult, more overseas tourists are choosing China.

The autonomous region attracted more than 11,000 foreign tourists and had a total revenue of over \$78 million from overseas travelers in 2019, a rise of 53 percent and 44 percent respectively over 2018.

"Currently, the number of inbound tourists from Nepal visiting Tibet has reached the same level as pre-pandemic 2019 figures, but the number of inbound tourists from other countries and regions is fewer than before the pandemic," says Dekyi, an official of the local tourism department.

International tourists visiting the autonomous region come from more than 70 countries, including Nepal, the United States, Malaysia, Vietnam, Germany, Japan and the United Kingdom.

"Most overseas tourists like to tour places with unique features of Tibetan culture, such as the cities of Lhasa, Shigatse, Lhokha, and the Ngari prefecture," Dekyi says.

She adds that overseas travelers have to go through approval procedures to visit Tibet. The application processing time for the permit has been cut to about three days, compared to more than a week before 2020.

"Our department has been coordinating with other departments to build a platform to supervise the autonomous region's inbound tourism," she says.

Dekyi calls the platform a "breakthrough", which helps the local authorities significantly shorten the time to process international tourists' application procedures to visit Tibet.

"It has effectively helped inbound travel agencies to ease the problem of long-cycled certification," she adds.

## Future fast growth

Yang Yong, general manager of the Tibet Vista Tour, an international travel agency providing tourism services for both inbound and domestic tourists, says that his company expects to receive 2,000 overseas travelers this year, and the overseas tourists his company has received so far this year are mostly foreigners who work and live in China.

"The proportion of overseas tourists who made trips to the region from outside China is relatively small," Yang says. "Most overseas travelers whom my company has received this year were mainly from Europe, the US and Southeast Asian countries."

Yang says that his company expects to have 25 percent of the 8,000 tourists it had



Overseas tourists pose for a group photo at the foot of the Mount Kailash (Mount Gangrinpoche in the Tibetan language) in Ngari prefecture of the Tibet autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



**Left:** Vladimir Poda, a Russian tourist visits the Drakyerpa Monastery near Lhasa, the capital of the Tibet autonomous region.

**Below:** Tourists pose for a photo in Tibet's Dingri county at the foot of the Mount Qomolangma.



**Left:** Overseas and domestic tourists enjoy a meal in a Tibetan restaurant in Lhasa in May.

**Bottom:** Visitors photograph the stunning scenery of Mount Qomolangma in Dingri county.



**Above:** A foreign tourist at the foot of the Mount Kailash in Ngari prefecture.



dealt with in 2019, as the recovery of flights is slow, and the process of applying for a Chinese visa is still difficult.

"Most overseas tourists have a positive impression about touring in Tibet," he says, adding that there are still complaints; for example, some are unhappy with the toilets at the tourism sites.

Yang says that his company provides hotel reservations, food, transportation, tickets, tour guides and document processing.

He says that foreign tourists choose to go to Mount Qomolangma, commonly referred to as Mount Everest in the West, in the autonomous region's city of Shigatse, and they also like to go to western Tibet's Ngari prefecture and the scenic routes linking with attractions in Nepal.

## More income for insiders

Jamyang Tsering, a Tibetan tour guide who speaks German and English at the Tibet Vista Tour, says that, with the number of overseas tourists rising this season, his monthly income has doubled.

Before April, he could only earn an average of 6,000 yuan (\$827), and his monthly income increased to more than 13,000 yuan thanks to the influx of international travelers.

Jamyang Tsering finds that many overseas tourists feel safe traveling in Tibet, and they also like the food of the region as there are always multiple options available.

"I also find that many overseas tourists are really surprised with the overall developments of the region, and many did not expect that much development before they came," says Jamyang Tsering, adding that most of the Western tourists love to visit Mount Kailash, the Potala Palace, and the ruins of Guge dynasty founded in around AD 912 by Kyide Nyima Gon, the great grandson of the Tubo ruler Langdarma, with its capital in Purang, more than 1,500 kilometers from Lhasa.

"Some guests are more interested about religious cultures of the region, such as the Drigungthil Monastery, and others prefer to go to rural places to see how local people live, dress themselves and practice their religion," he says.

Due to the pandemic, inbound tourism has been suspended for three years, and after reopening services again, many foreign guests are very excited to have the opportunity to visit the region, Jamyang Tsering adds.

Choedhar, a bilingual tour guide in Lhasa, says that, since April, the number of overseas tourists has been increasing, especially the number of the foreigners who work or live in China visiting Tibet.

"For me, I guided many European travelers this year, and I have found that many of them are more interested in the Tibetan traditional culture rather than visiting only for sightseeing," says Choedhar.

"Different sectors of the autonomous region have been making efforts to make it easier for overseas tourists to visit Tibet," Choedhar says, adding that foreign visitors can now find the right tour guides who speak their languages.

## Admiring the spiritual culture

Poda of All Ways International says that, in this season, the travel agency has brought almost the same amount of foreign tourists to Tibet as it did in 2019.

One of the groups Poda organized arrived in Tibet on Aug 8.

Poda says he met his business partners in Lhasa to reactivate their cooperation, and he also guided a group touring in the region.

This group had 21 tourists mostly from Russia.

These people were divided into two groups, with one guided by a Tibetan guide, who speaks Tibetan and English, and the other guided by Poda, who speaks English and Russian.

"We visited the Potala Palace, the Jokhang Temple, and the Drakyerpa Monastery in the past couple of days, and we also visited a Tibetan village to get a glimpse of local people's life," he says.

"What I like the most are the Jokhang Temple and the Potala Palace in Lhasa. I like them very much," he says.

Poda adds that he prefers to live in a simple hotel rather than a fancy one, as long as the hotel is at a good location to observe the ancient cultures of Tibet.

"We just visited Drakyerpa. There are many meditation caves, which meant a lot for me, because I practice meditation and yoga," he says.

"I also like to worship the sacred Mount Kailash, as the Tibetans and the Indians do."

Pilgrims of several religions believe that circumambulating Mount Kailash on foot is a holy ritual that will bring them good fortune.

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## SPORTS



杭州第19届亚运会  
The 19th Asian Games

## TABLE TENNIS &amp; BADMINTON



India's Sutritha Mukherjee (left) and Ayhika Mukherjee celebrate a point during their shock quarterfinal victory over China's Chen Meng and Wang Yidi in the table tennis women's singles competition at the Hangzhou Asian Games on Saturday. AFP



South Korea's Kim Ga-eun reacts after defeating China's He Bingjiao (right) during badminton's women's team final at the Hangzhou Asian Games on Sunday. The Koreans, led by world No 1 An Se-young, produced a stunning performance to sweep aside the host 3-0. AFP

# Net losses hit home in Hangzhou

Shock defeats in badminton and table tennis leave humbled Team China searching for answers

By SUN XIAOCHEN in Hangzhou  
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Back-to-back team losses in badminton and table tennis at the Asiad have exposed China's vulnerability in racket sports it once dominated, with athletes' lack of grit and grind raising concerns ahead of Paris 2024.

As Kim Ga-eun jumped into the celebrating pack of South Korean players following a decisive win in the women's team final against China, her opponent He Bingjiao was inconsolable, looking up at the roof to stem the flow of tears in front of a deflated home crowd at Binjiang Gymnasium in Hangzhou.

A shocking 3-0 defeat, with two singles and one doubles loss, all in straight games, on Sunday delivered a harsh wake-up call for Team China: Now the women's squad is also on the wane following the decline of the men's program.

World No 1 An Se-young got South Korea off to a strong start by beating reigning Olympic champion Chen Yufei in style in the first singles rubber, followed by a surprising doubles win for Baek Ha-na and Lee So-hee over China's top-ranked duo Chen Qingchen and Jia Yifan.

Kim then held off a battling He in a 70-minute slugfest to clinch South Korea's first women's team gold at the Asiad in 29 years.

It was a second straight loss for the Chinese women's team against South Korea at a major tournament following a 3-2 defeat at last year's Uber Cup final in Thailand.

The return to the continental throne in Hangzhou will motivate his team to push even harder to fight for more glory at next summer's Paris Olympics, said South Korea head coach Kim Hak-kyun.

"This win is thanks to the determination, mentality and unity of our players," said the former two-time Olympian. "They are at their peak, but we are still moving forward and our target is beyond Asia and looking at the Olympics."

Since a dominant run of five team golds from 1998 to 2014, China's women have endured a nine-year title drought at the Asiad, beaten by Japan in 2018, with a lack of mental toughness from key players such as Chen and He often costing China in clutch moments.

Home-court advantage turned into a heavy burden on Sunday, with the Chinese players feeling the weight of expectations on their shoulders, according to singles coach Xia Xuanze.

"Because we are playing at home, in an event that happens just every four years, of course we faced a lot of pressure," said the 2003 men's world champion. "At key moments we



XINHUA

"When things didn't go my way, I kind of got stuck and I couldn't get the best out of myself, nor could I adapt to my opponent's style. I need to toughen up quickly for next year's Olympics."

Chen Yufei, after losing to world No 1 An Se-young in the first singles match during the women's team final in Hangzhou

couldn't grasp our opportunities, our athletes wanted it too much to play at their best."

The main takeaway for China's world No 2 singles ace Chen was her lack of adaptability under pressure.

"Mentally I have a lot of work to do," she said.

"When things didn't go my way, I kind of got stuck and couldn't get the best out of myself, nor could I adapt to my opponent's style. I need to toughen up quickly for next year's Olympics," said the 25-year-old native of Hangzhou.

At last month's world championships in Denmark, Team China bagged only one gold, in women's doubles, from five events, to bring home its thinnest haul from the tournament in recent years.

Chen said the Chinese players are determined to rebuild their confidence in this week's singles and doubles competitions.

## Ping pong flop

The women's table tennis team served up an even bigger disappointment, with the team's two doubles pairs failing to earn China a semifinal berth for the first time in Asiad history.

Japan's Miwa Harimoto and Miyuu Kihara landed the first blow by stunning world No 3 pair Sun Yingsha and Wang Manyu, 3-1, in the

first quarterfinal. About an hour later the Hangzhou tournament witnessed arguably the biggest upset in table tennis doubles history.

To the shock of a full house at Gongshu Canal Sports Park Gymnasium, unheralded Indian duo Sutritha Mukherjee and Ayhika Mukherjee subdued China's world No 2 pair Chen Meng and Wang Yidi 3-1 to secure the country's first-ever women's medal in table tennis at the Asiad.

The shock results sparked heavy criticism from fans and pundits alike in a country where table tennis is considered the unofficial national sport. "They should've prepared better and should've studied their opponents more no matter where they come from," table tennis legend Deng Yaping said of the Chen-Wang loss to the Indian pair.

"We've analyzed and studied all the time by the rest of the world. If anyone plays us, they play as an underdog with a relatively stress-free mindset, while we need to stay sharp facing all the challengers," said Deng, a four-time Olympic gold medalist who retired in 1997.

With the rest of the world catching up fast, China's star paddlers need to approach their preparations for Paris 2024 with the utmost focus and without being distracted by their massive fan base and high-profile at home, Deng added.

## CRICKET

# Heavyweight India enjoys debut win

Explosive opener Yashasvi Jaiswal smashed seven sixes in a sublime maiden T20 century as India's men opened their first Asian Games campaign with a 23-run defeat of gutsy Nepal on Tuesday.

With superstars such as Rohit Sharma and Virat Kohli at home for the one-day World Cup beginning on Thursday, the world's top-ranked Twenty20 team has a second-string squad in Hangzhou.

But it is still formidable, packed with promising youngsters who have excelled in the Indian Premier League and a host of players with international experience.

After winning the toss and opting to bat, Jaiswal's masterful 100, from 49 balls, plus late fireworks from Rinku Singh (37 not out) and Shivam Dube (25 not out) helped India to 202-4.

Nepal had bludgeoned a record 314-3 against minnow Mongolia in the qualifying rounds but could only manage 179-9 in reply, with Avesh Khan and Ravi Bishnoi taking three wickets each.

"They are a good side so we're not surprised at how they came at us," said India skipper Rituraj Gaikwad. "It wasn't our best day but we still managed to get a win."

India's women cantered to gold last week, putting pressure on the men to follow suit.

"Of course, I'm really glad and happy that our girls won the trophy and the gold," Jaiswal told reporters.



India's Rahul Tripathi fields the ball during the men's quarterfinal T20 cricket match against Nepal at the Hangzhou Asian Games on Tuesday. India won by 23 runs. AFP

"We are just trying our best. We will keep trying and working hard for it and we will do what we can."

Cricket has been played at the Asian Games twice before, at Guangzhou 2010 and Incheon 2014, but India did not take part.

Bangladesh won the men's title in 2010 while Sri Lanka is the defending champion, with Afghanistan the runner-up both times.

Along with Pakistan, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, India entered the Hangzhou Games at the quarterfinal stage.

Jaiswal got India off to a scorching start and the team was cruising

at 103 without loss at an overcast Zhejiang University of Technology Pingfeng Cricket Field.

But when Gaikwad fell slogging to deep midwicket on 25 it sparked a mini-collapse with Tilak Varma (two) and Jitesh Sharma (five) soon following.

## 'Pretty special'

At the other end, Jaiswal, who played in the Test and T20 series against the West Indies in July, brought up his maiden century in T20 international cricket off 48 balls, with seven sixes and eight fours.

The 21-year-old's luck ran out

soon after, caught on the ropes by Abinash Bohara going for another big hit.

That brought Kolkata Knight Riders star Rinku to the crease and he slammed 37 off 15 balls in a late flurry that added 64 runs from the last five overs.

"Wherever you go and score a century, especially when you are representing your country, it's a proud moment and you get goosebumps," said Jaiswal.

"This is my first T20 century and it's pretty special."

A rampant Nepal rewrote cricket history on its way to the quarterfinals in beating Mongolia, becoming the first men's team to score more than 300 runs in a T20 international match.

But India's bowling unit was a different proposition.

Nepal was motoring at 62-1 in the eighth over, but the introduction of leg-spinner Bishnoi put the brakes on.

He snared captain Rohit Paudel for three and crucially Kushal Malla — who slammed the fastest-ever T20 international century, off 34 balls, against Mongolia — for 29.

It left Nepal in trouble at 77-4 in the 11th over and while Dipendra Airee (32) and Sundeeep Jora (29) did their best, it was not enough.

Later on Tuesday, Pakistan easily beat Hong Kong, China by 68 runs.

AFP

## SAILING

# Waves of approval for Ningbo sailing center

World Sailing president Li Quanhai has praised the sailing competitions at the 19th Asian Games, staged in a facility he described as a "fantastic benefit" for the sport in the region.

Over seven days at Xiangshan Sailing Centre in Ningbo, Zhejiang province, 129 athletes contested 14 events, with China finishing with eight medals in total, followed by Thailand and Singapore with seven each.

The Asian Games were a major qualifying event for the Paris 2024 Olympics, with places up for grabs in the dinghy, windsurfing, and kite events.

"We have seen a world-class sailing competition in a world-class venue at the 19th Asian Games. The standard of competition has been very high in all 14 events," said Li.

"That is testimony to the growing strength of sailing in Asia, as we saw at the Allianz Sailing World Championships. The credit for that must go to our Member National Authorities in the region who are working so hard to nurture the grassroots of the sport in their respective territories."

Singling out the Ningbo venue for special praise, Li added:

"Xiangshan Sailing Centre provided the perfect setting for the athletes to show their abilities. It really is a superb venue, and I am sure it will provide a strong legacy and a fantastic benefit for sailing across the region for a long time into the future."

David Graham, CEO of World Sailing, said: "I was speechless when I came into this venue — it is world-class, whether it is the facilities for the athletes and officials or the area where the boats are stored and the nice sheltered harbor for them to get out into the field of play."

"The organization of the sailing event in the Asian Games has been first-class — it's a mixture of local experts, and experts from other countries, who have come together as a team and done a fantastic job. The quality of the racing has been absolutely brilliant."

Having set a pre-Games target of five golds, host China eventually pocketed six gold medals during the Hangzhou Games.

Thailand had three golds and Singapore two. Japan, South Korea and Malaysia each had one.



Li Quanhai

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SPORTS

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TRACK AND FIELD

# Li's still loving the high life

Veteran savors home glory in Hangzhou as she continues to push for personal bests



Li Ling clears the bar on her way to winning the women's pole vault gold medal during the Hangzhou Asian Games on Monday. The 34-year-old won with an attempt of 4.63 meters. PHOTOS BY WEI XIAOHAO / CHINA DAILY

By LI YINGXUE in Hangzhou  
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Lying on the ground as the home crowd cheered inside Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium, Chinese pole vaulter Li Ling covered her face with a down jacket. A few seconds later, she stood up and took off, pole in hands, for her final attempt.

After gracefully rotating over the bar, she began her descent, gazing up at the night sky above the towering Big Lotus stadium and let gravity's pull take hold. Regrettably, the crossbar also descended, marking an unsuccessful attempt this time.

However, what awaited her was even more enthusiastic applause. She had already secured the gold medal with an Asian Games record of 4.63 meters. Her final attempt was a bid to surpass her own Asian record — 4.72m, set four years ago in Shanghai.

"I've always tried to pursue greater heights, hoping to get closer to the sky. As track and field athletes, we are always striving for those small improvements," she said in the post-competition news conference.

Unlike most sports, pole vault often ends with a failed attempt by the champion as competitors are continuously trying to better their previous mark, which can still be enough to win.

While Li felt a tinge of regret for not surpassing her personal best, she was content with her overall performance on Monday night. This gold medal marked her third consecutive victory in the Asian Games over the past nine years, underlining her dominance in Asia.

"Today my goal was not only to win the Games, I hoped to also set a personal best. I felt in good condition and I was aiming to achieve better results based on my previous performances," said the 34-year-old. "It's great recognition after four years of preparation. I'm very happy."

She explained why she put the jacket on her face to help her focus. "When I'm in the arena or on the field, just one moment determines whether you win or lose. So I have to really concentrate."

During the medal presentation, Li wore a traditional Chinese hairpin to match the knot button design of



Team China's award ceremony costume. "It's because we are in Hangzhou. It's flower season and this is very romantic," she explained.

Her husband, retired pole vaulter and 2010 Asian Games champion Yang Yansheng, was in the crowd with other family members and friends to cheer Li on.

Li made her Asian Games debut in

"I've always tried to pursue greater heights, hoping to get closer to the sky. As track and field athletes, we are always striving for those small improvements."

Li Ling, after setting the Asian Games pole vault record to claim gold in Hangzhou

2010, finishing second after clearing 4.30m. She recalled that she was quite nervous at the time, but says she is much more confident and focused these days.

"My goal is very clear and it's to break my own records. When I set my goals higher, I don't have an overwhelming obsession with the gold medal because I have higher objec-

tives to pursue," she said.

Li's parents had backgrounds in basketball and volleyball, but she fell in love with pole vault at the age of 12.

"It took me nearly four years before I could actually clear the bar, but I think being a slow starter is not a bad thing since it gave me more time to master the essential techniques," she said.

With over 22 years of pole vault training under her belt, she still finds joy in every session.

"It is a very sophisticated and interesting event. I never feel bored in the pole vault," she said. "I enjoy the feeling of being in the air, and those short moments when you're suspended in the air. That's the feeling I want to capture."

Li has suffered from injuries in recent years, but hopes those issues are now behind her.

"When we push our limits, injuries are inevitable. I've learned to coexist with injuries and have come to terms with them. I no longer fear them. Perhaps we can even become friends," she said.

Her Olympic journey has been marked by plenty of ups and downs.

She first stepped onto the Olympic stage at the 2008 Beijing Games, but has never managed to advance beyond the qualification rounds.

Last year's delayed Tokyo Olympics were especially tough, as she failed to clear the bar with any of her attempts. "I felt confident going into Tokyo," Li said. "But then there was a rain postponement and that really wasted my energy. So I couldn't deliver a very good performance."

"That was such a blow. I was in shock. I even wanted to retire because I went through a lot of preparations and in one moment everything was destroyed because the weather was not good."

She didn't retire. Instead, she redoubled her efforts to prepare for the upcoming Paris Olympic Games.

"On this journey I still need to overcome a lot of challenges, I believe I have the capability to overcome difficulties and perform even better," she said.

"I hope to train even harder this winter and experience that feeling of 'throwing myself into the air' at the Paris Olympics next year. This feeling has always been my goal."

## Gong strikes gold but laments falling short of her goal

By SHI FUTIAN in Hangzhou  
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Even after winning her third Asian Games gold, Chinese shot put legend Gong Lijiao was not 100 percent satisfied with her performance.

The all-conquering veteran came up short in her bid to break the 21-meter mark, so left the stadium feeling a tinge of disappointment.

"I'm happy that I won gold, but honestly speaking, the result was not the best. So it's OK to say that there are some regrets, which will now motivate me to keep pushing myself as I try to achieve my ultimate goal at the Paris Olympics next year," said the 34-year-old, whose throw of 19.58m ensured she topped the podium last Friday.

"I feel that my overall form this season has been even better than when I won gold at the Tokyo Olympics, but I didn't adjust myself well enough and, therefore, failed to produce my best in Hangzhou."

In August, Gong was also left frustrated when she threw 19.69 to claim bronze at the World Athletics Championships in Budapest. The reigning Olympic champion had hoped to crack the 20-meter mark in the Hungarian capital.

"The month before the Asian Games was quite tough for me. I competed at the world championships, but the result was not ideal. I was upset, but I knew I needed to put

it behind me as quickly as possible, as I wanted to win my third Asian Games gold," said Gong.

She said she couldn't have asked for a better atmosphere inside Hangzhou Olympic Sports Centre Stadium as she chased the elusive 21m mark.

"The moment I walked into the stadium, I heard the deafening roar of the home fans in the stands. I heard that the day that I competed, there were more than 35,000 spectators there. Every time the Chinese athletes entered the field, there was a new wave of cheering. An atmosphere like that is so important for Chinese athletes. It really spurs us on to produce better performances."

She also savored the moment she stood on the podium during the national holiday celebrations.

"I really like the design of the gold medal. It's just like a mooncake. Winning gold during the Mid-Autumn Festival is a really beautiful memory for me," she said.

Gong has become an icon of Chinese athletics. She competed at her first Olympics at the 2008 Beijing Games, initially finishing fifth but subsequently being upgraded to the bronze-medal position after two athletes were disqualified for violating anti-doping rules.

After pocketing silver at London 2012, she could only manage fourth at Rio 2016, before golds at the 2017 and 2019 world championships established her as the



China's Gong Lijiao competes on her way to winning the women's shot put gold medal at the 19th Asian Games in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, on Sept 29. AP

sport's dominant force. Gong finally got her hands on Olympic gold at Tokyo 2020. That victory was China's first-ever Olympic title in a field event.

She made her Asian Games debut in Guangzhou 2010, when she won a silver, with three golds following over

the next three editions of the Asiad. But, even though she still makes it look easy, winning is far from a certainty for the veteran.

"As I grow older, winning Asian Games golds is becoming harder and harder. Looking on the bright side, I'm more experienced. So I want to

thank my team, who give me fantastic support," said Gong.

"I was also in peak condition when I had to settle for silver at the Guangzhou Asiad, but I caught a cold just before the Games. So that shows you need a little luck to win gold at a major event."

Compared to her younger self, Gong said that she now has a much more "mature" mentality, adding: "I used to easily lose concentration during competitions. For instance, if someone threw further than me, I would become nervous. Now I only focus on my own performance."

And that focus remains firmly fixed on throwing beyond 21 meters next year in Paris.

"Actually, since the Tokyo Olympics, I haven't been happy with my results. This is a challenge for me. So my team has been helping me to adjust my training methods. The goal is to produce the best result at the Paris Games next year. My goal was 21 meters, and that remains the same," said Gong, who these days is also busy attending to her role as vice-president of the Chinese Athletics Association as well as coaching young Chinese shot put talents.

In a message to the young guns, she said: "Achieving that one highlight moment requires years of hard work from an athlete. I've been training for 20 years, and through my own story I just want to let more people feel the spirit of Chinese athletics."

"I want to tell the young athletes: Don't give up easily when you encounter little challenges. You have to try harder, and keep chasing your dream. Athletics is a sport where young athletes shine, and I hope more and more young Chinese athletes can shine on the world stage."