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CHINA DAILY

GLOBAL EDITION 中国日报 MONDAY, APRIL 29, 2024



Protesters in support of Palestinians in Gaza scuffle with pro-Israel counterprotesters during demonstrations amid the ongoing conflict between Israel and Hamas, at the University of California-Los Angeles on Sunday. DAVID SWANSON / REUTERS

US protests over Israel-Hamas war persist

By HENG WEILI in New York
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The recent unrest on US college campuses over the war between Israel and Hamas continued over the weekend, while at an annual news media dinner in Washington, attendees were showered with antagonistic chants as they entered the event.

A brief skirmish between pro-Israeli and pro-Palestinian demonstrators unfolded Sunday at the University of California-Los Angeles (UCLA), where a tent encampment was set up last week.

Security guards at UCLA attempted to keep the two sides separated, while campus police stood by and watched the brief clash, according to a Reuters photographer who witnessed the scene.

Protesters opposed to Israel's incursion into Gaza are demanding a cease-fire and the divestment of university assets in companies involved with the Israeli military, and an end to US military assistance to Israel.

Some 275 people were arrested

on Saturday at campuses including Indiana University in Bloomington, Arizona State University in Tempe and Washington University in St. Louis. Nationwide arrests in the protests have approached 900.

Among those arrested at Washington University was 2024 Green Party presidential candidate Jill Stein.

"They are sending in the riot police and basically creating a riot in an otherwise peaceful demonstration. So this is just shameful," Stein said in a statement.

The university said in a statement that those arrested would face trespassing charges.

Other campuses that have seen protests recently are Ohio State, Yale and New York University.

Protesters also turned up at the annual White House Correspondents' Association Dinner on Saturday, and some guests hurried through the crowd.

The protesters called out US President Joe Biden for his support of Israel's military campaign. They also criticized Western news outlets

for what they said was undercoverage and misrepresentation of the conflict.

"Shame on you!" shouted protesters wearing the traditional Palestinian keffiyeh, running after men in tuxedos and suits and women in long dresses holding clutch purses, as guests hurried inside for the dinner.

"Western media we see you, and all the horrors that you hide," crowds chanted at one point.

Glenn Greenwald, a prominent journalist who has been critical of crackdowns on the campus protests, wrote on X on April 26: "I don't recognize an Israel exception to First Amendment and free speech dogma. I watched Bush, Cheney and the neocons ... scream 'terrorist' to justify civil liberties abridgments — and I don't support it."

More than two dozen journalists in Gaza wrote a letter last week calling on their colleagues in Washington to boycott the dinner altogether.

"The toll exacted on us for merely fulfilling our journalistic duties is

staggering," the letter stated. "We are subjected to detentions, interrogations, and torture by the Israeli military, all for the 'crime' of journalistic integrity."

Nearly 100 journalists have been killed covering the war in Gaza, according to a preliminary investigation released Friday by the Committee to Protect Journalists. Israel has defended its actions, saying it has been targeting militants.

The demonstrations at UCLA involved at least some people from outside the university, which issued a statement on Sunday saying it had allowed two groups on campus to express their views.

Members of the Harriet Tubman Center for Social Justice planned to support the right of students to protest, according to the statement, while Stand in Support of Jewish Students, in partnership with the Israeli-American Council, said it planned to oppose antisemitism on campus.

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Premier, Musk call for further cooperation

Li says Tesla's achievements in China show mutual benefits of bilateral relationship

By ZHOU JIN
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Tesla's success in China has demonstrated that equal cooperation and mutual benefits conform to the fundamental interests of China and the United States, Premier Li Qiang said in a meeting on Sunday with Elon Musk, CEO of the US electric car maker.

Calling Tesla's development in China a successful example of trade cooperation between Beijing and Washington, Li expressed the hope that the US will work in the same direction as China to promote the stable development of bilateral ties.

China's huge market will always remain open to foreign enterprises, he emphasized.

Li pledged to continue to expand market access and improve services to provide a better business environment and stronger support for foreign enterprises, allowing them to invest in China with confidence and assurance.

Musk said that, thanks to the hard work and wisdom of the Chinese team, Tesla's Shanghai gigafactory is his company's top performer.

He expressed a willingness to deepen cooperation with China to achieve more mutually beneficial outcomes.

It was Musk's second visit to China, Tesla's second-biggest market, within a year.

Built and put into operation in 2019, the Shanghai factory, Tesla's first gigafactory outside the US, delivered 947,000 vehicles last year, which was 33 percent more than in 2022.

Musk was quoted by Chinese media as saying, upon his arrival in Beijing on Sunday afternoon, that it was "good to see electric vehicles making progress in China. All cars will be electric in the future."

Statistics show that China's new

energy vehicle sales surged 37.9 percent year-on-year to about 9.5 million last year, accounting for more than 60 percent of the global total.

Musk's visit also came as the 2024 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition is underway. The auto show started on Thursday and will run through Saturday.

In a fact-finding trip to the auto show on Sunday, Premier Li emphasized developing intelligent connected NEVs and making the automobile industry more high-end, smarter and greener.

Li made the remarks after visiting the booths of companies including Dongfeng, BMW, Geely, Xiaomi and Xpeng.

China's NEVs have a leading edge in market competition and open cooperation, and efforts must be made to maintain and develop these advantages, he said.

Li called for Chinese carmakers to accelerate breakthroughs in core technology and strengthen forward-looking technological research and development, in order to push for the upgrade of the auto industry.

Noting that the Chinese and global NEV markets are seeing continuous growth, he said that China will further promote building a unified national market and expand high-level opening-up.

China will treat domestic as well as foreign enterprises equally, and facilitate broader exchanges and cooperation between Chinese and foreign carmakers to promote common development and win-win outcomes, he said.

Efforts must be made to implement policies supporting purchases and usage, in order to further unleash the consumption potential of big-ticket items such as automobiles, he said.

After the storm



Residents in Guangzhou, Guangdong province try to clear debris and salvage a car on Sunday in the aftermath of a tornado. At least five people were killed and 33 injured. WU MING / NANFANG DAILY See **story**, page 10

CPC ADVANCES DISCIPLINE EDUCATION CAMPAIGN

Members urged to remain loyal, clean, responsible and help build resilient nation

By ZHANG YI in Beijing,
YANG HAN in Hong Kong
and REN QI in Moscow



The ongoing Party-wide discipline education campaign, a longtime tradition of the Communist Party of China, will help the CPC build a united core to face new goals and challenges and keep the country on the right track, according to

experts from around the globe.

From April to July, CPC members will study the newly revised Party regulations on disciplinary action, to strengthen their discipline awareness and remain loyal, clean and responsible, according

to a circular issued in early April.

Stressing that education should focus on integrating such awareness into everyday work, the circular urges discussions among Party members, as well as using typical violation cases as cautionary lessons, so that Party members will have a better understanding of lines not to be crossed and deeper respect for the rules.

Jon Taylor, a professor of political science at the University of Texas in San Antonio, noted the CPC's previous education campaigns have focused on cultivating closer ties with the people, improving officials' work styles and ensuring that its members stay true to the Party's founding mission.

See **Party**, page 2

China increasingly connected with the LAC in everyday life

Several weeks ago the University of Pittsburgh Press published a book, *Connecting China, Latin America and the Caribbean: Infrastructure and Everyday Life*. In 13 chapters and almost 400 pages, the book opens a window on a new aspect of China's global presence and international cooperation — in this case specifically with Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) — the impact of China on everyday life.

The topic began with a research group from China and LAC holding seminars and meetings in Renmin University of



China in 2016, later at the University of Pittsburgh and at the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM). The results are relevant since they explicitly highlight the concrete effects of China's presence in LAC countries: hundreds of millions of users and consumers in LAC are utilizing and buying "made in China" products and

services and, as a result, enjoying an improvement in their quality of life.

For almost a decade China has been highlighting the importance of international cooperation and people-to-people exchanges, also in the recent context of the modernization of China's cooperation and its insistence on high-quality cooperation under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

The increasing presence of China in LAC countries through trade, financing, investment, and infrastructure projects is making positive contributions to the

everyday life of people in LAC countries. Most of the people in LAC using Chinese products and services probably pay little heed to the high-level discussions on politics, but they do take note of their practical outcomes. People in LAC countries using Chinese products and services are forming their own perceptions of China based on their experiences. In many cases, these perceptions are not necessarily the same as those of LAC's elites.

Two factors that are prominently affecting everyday life in LAC countries are a new wave of new

Chinese immigration and infrastructure projects.

In the 21st century, Chinese immigration into LAC is having massive impacts in countries such as Chile, Mexico and Peru. It is not only creating everyday life engagements with China, but also generating new perceptions, jobs, and enriching the "people-to-people" relationship between LAC and China.

Besides, Chinese infrastructure projects in Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Jamaica and Peru also affect

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Asia Pacific: Thailand 120
thb; Philippines 120 php; Myanmar 2000 kyat; Japan
210 yen; Dubai 10 dirham; Pakistan 300 rupee

PAGE TWO



Party: Building discipline to improve self-governance

From page 1

The new Party discipline campaign builds on these efforts to strengthen the CPC's internal governance and management under President Xi Jinping's thoughts on the Party's self-reform.

Wang Feng, deputy director of the Institute of CPC History and Party Building at Beijing Normal University, said the Party has placed greater emphasis on building discipline to improve self-governance, a signal that self-reform is always happening.

Discipline is a glorious tradition and one of the CPC's unique advantages, which has ensured victories throughout its history, he said.

Steeped in history

The admission oath of the CPC has been revised several times, but the word "discipline" has remained unchanged.

A poem written by the late Chairman Mao Zedong — "Heighten the sense of discipline, and the revolution is sure to be successful" — revealed the relationship between discipline and the victorious revolution.

In 1928, when the CPC was still a small party, Mao issued a military doctrine, "The Three Rules of Discipline and Six Points for Attention", for the Red Army, who were then fighting against the Kuomintang.

A distinctive feature of the doctrine was its respect for the people. The content included: "Obey orders in all your actions; do not take a single needle or piece of thread from the masses; turn in everything captured."

This discipline made the Red Army popular with the people, and was in contrast to the Chiang Kai-shek-led KMT soldiers, who tended to be rude to villagers. The villagers voluntarily gave supplies and shelter to the Red Army and even joined them, greatly helping the CPC's war efforts.

"The people's support is our top political priority," Xi, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee and chairman of the Central Military Commission, has stressed on many occasions. He has made explicit requirements many times for the Party to carry forward the glorious tradition of building discipline.

"We must not allow our discipline to become a dusty document resting on the top shelf," Xi has said.

Addressing the third plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Commission for Discipline Inspection in January, he said the key task of advancing the Party's self-reform is to improve Party conduct, enforce

Party discipline, and fight corruption.

Underscoring the need to improve the legal system used to fight corruption, he called for an education campaign on discipline within the Party.

Maintaining unity

Yang Weidong, a law professor at the China University of Political Science and Law, said the ability to integrate a large-scale party with more than 5 million grassroots organizations and 98 million members, and unify their goals and actions, relies on a strict set of rules.

"This is a unique aspect that distinguishes the CPC from other political parties," he said. "Otherwise, such a large party might be like a pile of loose sand," he said, adding that discipline is also needed to lead the people to achieve great goals.

Compared with the two-party system in many Western countries, where the government might change every few years after one party loses an election, the CPC must win support from the people by placing strict constraints on its members, which is a higher requirement to consolidate the foundations for governance.

Chheang Vannarith, former president of the Asian Vision Institute, a think tank based in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, said the mission of a political party is to build a vision for everyone so that the country can be united and work together.

China is unique as the CPC is the largest and most complex political party in the world. Discipline is very important as without discipline unity cannot be maintained, he said.

Considering the complex external environment as well as foreign interference, it's necessary to build a unified core through discipline education, which will prepare China for the decades ahead, Chheang Vannarith said.

Democracy and respect for the rule of law are declining in different parts of the world because of weak political systems, he said.

A strong political party can contribute to nation building, especially in a country pursuing development, he said.

"But, unfortunately, not many political parties in the world have strong unity and a strong vision, so perhaps the CPC is the strongest of them all," Chheang Vannarith said.

Wang, the Party history expert, said the CPC is uniting and leading the people toward the goal of fully building a modern socialist country. This places higher demands on its governance capability and leadership.

“We have observed that the CPC is conducting a ruthless fight against corruption, which is deeply respected. It will increase the pace and quality of economic growth and increase confidence in officials.”

Sergey Suverov, associate professor at the Financial University under the Government of Russian Federation

At the same time, some Party members and cadres are not attentive, or have not grasped Party regulations and discipline. In many cases of Party members violating the law, a large number of them began by violating Party regulations and discipline first, he said.

In December last year, the Party's Central Committee released revised regulations on disciplinary action. It was the third time that the CPC made revisions to its regulations since its 18th National Congress in 2012. Adding 16 new items and modifying 76 items, it refines the supervision and disciplinary procedures, and punishment rules.

Yang, the law expert, said few political parties in the world are as rigorously organized as the CPC, with a strict set of rules and strict enforcement.

Punishment includes severe warnings and expulsion from the Party, which could mean the end of member's political life and affect their career.

In July, Hu Jiyong, who previously served as Party secretary at one of the subsidiary companies of China National Petroleum Corporation, was expelled from the Party and removed from his positions for disciplinary violations.

On June 7, a video clip showing him strolling along a street in Chengdu, Sichuan province, holding hands with a young woman wearing a long, pink off-the-shoulder dress went viral.

Hu was soon placed under investigation by the disciplinary department of his company, which found he had an improper relationship with the woman during his

marriage, and changed the schedule of his business trip to take the opportunity for recreation.

"Party discipline is more stringent than national laws," Yang said. If a member indulges in extravagant and wasteful spending, which causes a negative impact, they can face disciplinary punishment.

This strictness aims to make Party members and cadres hold themselves to higher standards than the public, he said.

Fighting corruption

Sergey Suverov, an associate professor at the Financial University under the Government of Russian Federation, said like any other country, corruption is a big drag on China's economic growth. It is very important, therefore, that Chinese authorities have consistently and decisively fought this evil, he said.

"We have observed that the CPC is conducting a ruthless fight against corruption, which is deeply respected. It will increase the pace and quality of economic growth and increase confidence in officials," he said.

James Gomez, regional director at the Asia Centre think tank, said anti-corruption measures are important, and any efforts to eradicate corruption by and within the CPC will be welcomed both locally and internationally.

Oleg Timofeev, an associate professor at Russian RUDN University, said over the past decade the CPC has made great achievements in its crackdown on corruption. The fight against graft has become one of the core elements of China's political system.

He said the activities and results achieved by the National Commission of Supervision, China's highest-level anti-corruption body, are being researched all over the world.

In March, Timofeev was invited to the Great Hall of the People in Beijing to participate in the Second Plenary Session of the 14th National People's Congress of China when the president of the Supreme People's Court, Zhang Jun, delivered a plenary report. "I witnessed the real enthusiasm of usually restrained Chinese legislators and a burst of applause every time the chief justice's report tackled the fight against corruption," he said.

He added he was sure the newly launched CPC discipline education campaign would double the government's efforts in the war against corruption, and accelerate the development of law-based governance structures needed for the nation's social and economic prosperity.

Tough challenge

Sourabh Gupta, a senior fellow at the Washington-based Institute for China-American Studies, said corruption is a "tax" on law-abiding citizen.

In developing countries, where incomes are modest, corruption is a key factor in deepening inequalities.

Reining in corruption is an arduous challenge, which is why disciplinary inspection and supervision need high-level support, as is the case currently in China, he added.

Ky Sereyvath, director-general of the Institute of China Studies at the Royal Academy of Cambodia, said since Xi took over as president, China has tackled corruption and also reduced unnecessary government expenditure.

The government has used funds more efficiently, especially in the construction of highways, roads, and other infrastructure, and also provides some funds for projects in countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative.

In recent years, China has helped strengthen global anti-corruption governance. In October, China announced that it would hold anti-corruption workshops for BRI partner countries, and train more than 300 graft fighters in Asia, Africa and Latin America within five years.

Chheang Vannarith said it's critical for countries to keep fighting corruption and building a strong government as geopolitical competition is also a competition between different governance models.

The question of which government remains strong and resilient is what will be important in the future, he added.

Chheang Vannarith said China is at the next phase of fighting corruption through disciplinary measures. This will be strongly emphasized by the CPC in the next 4 to 5 years, as it is the right time to strengthen the Party and good governance.

China will see intensive domestic reforms with anti-corruption at the top of the agenda, he said. If the reforms can be achieved, China will be a much more resilient nation.

"When you have a resilient nation, even when there's a storm outside China can stand firmly on its own feet," he said.

Yifan Xu in Washington, May Zhou in Houston, Yang Wanli in Bangkok contributed to this story.

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TOP NEWS

Tears of joy

Sumo wrestlers hold toddlers aloft during the "crying baby sumo" contest on Sunday at Sensoji temple in Tokyo, Japan. At the event, the wrestlers along with a referee try to make the babies cry, as the cries are said to be a sign of good health. The first cries determine which baby is the winner.

PHILIP FONG / AFP



Fulfilling pledges vital for US to sustain links

Amid frank, constructive interactions, five-point consensus reached

By ZHANG YUNBI

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Honoring commitments is key for the United States to stabilize relations with China in the near future, and forming a proper perception of China will be needed to make the interactions sustainable, observers said.

They made the remarks as US Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrapped up his second visit to China in his current post on Friday.

Yang Tao, director-general of the Foreign Ministry's Department of North American and Oceanian Affairs, held a media briefing about the trip on Friday evening, and he defined the latest round of official interactions as "frank, substantive and constructive".

During the three-day trip, which started on Wednesday, China made its position clear to the US on major topics involving Beijing's core concerns, such as strategic perceptions of China, the Taiwan question, trade, science and technology, the South China Sea and the US' "Indo-Pacific Strategy", according to Yang.

President Xi Jinping met with Blinken in a courtesy meeting on Friday afternoon.

The talks between Foreign Minister Wang Yi and Blinken earlier on Friday lasted for five-and-a-half hours.



However, some die-hard issues remain, as Washington has yet to change its fundamental perception of China as a rival. Its policy framework of holding back China has not changed, so it is true to its practice of aligning with allies to contain China."

Wu Xinbo, dean of Fudan University's Institute of International Studies

The two sides reached a five-point consensus, including maintaining high-level exchanges and contacts at all levels, and announced that the first meeting of the China-US Intergovernmental Dialogue on Artificial Intelligence will be held.

Beijing and Washington also agreed to take measures to expand people-to-people exchanges between the two countries and to welcome students coming to each country for studies.

Wu Xinbo, dean of Fudan University's Institute of International Studies, noted that during the 10 months since Blinken's trip to China in June last year, the two sides have achieved progress in areas including high-level interactions and expanding mutual visits by ordinary people.

"However, some die-hard issues remain, as Washington has yet to change its fundamental perception of China as a rival. Its policy framework of holding back China has not changed, so it is true to its practice of aligning with allies to contain China," he said.

"The relationship is more stable compared with a year ago, but it is still vulnerable," he added.

During his meeting with Blinken, President Xi said that while each side can have its friends and partners, "it should not target, oppose or harm the other".

He added that the two countries should uphold their responsibility for world peace, provide the world with public goods, and play a positive role in promoting global unity.

Su Xiaohui, deputy director of the Department of American Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, said, "Following the latest strategic communications achieved in Beijing, realizing the fresh consensus will be key for the relations in the near future, and Washington should

honor the consensus with more tangible sincerity.

"The message sent by Xi is clear about what the two countries should and should not do. If both sides succeed in following the advice, we will see a series of positive effects taking the relations further back on track and fostering mutual benefits," she said.

While the US has been behind the recent ups and downs in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, "Washington is also worried about the prospect that the China-US ties may spiral out of control and the two nations may be dragged into a major confrontation", she added.

Following the summit between the two heads of state in San Francisco in November, the two sides have carried out a series of important dialogues at various levels and in various fields, including a visit to China by US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen earlier this month.

In addition, San Francisco Mayor London Breed visited China from April 13 to 21, visiting five cities — Hong Kong, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, Beijing and Shanghai — in search of more opportunities for cooperation.

Diao Daming, a professor of US studies at Renmin University of China's School of International Relations, said, "As for Washington, great credibility is a viable path to make sure Blinken's China trip will not end up being in vain."

Forming a proper perception of China means that the US should realize "China's growth is good news and a great opportunity for the whole world's lasting development", Diao said.

"Also, it should be aware of the fact that it is a natural trend for China to achieve its growth, which will not be disrupted by any external factors," he added.

Two giant pandas will be sent to San Diego Zoo

By YAN DONGJIE

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China will send giant pandas Yun Chuan and Xin Bao to the San Diego Zoo in the United States, heralding a new 10-year round of international conservation partnership.

In line with an agreement for giant panda conservation signed earlier this month by the China Wildlife Conservation Association and the San Diego Zoo in California, both parties are making preparations for the pandas' journey, according to the association.

China has selected Yun Chuan, a male, and Xin Bao, a female, from the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda in Sichuan province, and has arranged for experienced caretakers and veterinarians to accompany them to the US.

The San Diego Zoo is renovating and upgrading the panda facilities to provide a larger and more comfortable living environment. Additionally, the zoo has assembled a professional team with expertise in panda care, daily nursing and related scientific research, acquired through study and exchange programs in China.

To ensure the well-being of the giant pandas, experts from the China Wildlife Conservation Association traveled to the US in March for in-depth discussions and technical exchanges with the San Diego Zoo.

Li Desheng, deputy director of the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda, said: "Giant pandas are important envoys for peaceful and friendly exchanges. As far as I know, wherever the giant pandas go, they are especially loved by the local people. Giant pandas can greatly facilitate communication between peoples and let people around the world know China better. There is also much collaboration in the field of animal conservation."

The cooperation between the China Wildlife Conservation Association

and the zoo dates back to 1996, when Bai Yun and Shi Shi from the research center became the first pair of pandas to live in the zoo.

Giant pandas Hua Mei, born in 1999, and Mei Sheng, born in 2003, who formerly lived at the San Diego Zoo, are not only the result of China-US giant panda research cooperation, but also are adorable ambassadors promoting friendly exchanges between the two countries, the conservation association said. They have also made a positive contribution to enhancing friendship between the peoples of China and the US, it added.

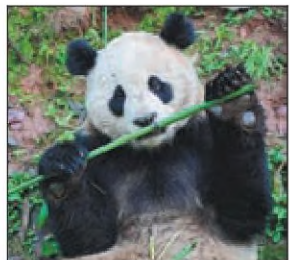
Over the past two decades, the two sides have cooperated and solved a series of technical challenges, including important discoveries in key areas such as panda breeding, habitat protection and panda supplemental nutrition, according to the association.

Since the 1990s, China has collaborated on giant panda conservation with 26 institutions in 20 countries, including Spain, Japan and France.

On Monday, giant pandas Jin Xi and Zhu Yu are scheduled to depart for the Madrid Zoo in Spain, beginning a 10-year stay, the China Wildlife Conservation Association announced earlier.

"International cooperation in fields such as disease prevention and control, treatment, and wild training and reintroduction to the wild, has achieved good results," said Li, the deputy director of the conservation and research center. "Scientific and educational outreach also serves as an important function of international giant panda exchanges, allowing more people to understand giant pandas, which provides very good support for our efforts in protecting wild giant pandas," Li said.

Since giant pandas are a national treasure of China, "we are very willing to share our experience in giant panda conservation and research," he added.



A pair of giant pandas, female Xin Bao (left) and male Yun Chuan, have been selected for relocation to the San Diego Zoo in the United States as part of a 10-year international cooperation project for giant panda conservation. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Protests: More schools turn to police

From page 1

"We want UCLA to divest from corporations that are profiting from the genocide in Gaza ... we are trying to get UCLA to divest because UCLA has blood on its hands," Kaia Shah, a 2023 UCLA graduate, told the Los Angeles Times.

"The Jewish students at UCLA are brilliant and resilient and they're proud and they're loud," Dan Gold,

executive director of the Hillel at UCLA, told demonstrators from the pro-Israeli stage Sunday, the Times reported.

In the past two weeks, pro-Palestinian protests have spread to college campuses across the United States.

The proliferation started with the mass arrest of more than 100 people at Columbia University in New York more than a week ago, when the school's president asked the New

York Police Department to enter the campus to dismantle tents set up by the protesters on the main lawn.

Representative Jared Moskowitz, a Florida Democrat, recently visited the campus in Manhattan with several other Jewish lawmakers, The New York Times reported.

He said some in the Democratic Party were downplaying the tone of some of the demonstrations.

"There are people who are peaceful,

and there are not," he said. "But there's a denial from my friends on the left," a view that "everyone's peaceful, there's no antisemitism."

Administrators, including those at Columbia, have said the unauthorized protests have broken school rules, disrupted learning and have led to harassment and antisemitism.

At the University of Southern California (USC) in Los Angeles, there was a heavy police presence over the weekend. The university announced last week that it would cancel its main graduation ceremony for security purposes.

On the USC campus, the words "Say No to Genocide" were spray-painted Saturday on the Tommy Trojan statue, named for the school's mascot.

Earlier this month, USC, citing safety reasons, called off the valedictory speech by a Muslim student, who said she was being silenced.

At Emory University in Atlanta last week, two professors were among 28 people arrested, with one — economics professor economics professor Caroline Fohlin — being forcefully taken to the ground by police, in widely viewed video posted to social media.

Another faculty member, Noelle

McAfee, chair of the philosophy department, is shown being led away by Atlanta police.

The Council on American-Islamic Relations chapter in Georgia on Thursday condemned the "use of force" in the campus arrests.

"Protesters shared a day of cultural learning and community despite which Emory deployed excessive use of force, tear gas, and rubber bullets," the organization said in a statement, CNN reported.

Agencies contributed to this story.

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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.

Vol. 38 — No.1324

Ties: Infrastructure projects generating many jobs

From page 1

people's everyday life in these countries. The quantitative dimension is important: until 2023, more than 250 Chinese infrastructure projects have generated almost 800,000 jobs in LAC. Hundreds of millions of LAC's inhabitants are using ports, airports, highways, subways, and Wi-Fi networks that have been constructed under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.

Chinese companies have been realizing infrastructure projects in LAC countries, while LAC public and private institutions have also "normalized" their understanding with Chinese enterprises through these infrastructure projects and other transactions. Beyond this

direct learning process, at least two aspects of Chinese infrastructure projects in LAC are important. First, Chinese infrastructure projects in LAC have diversified importantly throughout the 21st century, particularly by country and sector. As a result, Chinese infrastructure projects have increased their presence in countries such as Argentina, Chile, Mexico, and Peru, in addition to Brazil, still the most important recipient of Chinese infrastructure projects.

The sectorial diversification is also substantial: since the early 21st century Chinese investments were concentrated in fossil energy, more recently, they have become significant in transportation (including ports, airports, and highways); even within the

energy sector, Chinese infrastructure projects have gone beyond fossil energy infrastructure. Second, Chinese infrastructure projects are importantly changing full "landscapes" in LAC: as discussed in the aforementioned book, Cosco's investment in Chancay Port in Peru and the State Grid Corporation's high-tech contribution in energy distribution in Brazil are not only affecting everyday life in the region, but generating positive effects in terms of employment and environment.

China's increasing presence in LAC is impacting the quality of everyday life of hundreds of millions of people. That means that Chinese companies have to be aware of the importance of their

products and services. With an increasing proportion of LAC's population confronted with a new wave of Chinese immigration and massive Chinese infrastructure projects, Chinese companies must respond by upping their game. Most regional and bilateral LAC-China institutions, so far, are not aware of this new stage and level of the LAC-China relationship. But this issue needs to be top of the agenda to underpin long-term China-LAC relations.

The author is a professor at the National Autonomous University of Mexico and coordinator of the university's Center for Chinese-Mexican Studies. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

BUSINESS

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Brain-machine integration spawns global biz race

China, US seek lead in emerging industry with Chinese firms wrestling early edge

By CHENG YU chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

In Hangzhou, Zhejiang province, a 38-year-old tech firm worker, who was dealt a cruel hand by life in the form of a car accident that took both his arms, is realizing life could also create marvels, by way of high-tech — in his case, an intelligent bionic hand that breathed new life into his residual limb. Using his mind, he controls the movement of his artificial fingers, grips and dips a brush into ink and elegantly inscribes four Chinese characters on a piece of paper.

The four Chinese characters mean luck and hope — many people would agree with the techie. The brain-computer interface, or BCI, technology, which controls the brain through mind and blurs the lines between humans and machines, promises technological innovation where the mind knows no bounds.

China, propelled by both the government and the private sector, is off the blocks in the global BCI race, trailing only the United States in certain segments. Chinese BCI firms are sharpening focus on both invasive and noninvasive niches of the emerging industry while the authorities concerned are seeking to get a grip on the formulation of regulatory rules.

The bionic hand was developed by BrainCo, a startup incubated at Harvard University and founded by Chinese engineer Han Bicheng. It was previously used by para-athlete Xu Jialing, the torch-bearer at the opening ceremony of the 4th Asian Para Games in Hangzhou last year.

BrainCo uses BCI technology in its bionic arm and couples it with a bracelet-like array of electrode sensors on one's arm, enabling users to use their mind to interpret electromyographic neural signals and next execute actions like clenching fists, opening palms or even giving a thumbs-up.

More than 100 Chinese companies like BrainCo are seeking to excel in the BCI industry. According to a report from the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, a government think tank, the trend in China is similar to the one in the US.

The US and China together accounted for two-thirds of the total 500 representative BCI companies in the world as of the end of the first quarter, meaning that both countries have a "sound foundation" for leading the industry in the future, the report said.

Another report from the China Electronics Technology Standardization Institute stated that the sales revenue of the global BCI market is expected to reach \$3.7 billion by 2027. By 2040, the corresponding figure for China's BCI industry is expected to exceed 120 billion yuan (\$16.9 billion), including sales of related equipment, which are expected to exceed 50 billion yuan.

Gao Xiaorong, a tenured professor at Tsinghua University, said: "The ultimate goal of BCI development is to realize full integration of human brain and machine as one organic whole. As both China and the US are striving to drive progress in the BCI



A visitor shakes hands with a staff member equipped with bionic hands enabled by brain-computer interface during an expo in Shanghai. FANG ZHE / XINHUA



A visitor tries a brain-computer interface device during the China International Fair for Trade in Services in Beijing last year. LI XIN / XINHUA



A visitor looks at brain-computer integration rehabilitation equipment on display during an expo in Beijing. LI XIN / XINHUA

US counterparts are more advanced in invasive ones."

In invasive BCI, the sensors are implanted inside the brain in order to increase the information that is being extracted. In contrast, noninvasive BCI is relatively safer and easy to implement but has limited capacity in replacing or enhancing the lost bodily functions, Gao said.

Earlier this year, preeminent entrepreneur Elon Musk said his firm Neuralink had implanted a device in a human for the first time, with the patient recovering well and showing promising neuron spike detection, which sent ripples through the industry.

The move followed Neuralink's announcement in May last year that the US Food and Drug Administration had given the green light to the world's first in-human clinical trial — a huge step forward in BCI development.

But the way forward and the race to the future have to be tempered with caution, said He Jianghong, a renowned expert in neurosurgery at Beijing Tiantan Hospital. Safety issues should be given special attention during the BCI technology's development, he said.

"Attention should be paid to track whether a BCI device can be safely put into operation and become compatible for a long time, and whether it will cause direct damage such as infections, bleeding or other problems to users.

"Also, once this technology is widely applied, it will inevitably collect data like a large number of human brain signals, thus potentially raising privacy concerns."

So, it is important that China and other countries should address ethical issues and take precautions so that the BCI industry can develop in a healthy way, He said.

technology, the goal is likely to be achieved over the next 50 years."

Hexi Yujin, partner and senior vice-president of BrainCo, said: "It is such technological innovation that propels industrial innovation, thus ultimately transforming into new quality productive forces for the industry."

She said BrainCo has developed a series of BCI technology applications, including bionic hands, sleep aids and stress relievers that promote mindfulness, which have all entered mass production.

"We are the first in the industry to achieve mass production of BCI products, with over 100,000 units of high-precision single-item brain-machine interfaces, which means we are able to control the cost of such frontier technology and make it more accessible."

At the Zhongguancun Forum, a tech event in Beijing last week, the

national capital released an action plan on BCI and proposed a series of targeted measures that aim to drive the development of the BCI industry.

BCI has also been listed as one of China's top 10 iconic products of future-oriented industries in an opinion-based list compiled by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology and six other ministries last year.

The list made it clear that accelerated efforts will be made for breakthroughs in BCI, to develop key technologies and core devices such as BCI chips and neural models, a number of easy-to-use and safe BCI products, and encourage exploration of applications in fields such as medical rehabilitation, driverless driving and virtual reality.

In February, a Chinese clinical team from Xuanwu Hospital implanted a wireless processor into

the brain of a paralyzed man. This helped him to recover his motor skills. Now, he can drink a bottle of water on his own — one of his many abilities that have been restored.

Zhao Guoguang, a professor at Xuanwu Hospital, said the move marked an important step for China on BCI applications, which will hopefully help patients with brain diseases related to spinal cord injury and epilepsy to recover, and offers the possibility of realizing fusion of brain-computer intelligence.

The patient, who received the implant in a clinical trial in October 2023, had suffered a complete spinal cord injury in a car mishap. He had been a quadriplegic, or paralyzed in all four limbs, for 14 years.

After three months of home training, the patient is now capable of fetching a bottle of water on his own via an air-filled glove driven by brain waves, with his grasping accuracy

rate exceeding 90 percent.

The implantable device, called Neural Electronic Opportunity, was developed by a group of scientists from Tsinghua University. Its internal part is powered by the external part through the scalp, and it receives neural signals before transmitting them to a computer or cellphone.

Zhao, however, also admitted, "There is still a certain way to go for BCI's large-scale application in the country, and future research will be conducted on device stability and functionality."

Gao from Tsinghua University said: "The current Chinese market is dominated by noninvasive BCI companies, accounting for more than 85 percent, involving education, entertainment and other industries, while invasive brain-computer interface devices are mainly in the medical industry. The

Where free will, mental privacy inform protection of 'neuro rights'

REPORTER'S LOG
By Cheng Yu

Both China and the United States are driving the brain control tech, giving the sci-fi-like field dimensions of reality. Not surprisingly, there are concerns on who will protect the extremely sensitive data that will emerge on consumers' brain functions and responses.

A potential nightmare scenario, for example, could be where some-

one exploits a security loophole in brain-computer interface products and steals highly personal data, while also inserting harmful malware in the system.

What if BCI users end up with a device that doesn't function or, worse, makes them vulnerable to mind-reading, or even mind-control, by others?

Experts have therefore stressed that security and ethical issues should be dealt with before going full speed ahead with wide-ranging applications and commercialization of the BCI tech.

China appears to be aware of the overall situation and has already ini-

tiated action on how to regulate the emerging industry to ensure its healthy development. It has issued a guidance earlier this year on BCI research and a guide on the conduct of research and risk prevention in research and applications of the technology.

The guidance, developed by the Artificial Intelligence Ethics Subcommittee of the National Science and Technology Ethics Committee, outlined six basic principles for researchers and institutions.

The first principle emphasized that BCI research should be "moderate and harmless", with the fundamental purpose of "assisting,

enhancing, repairing human's sensory and motor functions, or improving human-computer interaction capabilities, to enhance human health and welfare."

Research should ensure conduct of ethical and data security reviews of plans and results and promote risk monitoring throughout the process to protect participants' safety, privacy, data security and legal rights.

Hexi Yujin, partner and senior vice-president of BrainCo, a Harvard University-backed BCI startup, said: "In terms of data protection, companies now obtain data with the informed consent of users and all data have been desensitized, which

means key personal data have been wiped out.

"Companies are also regulated to only use such data for modeling to satisfy users and cannot use the data for any other purposes."

Domain experts stress that while the frontier technology offers unprecedented benefits to both consumers and businesses, it is equally important that it shouldn't be abused for commercial benefits.

Currently, the BCI technology can only recognize specific instructions and cannot yet "read minds". Duan Weiwei, a senior researcher at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, said: "If, one day, the brain-comput-

er interface develops to the level of deep interaction with the brain, then we must define what can be done and what cannot be done.

"Therefore, it's very necessary to prompt stakeholder groups to conduct extensive discussions on issues such as neural data and mental privacy that may be involved in brain-computer interfaces, and to formulate corresponding technical standards, norms and ethical principles, and establish dedicated supervision, compliance and ethical review mechanisms."

At the end of the day, if BCI technology can really help read minds, maybe the world will regard "neuro rights" as basic human rights and advocate the inclusion of free will and mental privacy within the scope of human rights protection.

BUSINESS



Brazil-based pulp producer Suzano exhibits its products and solutions at the 6th China International Import Expo in Shanghai in November. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Suzano upbeat about growth potential in Chinese market

Pulp firm introduces trial trade of its products in RMB to enhance presence

By CHENG YU
chengyu@chinadaily.com.cn

Brazil-based world's leading pulp producer Suzano is confident about the growth prospects of the Chinese market and has introduced a trial trade of its products in renminbi in order to strike deep roots in the country, the company's global CEO told China Daily.

"Our confidence is that China is preparing even more for the future," said Walter Schalka, CEO of Suzano. "We already made a trial to trade our product in renminbi, as we strive to be more localized to serve our customers here."

Schalka said he sees a good correlation between the company's business and China's GDP growth. The Chinese economy grew 5.2 percent year-on-year last year and has set a target to grow 5 percent this year.

"Together with the steady economic growth, the company's pulp business grew 6.6 percent last year in the Chinese market," he said.

"China now represents roughly



Walter Schalka

40 percent of our total exports. Suzano is exporting to over 100 different countries around the globe, but China is by far the most relevant market for us," Schalka said, adding that this percentage is "steadily growing" every year.

Schalka disclosed that the company had already gained some orders at the beginning of this year and is confident that the order book will keep growing.

He made the remarks as the Brazilian company celebrated its 100th anniversary with Chinese stakeholders in Shanghai late last month. During the celebration, the company reinforced its commitment to further expanding in the Chinese market, and called on its local stakeholders to work together to shape the future.

Schalka said: "The Chinese market

is very dynamic and has been growing, but we see even more potential for growth for the coming years."

"The per capita consumption in the tissue business in China has been growing steadily. It's still below certain Western regions such as Europe and the United States. There is an opportunity for us, as we are seeing higher GDP growth opportunity to keep enhancing and increasing per capita consumption," he said.

In March, Suzano signed two strategic partnership frameworks, one with the China-UK Low Carbon College of Shanghai Jiao Tong University, and the other with its business partners. This constitutes an important part of Suzano's new global initiative of investing \$100 million in the coming years to strengthen innovation and sustainability practices across all regions.

"Innovation is part of our DNA," Schalka said. "We set our innovation hub in Shanghai last year and the idea is to work not only with our customers to enhance their competitiveness, but to look for alternatives to use biomaterials for the future as well."

Schalka believes such innovative efforts are in line with the country's

focus on developing new quality productive forces.

"It appears to me as a shift toward innovation-driven growth, with a focus on advanced productivity that moves away from traditional economic models. Strategic emerging industries and industries of the future are seen as key drivers of the new quality productive forces," he said.

"These industries include biotechnology, new energies, new materials and environmental protection, all industries that will contribute not only to growth, but to ensure high-quality growth and healthy development of society in harmony with nature," he added.

In the long run, China's ongoing new round of technology revolution and industrial transformation, in response to its transition from high-speed to high-quality growth, is expected to unleash its inherent growth potential and inject new impetus into the high-quality development of the Chinese economy, he said.

"Companies aligned with the new quality productive forces and promoting high-quality development, such as Suzano, will continue to thrive in China," he added.

German firms target digitalized, decarbonized future

NANJING — Two robotic arms work closely together to solve a Rubik's Cube, demonstrating the translation of natural language into machine language to solve manufacturing problems.

This collaborative robot is located at the Siemens Yangtze River Delta AI Lab, which opened in May last year in Suzhou, East China's Jiangsu province.

The lab focuses on showcasing Siemens' innovations and applications in areas such as AI and big data, aiming to strengthen cooperation and accelerate the digital transformation of enterprises in the Yangtze River Delta region.

In recent years, there has been strong demand for the digital transformation of Chinese enterprises in various industries. Digital technologies, such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing, and the internet of things, continue to advance, creating economic growth points and cooperation potential for international digital service providers.

The opening of the lab is one of Siemens' steps in the digitalization process in China.

The digital factory of Siemens in Chengdu, Southwest China's Sichuan province, was declared a "Sustainability Lighthouse" by the World Economic Forum last year for its comprehensive digital energy system. Since 2019, the factory has reduced energy consumption per unit product by 24 percent while increasing production by 92 percent through the establishment of a comprehensive digital energy system.

At Siemens Numerical Control Ltd, a new factory in Nanjing, capital of Jiangsu, that began operations in 2022, digitized and automated equipment and systems enable it to increase productivity by 20 percent and volume flexibility by 30 percent compared to the original plants and production lines.

In addition to improving digitalization itself, Siemens is promoting digital transformation cooperation with local companies. During 2023, Siemens cooperated with six Chinese companies to accelerate the intelligent digital transformation process.

This March, Siemens Advanta Consulting, focusing on end-to-end digitalization services, signed an agreement with Suzhou New District to establish its China headquarters in Suzhou.

Roland Busch, president and CEO of Siemens AG, views China as a country with a high acceptance and use of digital technology, a large number of small and medium-sized enterprises, and an urgent need for digital transformation. It could become a leading market for driving global industri-



We ... are also incorporating the environmental, social and governance standards into considerations for upstream and downstream value chain cooperation."

Guo Huaying, senior manager of Knorr-Bremse CVS China

al digitalization, which is very attractive for digitalization solution providers like Siemens.

Led by dual-carbon goals, China's green and low-carbon industry has made great progress in recent years, providing technology development opportunities for multinational corporations.

Eying opportunities in China's new-energy vehicles industry, German auto supplier Schaeffler inaugurated the second phase of its factory in Taicang of Jiangsu in November last year, and signed an agreement for the third-phase project, with an investment of 1.5 billion yuan (\$207 million).

While seeking opportunities for green economy development, German companies are also implementing low-carbon production requirements in their supply chain cooperation strategies.

"We are not only gradually promoting low-carbon production ourselves, but are also incorporating the environmental, social and governance standards into considerations for upstream and downstream value chain cooperation," said Guo Huaying, senior manager of Knorr-Bremse CVS China.

By 2030, the company's carbon emissions are expected to be reduced by 75 percent compared to 2018, while a 25 percent reduction target has been set for upstream and downstream industry chain-related areas.

China's economy is accelerating its transformation driven by digitalization and decarbonization, releasing new vitality for development and bringing new growth potential for foreign investors.

The Business Confidence Survey 2023/24 released by the German Chamber of Commerce in China in January shows that more than 90 percent of the surveyed German enterprises plan to continue doing business in the country, and more than half plan to increase investment in China.

XINHUA

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BUSINESSINSIGHT

China's economy on stable, positive trajectory

EAGLE EYE
By Lian Ping, Liu Tao
and Ma Hong

Supported by coordinated macroeconomic policies, China's economy achieved a strong start in the first quarter of 2024, demonstrating a stable and positive trajectory.

As the second quarter unfolds, the international economic environment continues to be marked by complexity and uncertainty.

The possibility of a postponement in interest rate cuts by the US Federal Reserve looms. Factors such as stronger-than-expected economic growth in the United States and a slowdown in the pace of inflation might lead the Fed to defer the anticipated rate cuts at the end of the second quarter, potentially reducing the magnitude of the cuts as well.

Increased volatility is expected in international financial markets. The rise in US bond yields places equity markets at risk of a downturn, raising concerns of a potential correction in US stocks. The US dollar is anticipated to receive robust support, putting continued pressure on other key currencies. Though short-term pressure is anticipated with respect to gold prices, there is the possibility of a rebound in the medium term.

Cross-border capital flows are projected to gradually return to emerging markets, with those in Asia expected to experience pronounced net inflows. This trend signifies renewed investor confidence in these markets, driven by factors such as attractive growth prospects, favorable demographics, and ongoing structural reforms in certain economies.

As reflected in the progress of fiscal policy in the first quarter, China had taken the comprehensive approach of appropriately enhancing the intensity and strengthening the effectiveness. In the second quarter, multiple measures will be implemented to ensure a reasonable expansion of fiscal policy.

These measures include the effective implementation of structural tax cuts and fee reductions, increased support for industrial transformation and upgrade, and enhanced expenditure in the livelihood sector.

The accelerated pace of local government bond issuance and the timely launch of 1 trillion yuan (\$138 billion) in ultra-long-term special government bonds are particularly significant. It is expected that the issuance of local government bonds, especially new special bonds, will accelerate between April and May.

Based on historical experience, there is a higher possibility that special government bonds will be issued in the third quarter. However, it cannot be ruled out that, in order to quickly generate physical workloads, the issuance may begin late in the second quarter.

In the first quarter, China's monetary policy effectively played a dual role of managing overall liquidity and promoting structural adjustments, releasing a series of unexpectedly accommodative signals. In the second quarter and the latter half of the year, the stance of monetary policy will remain prudently accommodative, aiming to create a favorable monetary and financial environment for the continued improvement of the economy.

There is a possibility of further reserve requirement ratio cuts in the second quarter or later in the year, with targeted reductions being the primary approach. It is expected



CAI MENG / CHINA DAILY

that the second reduction in the RRR could be more focused on specific sectors or institutions. Additionally, there is room for a decrease of 10-20 basis points in the medium-term lending facility rate, and the loan prime rate may also be adjusted accordingly.

In addition to traditional measures, structural monetary policy tools such as promoting technological innovation and facilitating technological transformation through relending will be comprehensively utilized. These tools will enhance guidance and incentives for financial institutions, promoting the flow of credit to key sectors and supporting the structural adjustments needed for sustainable growth.

Coordinated steps

Close coordination and cooperation with fiscal policy will be strengthened to ensure the smooth issuance of government bonds. This is aimed at maintaining stability in the bond market and facilitating the financing needs of the government while ensuring favorable borrowing costs.

As the economy continues to recover, leading to improved employment conditions and an increase in consumption scenarios, domestic demand is playing a pivotal role in driving consumption recovery.

The sustained rebound in domestic demand is being propelled by the growth of infrastructure investment, manufacturing sector investment, and the stabilization and recovery of real estate investment. Investment will continue to contribute to stable economic growth, with an accelerated contribution to GDP.

Improved external demand, advantages across the entire industry chain, and ongoing structural transformations and upgrades in exports will continue to support a positive export performance.

It is projected that GDP growth will reach around 4.5 percent in the second quarter. With the effective implementation of relevant policies, there is room for the economy to surpass expectations and

achieve a rebound in growth over the next three quarters.

Consumer spending is expected to grow by 7.4 percent in 2024, contributing to some 50 percent of GDP. Capital formation is projected to increase by 3.8 percent, contributing to around 35 percent of GDP. Net exports are forecast to grow by 2 percent, contributing to about 15 percent of GDP. Overall, the annual GDP growth is expected to be around 5.3 percent.

Following the second quarter, investments in infrastructure and the manufacturing sector are expected to maintain high growth rates, while the decline in real estate investment will narrow. These factors combined will contribute to the sustained growth of fixed-asset investment.

With the effects of countercyclical policies becoming evident, strong fiscal support, and an abundance of major projects, infrastructure investment will play a significant role in stabilizing the economy.

The demand for technological upgrades, improved operating conditions for private enterprises, recovering external demand, the onset of a restocking cycle in China and the United States, and robust policy and financial support will enable manufacturing sector investment to maintain rapid growth, surpassing pre-pandemic levels and strengthening its role in promoting stable economic growth.

It is projected that fixed-asset investment will grow by 4.5 percent year-on-year in the second quarter, with infrastructure investment increasing by 7 percent and manufacturing sector investment growing by 9.5 percent.

For the full year, fixed-asset investment is expected to grow by 6 percent year-on-year, with infrastructure investment and manufacturing sector investment growing by 7 percent and 10 percent, respectively.

In the second quarter, as the employment situation gradually improves and household incomes steadily increase, consumers will gain more confidence and purchasing power. The stabilization of the real

estate market typically has a positive effect on related consumption, as homeowners feel more secure about their assets and will be more willing to spend on home-related products and services.

The strong performance of the automobile industry and robust sales indicate that consumers are confident in making big-ticket purchases. This trend is further supported by policies promoting trade-ins for old vehicles, which will have a positive impact on consumer spending.

Additionally, the services sector is experiencing fast growth, driven by increased demand for dining, travel, entertainment and other leisure activities.

The recovery of consumer price indexes is also contributing to an increase in prices of consumer goods, which could stimulate consumption as consumers may opt to make purchases before prices rise further.

It is projected that in the second quarter, the retail sales of consumer goods will grow by 4 percent. The combined effect of these policies could generate an additional consumption increment of around 350 to 400 billion yuan for automobiles and household appliances, contributing to a 0.7 percentage point increase in the year-on-year growth rate of total retail sales of consumer goods in 2024, reaching 6.2 percent.

Following the second quarter, exports are expected to surpass expectations with a positive growth outlook. Overall, external demand continues to gradually recover.

The cyclical recovery in the real estate market and the onset of restocking cycles have strengthened the momentum of recovery of the US manufacturing sector. Demand from emerging economies remains robust.

Internally, the advantages of the entire industry chain, strong production capacity, optimized export structure and a low base year provide support for exports.

Import growth has shown a slight improvement.

Domestic demand remains stable, with consumption steadily recovering and infra-

structure and manufacturing sector investments maintaining rapid growth. As the economy continues to recover and China persists in its strategy to expand imports, demand may further recover compared to 2023.

Policy support

In dollar terms, exports are projected to grow by 3 percent year-on-year in the second quarter, while imports are expected to grow by 1 percent. For the entire year, exports are forecast to grow by 2.5 percent year-on-year, with imports increasing by 0.5 percent.

During the first quarter, the real estate market remained in a bottoming-out phase, with concerns still looming over the risks faced by real estate developers. The growth rate of housing credit and off-balance-sheet financing from non-banking institutions continued to decline, while the land market contracted, and the downtrend in real estate investment continued.

Looking ahead to the second quarter, as the high base effect gradually dissipates, housing support policies are expected to take further effect, driving marginal improvements in key indicators such as real estate sales and new construction.

It is projected that real estate development investment will decline by around 9 percent year-on-year in the second quarter, narrowing the decline by 0.5 percentage points compared to the end of the first quarter.

During the first quarter, the overall prices remained at a low level, with the tailing effect contributing to a slight decline in the consumer price index, while the producer price index was dragged down by the decrease in prices of construction materials related to the real estate sector. However, in the second quarter, the price level is expected to gradually rise from the low position.

By the end of the second quarter, it is projected that the CPI will rise to 0.3 percent year-on-year, and the PPI will dip 1.5 percent year-on-year. The price gap between CPI and PPI will narrow to 1.8 percentage points, indicating a relief in downward pressure on prices.

Entering 2024, the US dollar index has displayed considerable resilience, experiencing several phases of rebound, leading to a tug-of-war situation between other key currencies such as the Chinese yuan and the US dollar.

In the medium to long term, relative changes between the economies of China and the US in terms of monetary policy, growth trajectory, price levels and international balance of payments will drive a weakening of the US dollar and a strengthening of the Chinese yuan.

However, in the short term, factors such as the delay in interest rate cuts by the Fed will continue to impact the exchange rate between the Chinese yuan and the US dollar, resulting in periodic fluctuations.

It is projected that in the second quarter, the midpoint of the Chinese yuan against the US dollar exchange rate will exhibit a two-way fluctuation within the range of 6.95 to 7.15, with a higher possibility of stability and a potential uptrend.

In the third quarter and beyond, as the Fed establishes a clear path for interest rate cuts and the Chinese economy further stabilizes and improves, the midpoint of the Chinese yuan against the US dollar exchange rate may continue to rise.

Lian Ping is a council member of the China Chief Economist Forum and head of the Guangkai Chief Industry Research Institute. Liu Tao is deputy head and Ma Hong is a researcher of the institute. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Consumer market overcomes COVID impact

MAIN STREET
By Daniel Zipser

As countries around the world continue to navigate the fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, China's economy has demonstrated resilience and adaptability. One of the most compelling developments has been the substantial increase in consumer spending, which fueled China's 5.2 percent GDP growth in 2023.

Data show that a staggering 83 percent of this growth stemmed from a surge in consumption, signaling China's gradual shift toward a consumption-driven economy. Retail sales in the first two months of 2024 show a healthy year-on-year increase of 5.5 percent, with goods contributing a 4.6 percent rise. Remarkably, food service sales leaped by 12.5 percent, indicating a robust recovery in hospitality sectors, possibly buoyed by increased consumer confidence and relaxation of any lingering pandemic restrictions.

A remarkable aspect of the recovery has been the rebound in air travel. Air passenger

numbers soared by an astounding 44.4 percent in early 2024. This upsurge is perhaps the most vivid indicator of renewed mobility and a resurgent appetite for travel and face-to-face business engagements, signaling that air travel has rebounded from the doldrums of the pandemic era.

International travel has particularly rebounded, reaching 77 percent of pre-COVID levels by early 2024. The spending patterns associated with this travel have shifted dramatically. Despite a stark reduction in the number of shoppers — a likely residue of the pandemic's impact — spending per person has surged.

According to data by Global Blue, average spending per Chinese traveler has substantially exceeded 2019 levels: 14 percent higher for those traveling to Italy, 20 percent higher for travelers to France, and a striking 117 percent and 64 percent higher spending per person for travelers to Japan and Singapore, respectively.

The automotive sector represents another promising area of growth in consumption. While overall auto sales grew by a very healthy 17 percent, during the first two months of the year electric vehicles outpaced this number with an impressive 37

percent surge, highlighting changes in consumer preference for greener alternatives.

EVs now represent 35.6 percent of China's total automotive market. The dominance of domestic brands in this segment is striking, with these brands capturing 84.5 percent of the market in 2023.

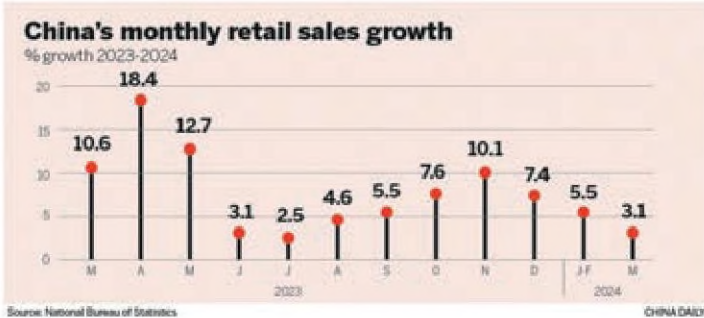
Areas of concern

While several macroeconomic indicators are pointing in a promising direction, there are also a number of areas that are still cause for concern, foremost of which is the continued slump in consumer and business sentiment. The collapse in property transactions in 2023 is a big factor behind the drop in confidence.

Lower sentiment levels drove the household savings rate to 31.7 percent in 2023, representing a significant reservoir of potential spending power should consumer confidence recover.

A 5 percent decline in exports in 2023, zero growth in fixed-asset investment by privately owned companies, and double-digit youth unemployment are other key factors driving a reduction in consumer spending and investment.

Nevertheless, the first few months of the



year paint a picture of a Chinese economy that is navigating the post-pandemic world with considerable momentum. While it's too early to accurately forecast how the remainder of the year will take shape, key macroeconomic and consumption indicators are heading in the right direction.

The significant resurgence in consumer spending, a robust recovery in travel and a substantial shift toward EVs are shaping China's post-pandemic economic landscape. These trends not only underscore the resilience of the Chinese economy but also reflect broader shifts in consumer preferences toward more sustainable and high-value products.

We also reaffirm our view that the era of double-digit growth is behind us, and companies will need to adjust their expectations accordingly to thrive in an increasingly competitive market. Success will require a more granular and targeted approach. Consumer marketers will need to focus their attention on identifying fast-growing consumer segments and product categories, while tapping into the ongoing shift in consumer preferences from products to services.

The writer is senior partner in McKinsey & Co's Shenzhen office, and leads McKinsey's Asia Consumer and Retail Practice. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

WORLD

Editor's note: As the People's Republic of China celebrates the 75th anniversary of its founding this year, China Daily asked prominent international figures to reflect on their relationship with the country and to talk of the direction in which they see it going.

CHINA LINK



By ZHENG WANYIN in London
zhengwanyin@mail.chinadailyuk.com

"I'd been totally ignorant of China, more or less, through my education," Alan Macfarlane says.

Yet the 83-year-old anthropologist is now committed to building a cultural bridge between China and the West, through the exchange of shared enjoyment of culture.

An example of his commitment is the fact that, in addition to his titles of emeritus professor of anthropological science at the University of Cambridge and life fellow of King's College, he is guardian of a granite stone standing on the bank of the River Cam that commemorates the Chinese poet Xu Zhimo.

Xu, who lived from 1897 to 1931, was an associate member of King's College for 18 months in the early 1920s. In 1928, he wrote his most famous poem, *Saying Goodbye to Cambridge Again*, which has been learned by millions of schoolchildren in China.

It was Macfarlane who set the stage for the installation of the stone, and who founded a poetry and art festival in the name of Xu that has brought together poets, literati, artists and scholars from around the world each year for the past 10 years, with the aim of promoting exchanges between East and West.

The festival is by no means Macfarlane's only project aimed at increasing understanding.

Cam Rivers Publishing, a company in Cambridge that Macfarlane co-founded with one of his Chinese students nine years ago, has been translating and publishing books by Chinese scholars in the United Kingdom and organizing exhibitions that feature influential local figures who have been deeply engaged with Chinese art, as well as hosting tea-tasting ceremonies that feature selections of fine Chinese teas.

Contemplating his journey, Macfarlane now realizes that one-third of his life has been centered on China, and he says he knew little about the country before he turned 50.

His China story began in 1996 when he first undertook a visit to the country.

Understanding people

"How is it possible to get to a closer understanding (of China)?" he says. "You can read as many books as you like about a place, but unless you actually go there, meet the people, you really don't get any strong impression."

Macfarlane's first visit to the country was essentially as a tourist, but as an anthropologist who had been preoccupied with England, Nepal and Japan, his curiosity was aroused by wanting to compare the models of different civilizations and observe the contrast between East and West, as well as similarities caused largely by China's heavy historical influence in eastern and southern Asia and the commonalities of mankind.

"I suddenly realized that the later part of my life would perhaps be devoted to understanding China," Macfarlane says.

When he returned in 2002 the country's transformation amazed him.

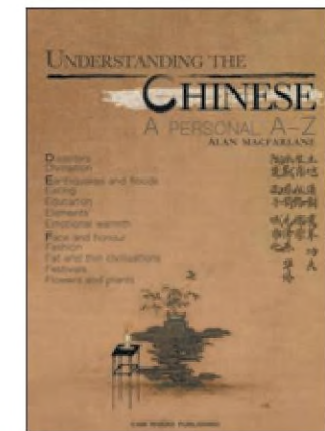
The reform and opening-up, which jump-started China becoming an economic powerhouse, had entered its 25th year of implementation. And in 2001 the country being granted admission to the World Trade Organization and Beijing being granted the right to host the 2008 Olympic Summer Games had brought the country forward, into the limelight.

"From then on our love of China and interest in it... blossomed."

The great changes were appealing to Macfarlane, drawing him back to further explore the land, and the following 17 years gave him and his wife, Sarah Harrison, opportunities to visit China nearly every year until COVID-19 interrupted things.

Macfarlane traveled over almost all of the country, from megacities to remote counties surrounded by sweeping mountains.

He also talked to people from all walks of life, from local government officials in charge of running cities, to people from the Hui ethnic group, who sat by the side of the road playing mahjong. Scholars, musicians, Buddhist monks, his Chinese students and their family members all became his consultants on China.



The book by Alan Macfarlane helps foreigners get a good understanding of Chinese culture.

The vastness of the landscape, the hugely varied culture, the hospitality of the people and the transformation that took place within the period of extraordinary growth were encompassed in travel diaries and photos taken by Harrison, with notes by Macfarlane.

However, for an anthropologist, traveling is much more than sightseeing.

Take an imaginative leap

Anthropology, after all, is a discipline that seeks to look far below the surface.

For example, a wedding in a certain region is not simply a ceremony but can signify characteristics of a specific social or cultural setting, Macfarlane says.

"When examining a wedding, if we ask the questions: Who did the bride marry? Was it a cousin or other relative? Then we are asking about social structure. If we ask what they wore and what religious and other rituals occurred we are asking more about culture. They are anatomically separable yet, obviously, closely related. So, anthropologists want to know not only what people do, but what significance their actions have."

And to make sense of China based on his extensive tours, Macfarlane wrote the book *Understanding the Chinese: A Personal A-Z*, which provides vignettes that explain more than 120 concepts of Chinese characteristics, including ancestors, Confucius, eating, education, law and justice, love and marriage, and more, including how people are presented in Chinese societies, how Chinese look at certain ideas, and how those perceptions have formed.

Macfarlane knows full well that writing a book about understanding the Chinese is attempting the impossible, and in the preface, he says, "Every assertion or generalization can be disputed, highly qualified or shown to be only a partial truth."

So he treated the analysis as if he were preparing a dictionary or encyclopedia, hoping to navigate readers toward the unfamiliar world of China but knowing it was a work in progress.

And seeking to get inside Chinese civilization has been an upside-down experience for him.

"China has been a huge challenge to all that I took to be normal and natural. My own view of my own Western culture and history has been totally transformed by my experience in China. This means that I have explored myself and my own culture in a Chinese mirror, as much as trying to see China in the Western, Nepalese and Japanese mirror."

Moment of change

The moment of change happens when one takes a step back, suspends some of the preconfigured categories and takes an imaginative leap, Macfarlane says, after which a person may find his or her innate way of thinking, is not particularly common, and the "cosmology" of others is not that outlandish, and is even worthy of attention.

And if there is no right or wrong, or strange or normal in cultures, ignorance and fear of others, and discrimination toward them, is unnecessary, he says.

The task that Macfarlane sets for himself is to lessen that fear or discrimination by explaining a little of how China works, so that the invisible barriers, which are built from taken-for-granted assumptions, can be visible.

"It's really about knowledge and communication. Once you get to know the other, you know why they're doing things, why things are different, and you begin to lose that fear. And the more communication, the more people visit China, the more the West appreciates its greatness, and the Chinese already, obviously, appreciate and have imported much from the West."

How is it possible to get to a closer understanding (of China)? You can read as many books as you like about a place, but unless you actually go there, meet the people, you really don't get any strong impression."

Alan Macfarlane, UK anthropologist



Clockwise from top left: Alan Macfarlane stands at the border between China and Myanmar, near Dadenghan Dai Village, in 2005; Macfarlane and his wife Sarah Harrison visit Tsinghua University in Beijing in 2019; The couple attend a tea ceremony in Jian'ou city, Fujian province, in 2023.

Macfarlane says he wishes he could act as a bridge between East and West, to forge cross-cultural understanding, because for him this is also "the aim of the greatest anthropologists".

On Sep 5 last year, Cambridge basked in sunshine as people came together in the heart of King's College in the name of the ninth Cambridge Xu Zhimo Poetry and Art Festival to celebrate exchanges.

Macfarlane writes in the preface for the event: "Chinese civilization is like a forest, where you have different trees: different people in different positions, different statuses and roles. Yet they all grow alongside each other and share the same space in a



mutually supportive way ... on the whole, not destroying each other. That kind of harmony seems to be a wonderful model for what the world could be."

Sitting on a bench in the warm daylight at the provost's private garden, where dwarf shrubs and a wildflower meadow grow in harmony, Macfarlane says: "Cultures and civilizations have to retain what is special about them, while at the same time living together and sharing what they can. So that's what I meant, that we will retain our different views on art, music, family systems, beliefs and philosophies. Because we need to. But that doesn't mean that we can't live in peace."

Hebei positioned at forefront of high-quality development

Province leading way in pursuing China's modernization with local characteristics

By WANG JINHUI
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To bolster the development of new quality productive forces and build advanced industrial systems, Hebei province is ramping up efforts to integrate into the new development pattern of China's modernization with local characteristics.

With this year marking the 75th anniversary of the founding of the People's Republic of China, Ni Yuefeng, secretary of the Hebei Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China, noted that as the region surrounding the national capital, "Hebei will inject new vitality into high-quality economic and social development and continue to make remarkable achievements in the new era."

"We are striving to blaze new trails in boosting innovation-driven growth while taking more responsibilities in advancing the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and



the high-standard, high-quality construction of the Xiong'an New Area," added Ni. "We are achieving breakthroughs in comprehensive green transformation, cultivating core strengths in deepening reform and opening-up, and promoting common prosperity through new achievements."

"We will comprehensively fulfill the annual economic and social development tasks, continuously create new situations in various undertakings, and make greater contributions to the comprehensive advancement of China's modernization and the great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation."

During a recent visit to the HBIS-POSCO automotive steel sheet project, a joint venture between Shijiazhuang-based HBIS Group, one of the largest steelmakers and integrated service providers in China, and South Korean steelmaker POSCO, Ni expressed the need to fully leverage the province's unique advantages, empower advanced manufacturing, ensure major technological upgrades and promote large-scale equipment renewal to propel the high-end, intelligent and green development of the manufacturing industry.

The project, which was completed and put into operation in Hebei's Tangshan city last October, utilizes a high-strength ultra-thin automotive steel sheet production process that significantly reduces the weight of car body while extending the service life of the body and components, achieving energy saving and carbon reduction from a whole-life-cycle perspective.

"We must firmly grasp the overall national strategy of coordinated development in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, strengthen collaborative innova-

tion and industrial cooperation, vigorously boost the deep integration of sci-tech and industrial innovation, and foster emerging industries such as new energy, new materials and robotics in a targeted manner," Ni said.

Concurrently with those efforts, he stressed Hebei must create an environment that encourages innovation and tolerates failure, and gather innovative elements and high-end talents, thus stimulating the enthusiasm of all types of professionals for innovation and entrepreneurship. "As well, it is necessary to further optimize the business environment, attract more investments, launch key projects, accelerate the pace of economic and social development, and make greater contributions to the overall situation of the province," Ni noted.

In mid-April, during a visit to Serbia with a Hebei provincial delegation, Ni said the province strongly supports the high-quality development of HBIS Group Serbia Iron & Steel — the Chinese-acquired overseas, fully integrated steel enterprise focusing on the site of the former Smederevo Steel Plant in eastern Serbia —

and promotes the improvement of energy utilization efficiency while driving the extension of the industry chain to the material level.

"We will deepen exchanges with other provinces, enhance cooperation in fields such as economy, trade, agriculture, sci-tech, culture and sports, and join hands to stimulate development," Ni said. "We will serve and integrate into the high-quality construction of the Belt and Road Initiative, enhance the role of the China-Europe freight trains, facilitate smooth logistics channels, share development opportunities and achieve mutual benefits and win-win results."

Meanwhile, Tangshan is pushing toward the transformation and upgrading of 26 characteristic industrial clusters, including rail transits and robotics, in accordance with local conditions, thereby helping form new quality productive forces.

This year's government work report for Tangshan proposes to add more than 100 new robotics companies and establish a research institute focusing on the robotics industry to boost technology transfer. The report

also emphasizes implementation of the "Robotics-plus" initiative, expanding typical scenarios in 10 major areas including manufacturing, trade, logistics, and safety and emergency response.

The vibrant biopharmaceutical industry has attracted numerous innovative talents to settle in Shijiazhuang, capital city of Hebei. By the end of 2023, Shijiazhuang had a total of 1,299 biopharmaceutical companies, whose revenue accounted for more than 60 percent of the province's total in the biopharmaceutical sector. Hebei has focused on building and utilizing innovation platforms such as the Shijiazhuang International Biomedical Park, effectively enhancing the independent innovation capabilities of the biopharmaceutical industry through national key laboratories built by companies such as Shijiazhuang Pharmaceutical Group and Yiling Pharmaceutical.

Hebei, which is home to some coastal regions, also transforms and upgrades ports, integrating resources and accelerating construction of reserve bases for strategic materials. Tangshan



Hebei will inject new vitality into the high-quality economic and social development and continue to make remarkable achievements in the new era."

Ni Yuefeng, secretary of the Hebei Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China

Port's cargo throughput ranks second in the world, with 152 productive berths already built, connecting to more than 80 countries and regions and over 200 ports. In 2023, Huanghua Port in Hebei's Cangzhou city achieved a cumulative cargo throughput of 330 million metric tons, a year-on-year increase of 4.99 percent, marking the fourth consecutive year its cargo throughput exceeded 300 million tons.

Benefits gained via regional coordination

By WANG JINHUI

Aiming to become a hub for the coordinated development of the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region and bolster high-quality development of Xiong'an New Area, Hebei province is focusing on creating a regional collaborative innovation community and striving to absorb the spillover effects of science, technology and industry from Beijing and Tianjin.

To that end, Hebei has achieved remarkable accomplishments at several levels, including economic development, transportation, tourism and people's livelihood. For instance, Caofedian district of Hebei's Tangshan city has undertaken about 270 projects from Beijing and Tianjin since 2014; a one-hour transportation circle in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region is taking shape; the cultural tourism brand of the "So Close, So Beautiful, Spend Your Weekends in Hebei" has gained widespread influence; and the integration of social insurance cards in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region has gen-

erated an increased sense of well-being and happiness among the people.

Several companies chose to base their research and development activities in Beijing and production in Hebei and Tianjin.

Beijing Guochua Technology Group integrates the R&D of new coal preparation processes and equipment, engineering design and contracting, coal preparation equipment manufacturing, and coal preparation plant operation.

In 2018, the group optimized its layout in the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, keeping its headquarters and R&D center in Beijing while establishing production facilities in Tangshan, Hebei province.

It also founded a clean coal technology company in the Tangshan Hi-tech Industrial Development Zone that year.

"Taking the high-speed train from Tangshan to Beijing is very convenient and this is an important reason why the company's headquarters set up a subsidiary here," said Meng Lingyun, general

manager of the Tangshan-based company. Meng added that the increasingly convenient rail transportation not only allows them to better communicate with the headquarters but helps them expand their business nationwide, injecting vitality into the high-quality development of the company.

Key initiatives

Since 2023, the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region has focused on the coordinated development of key industry chains such as hydrogen energy, new energy, and intelligent connected vehicles, forming more than 200 technology-related tasks and a list of over 200 targeted enterprises for investment attraction.

Hebei aims to leverage the leading role of the new energy and intelligent connected vehicles and robotics industry chains, integrate into the industry chain cooperation in biopharmaceutical, hydrogen energy, network security and industrial internet, and promote the high-quality

development of key industry chains.

The province has also prioritized ensuring the supply of agricultural products to Beijing and has actively undertaken agricultural relocation projects, working with Beijing and Tianjin to optimize the layout of the agricultural industry. The three regions are jointly launching projects in the modern seed industry and conducting scientific and technological research to consolidate a foundation for the production of grain and important agricultural products. Hebei is also developing major agricultural sectors, including grain and oil, vegetables, fruits, Chinese medicinal materials, dairy and animal husbandry.

By utilizing its proximity to Beijing, Hebei is focusing on targeted investment attraction, introducing central agricultural enterprises such as China Co-op Group and OFCO Group, and jointly creating a complete industry chain covering planting, feed, breeding, slaughtering, deep processing

and logistics warehousing based on characteristic industrial parks.

Xiong'an New Area

Currently, Hebei's Xiong'an New Area is at a key stage of realizing large-scale construction and undertaking the relocation of noncapital functions from Beijing. Centering on innovative thinking and new concepts, the province is carrying out the comprehensive support policies of the central government, ensuring that children's education, salaries and housing provident funds in Xiong'an are not lower than in Beijing.

Construction of the headquarters for the first batch of four relocated central enterprises has been accelerated; three schools supported by Beijing have started classes; and construction of four relocated universities and the Xiong'an branch of Peking University People's Hospital has commenced.



From left: Workers at HBIS check rolls of aluminized metal. ZHAO HUI / FOR CHINA DAILY A high-speed train on the production line of CRRC Tangshan. YANG YANG / FOR CHINA DAILY A woman checks a screen on the production line of CSPC Pharmaceutical Group. SHI SHENGQUAN / FOR CHINA DAILY The container wharf at the Huanghua Port. DAI SHAOZHI / FOR CHINA DAILY An unmanned vehicle in Xiong'an New Area. GENG HUI / FOR CHINA DAILY

Bolstering ecological and environmental governance

By YUAN SHENGGAO

Hebei province is implementing a new development concept and using innovative methods to boost ecological and environmental governance, and according to Ni Yuefeng, secretary of the Hebei Provincial Committee of the Communist Party of China, implementing the new development concept marks a profound change in terms of overall development.

"It is necessary to persist in integrating innovation into various fields of economic and social development while comprehensively promoting innovative ideas, mechanisms and work," Ni said.

As an ecological and environmental support area for the Beijing-Tianjin-Hebei region, the province has optimized its green performance in key industries such as steel, incentivizing enterprises to reduce emissions and realize low-carbon growth through practical policies. As a result, the technological equipment and environmental governance level of Hebei's steel industry have been significantly enhanced. Specifically, blast furnaces with a capacity of less than 1,000 cubic meters and converters with a capacity of less than 100 tons have been phased out, and advanced



A view of the Saihanba mechanized forest farm, the world's largest artificial plantation, in Chengde, Hebei province. TIAN MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

technologies such as low-carbon metallurgy and clean steelmaking have been adopted. Smart production lines and digitized workshops have also been constructed.

The improvements enhance the environmental standards of enterprises and also drive the continuous achievement of innovation in technology, management and process.

"To encourage more enterprises to become 'excellent players' in environmental protection, it is vital to strengthen benchmark guidance,"

said Bai Yi, head of the comprehensive coordination team of the A-level environmental performance company in August 2022 and has increased expenditure on environmental protection since the beginning of this year, with about 700 million yuan (\$96.6 million) being invested in related automatic facilities.

Tangshan Reafor Iron and Steel became an A-level environmental performance company in August 2022 and has increased expenditure on environmental protection since the beginning of this year, with about 700 million yuan (\$96.6 million) being invested in related automatic facilities.

On March 29, in its automatic dumping room, the dumper held fully loaded trucks tightly and unloaded materials. The dumper's dust collection and extraction equipment started simultaneously.

A deputy general manager of the company said that it has comprehensively improved aspects such as emission and clean transportation.

Bai said Hebei will implement a leading A-level performance plan this year and select one to three model A-level enterprises in each sector to set benchmarks for others, with the goal of driving overall industry improvement.

The province also attaches importance to the critical role of scientific and technological innovation, exploring green governance models for saline-alkali land and insisting on the combined approach of "sowing seeds to the land" and "adapting land to the seeds". It has achieved a win-win situation of improving the soil ecological environment and developing characteristic agriculture.

We adhere to the combined approach of "sowing seeds to the land" and "adapting land to the seeds", selecting 25 mature varieties such as drought-resistant alkaline wheat, salt-tolerant rice, millet and quinoa, and promoting them in a zoned and classified

manner," said Zheng Hongwei, deputy inspector of the Department of Agriculture and Rural Affairs of Hebei province.

Hebei has explored and formed eight major industrial models, including drought-resistant alkaline wheat sowing, standardized production of salt-tolerant rice and saline-alkali land cultivation of facility fruits and vegetables.

"On the one hand we improve the salinity of the soil, while on the other hand, we select adaptive varieties."

"Through dual efforts, we achieve the mutual promotion of suitable planting and soil improvement, forming a more eco-friendly, green, low-cost and sustainable saline-alkali land governance model," Zheng said.

As cultivation of superior varieties and the governance of saline-alkali land proceed simultaneously, 333,333 hectares of saline-alkali land in the province has gradually been transformed into a new grain barn. In 2023, the autumn sowing area of drought-resistant alkaline wheat reached some 103,000 hectares, an increase of about 36,300 hectares over the previous year, and two drought-resistant alkaline wheat processing enterprises were recognized as provincial leading enterprises.

By WANG JINHUI

The Hebei Provincial Department of Commerce recently introduced 30 measures to improve the business environment, catering to the needs of market entities and optimizing services to inject sustained dynamism into high-quality development.

The new measures continue the main tone of business work and make adjustments and innovations in specific items.

Rong Yanfeng, director of the policy and regulation division of the Hebei Provincial Department of Commerce, said one noticeable change is that, compared to the seven aspects of last year, this year's measures reflect a "user-centric" approach consisting of four main aspects: enhancing the efficiency of business administration services; intensifying the support of business elements; boosting the vitality of market entities; and strengthening the legal protection capability of business.

For instance, in terms of enhancing the efficiency of business administration services, the new measures continuously upgrade and optimize existing approval services, further reducing application materials, compressing processing procedures and providing more precise pre-application guidance.

For approval efficiency, building upon a 20 percent reduction in the time limit for all approval matters last year, they have proposed an additional 30 percent reduction of time.

Xu Zhenglin, head of a working team focusing on government services at the Hebei Provincial Department of Commerce, said market entities have the most influence on whether the business environment is good or not, adding: "The issue of what are the pain points and blockages for businesses is the primary consideration for the policy-making departments."

Over the past year, the team conducted telephone surveys of 520 companies to initiate policy improvements based on the needs of the enterprises. The new measures propose activities such as targeted assistance in key areas, surveys on investment attraction, and service delivery to the grassroots areas. Others include allowing staff members to conduct on-site research and office work at enterprises, effectively helping them solve practical problems.

Shijiazhuang has introduced a series of innovative measures to improve the business environment, with the aim of ensuring fairness and providing excellent services and greater convenience for businesses.

In the Luqian Economic Development Zone, the construction of the Taihang Robotics Industrial Park project, with a total investment of over 3 billion yuan (\$414 million), is in full swing.

"Thanks to the support of regional assessment results, the project approval process omitted the preparation of a soil and water conservation report, which not only saved a month of on-site assessment time, but also reduced report preparation costs by 200,000 yuan, enabling the rapid implementation of the project," said Dong He, the project manager.

Once completed, the project will be home to a group of robotics research and manufacturing enterprises, establishing an integrated industrial chain encompassing scientific research and development, application and production promotion.

Since 2021, Shijiazhuang has been the first locality in the province to implement a regional assessment result sharing mechanism through the Engineering Construction Project Approval Supervision Management Platform, transforming the "enterprise-paid multiple assessments" into "government-funded result sharing", reducing the procedures, materials, time and costs for enterprises.

Currently, in the city's 19 provincial-level and above development zones, a total of 180 items in 10 categories of regional assessments have been completed, with 960 construction projects sharing applications, resulting in a total cost savings of approximately 300 million yuan for enterprises.

This year's government work report of the State Council proposed to stimulate the vitality of various business entities. "Based on the practical aspects of business work, promoting continuous value-added business services, shifting from 'what is available, to what is needed' is an important focus of our policy-making," he added.

Ideally for enterprises, the need for resource elements should be obtained more quickly and at a lower cost. To that end, the new measures will prioritize promoting cooperation among government, banks and enterprises, expanding the scope of export credit insurance, strengthening financial support for foreign trade, and implementing incentive policies for foreign-invested enterprises.



Xiong'an New Area makes efforts to offer better government affairs services. TIAN MING / FOR CHINA DAILY

financial experts, forming six financial advisory teams, to serve 34 development zones across the province.

"Since the start of the pilot program, by the end of 2023, Hebei has granted a total credit amount of some 13.78 billion yuan (\$1.9 billion) to various types of enterprises, as well as over 10.69 billion yuan in reserved projects for loans," said Li Jianying, head of the development zone management division of the Hebei Provincial Department of Commerce.

A high-quality business environment is the guarantee for vigorous

growth of unicorn enterprises in Hebei — as evidenced by the development path of Hebei Kunshan New Energy, a high-tech enterprise in Yuanshi county, Shijiazhuang city, according to Zhao Dong, general manager of the company. It produces high-performance lithium-ion battery anode materials used in power batteries, energy storage batteries, and consumer electronic batteries, which are highly welcomed by well-known domestic battery manufacturers.

"The government departments help us coordinate and solve the difficulties and problems encountered in our development, allowing us to promptly enjoy policies such as subsidies for research and development investment, and enabling us to invest more energy in the R&D of new products," Zhao said.

In recent years, Hebei has persisted in launching favorable policies in multiple aspects, including investment attraction, technology services, financial support and talent cultivation, resulting in strong momentum in technological and industrial innovation.

"The effects of technological innovation entering the high-quality development of Hebei are becoming apparent," said Wu Yiqing, a researcher at the Hebei University of Economics and Business and director of the Hebei Coordinated Innovation Center for EFT Coordinated Development.

Synlight Semiconductor, located in Hebei's Baoding National High-tech Industrial Development Zone, specializes in the research and production of third-generation semiconductor material silicon carbide single crystal substrates. The company's electrically conductive and semi-insulating silicon carbide single crystal substrates are widely used in new energy vehicles, photovoltaics, 5G communications, and other fields.

CHINA

Model moment



National model workers and Beijing model workers wait to get their hair done before a photo shoot at a store operated by Da Bei Photo Studio in Beijing on Sunday. In celebration of this week's International Labor Day, a photo shoot activity with the theme "Saluting the Workers" was held to capture portraits and group photos of model worker representatives, aiming to promote their spirit and craftsmanship. CHEN JIAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chinese mainland announces cross-Strait tourism measures

KMT delegation stresses importance of exchanges, urges lifting of restrictions

By JIANG CHENGLONG
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New measures regarding the resumption of cross-Strait tourism were announced by the Chinese mainland on Sunday, along with approval for shipments of Wendan pomelos from Taiwan to the mainland.

Fu Kun-chi, who was leading a Chinese Kuomintang party delegation visiting the mainland, called on Sunday for the Democratic Progressive Party authorities in Taiwan to meet the "common expectations of both sides of the Strait" by lifting restrictions on mainland tourists traveling to Taiwan.

While meeting with the KMT delegation on Sunday morning, Vice-Minister of Culture and Tourism Rao Quan announced new tourism measures across the Taiwan Strait, with tours by residents of the southeastern province of Fujian to Matsuo to resume first.

Group tours of Fujian residents to Taiwan will also be resumed once direct sea passenger transport resumes between Pingtan, an island

city off the east coast of Fujian, and Taiwan.

Rao extended a warm welcome to compatriots from Taiwan to visit the mainland more frequently for sightseeing, to witness the development and changes on the mainland, and to benefit from its progress and achievements.

The KMT delegation also met with Zhao Zenglian, deputy head of the General Administration of Customs, on Sunday morning. Zhao announced that based on scientific assessments, the administration would approve the shipment of agricultural and fishery products from Taiwan, such as Wendan pomelos, that meet the mainland's quarantine requirements.

Separate announcements by the Ministry of Transport and the Civil Aviation Administration of China said they had used existing communication channels on Sunday to urge the Taiwan authorities to resume direct sea passenger transport and completely resume direct flights across the Strait.

Zhu Fenglian, a spokeswoman for the Taiwan Affairs Office of the State

Council, said on Sunday that direct cross-Strait flights have greatly facilitated exchanges between people on both sides and played an important role in promoting the common interests of compatriots across the Strait.

"We hope that the Taiwan authorities will fully consider the demands of people on both sides and shipping companies and promptly resume direct cross-Strait sea passenger transport and reopen air routes between the 30 mainland destinations and Taiwan," she said.

In a group interview on Sunday, Fu said the mainland visit by the delegation, which he said represented new public opinions from Taiwan, aimed to promote peaceful and prosperous development across the Strait, with frequent exchanges between the peoples. "This is the expectation of all industries and fields in Taiwan," he said.

Fu criticized the obstacles set by the DPP authorities, such as a limit on the number of mainland tourists able to visit Taiwan, and urged their removal.

"It is the common expectation of all people across the Strait to have comprehensive exchanges," he said.

In an exchange activity with the KMT delegation on Sunday, Cai Shiming, a doctor from Taiwan who

works at Tsinghua Chang Gung Hospital in Beijing, expressed his hope that there would be more cross-Strait flights, which would increase opportunities for exchanges between people on both sides and foster mutual understanding.

"Although the current situation across the Strait is still tense, I sincerely hope that through more exchanges and contacts we can understand each other better, which would help resolve barriers and differences," he said.

Su Yung-chun, a Tsinghua University graduate from Taiwan who works in Beijing, also called for cross-Strait cultural exchanges and tourism to be fully resumed as soon as possible.

"The exchange between people on both sides of the Strait is unstoppable," he said. "The shallow Taiwan Strait cannot prevent the historical trend of people from both sides getting closer and more intimate."

The KMT delegation left for Taiwan on Sunday after completing a three-day visit to Beijing. During the visit, the delegation toured the mainland's leading electric vehicle manufacturer, the Beijing International Automotive Exhibition and an autonomous driving demonstration zone.

Guangzhou counts cost of tornado that killed 5, injured 33

By ZHENG CAIXIONG
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At least five people were killed and 33 injured when a strong tornado struck Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong province, on Saturday, with residents warned to be on the alert for potential strong wind gusts and torrential rain in the coming days.

All the injured, from the city's Baiyun district, were promptly sent to hospital for treatment, the district government said in a statement released on Sunday.

The tornado, which struck at about 3 pm, was accompanied by downpours, hailstones, thunder and lightning. It left a trail of destruction more than a kilometer long and caused widespread damage, destroying or damaging more than 140 factory and residential buildings, the district government said.

Southern Power Grid had to send more than 300 emergency repair personnel and 45 vehicles, including five equipped with laser cleaning devices, and four sets of large lights to help repair damaged electrical equipment.

The towns of Zhongluotan and Taihe suffered a severe blackout after they were hit by the tornado, the district government said.

A 76-year-old Zhongluotan resident surnamed Zhu said he had never seen such a severe tornado before.

"Many tin-roofed houses were overturned by the tornado and the strong winds," he said.

Another resident, surnamed Liu, who runs a small restaurant, said many trees and billboards were blown down and electric poles were leaning over.

"Many residents were too scared to go out, as it was dark outside on Saturday afternoon," she said.

The district government said search and rescue work was basi-

cally completed by early Sunday morning, after hours of hard work by rescuers and related personnel through the night.

Guangdong's meteorological bureau said on Sunday that a preliminary assessment indicated it was a strong tornado.

The bureau said it had organized a team of experts to conduct an on-site disaster investigation of the tornado's impact path, which was more than 1.7 km long and had a maximum width of about 280 meters.

It said the tornado was the result of a warm and humid air flow from the southwest of the South China Sea that had continued to strengthen, transporting a large amount of water vapor and energy to the city.

A long period of high temperatures and high humidity had seen a large amount of unstable energy accumulate near ground level in the city, the bureau said. A low-level jet strengthened on Saturday, exacerbating the unstable layer structure of "cold above and warm below", it said.

The warm and humid air flow near the ground continued to increase in the city and multiple meteorological observation stations recorded abnormally high humidity on Saturday morning, it said.

Strong updrafts triggered by conditions close to the ground and high-altitude fluctuations caused the mother storm of the tornado to develop strongly, it said.

The bureau warned of continued extreme weather in Guangzhou in the days to come and urged government departments to introduce concrete and effective measures to cope with possible natural disasters.

People should pay attention to changes in the weather when they plan to travel during the May Day holidays from Wednesday to Sunday, it said.

Chang'e 6 lunar mission to be launched soon

By ZHAO LEI
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Chang'e 6, China's next spacecraft to venture to the moon, is scheduled to set out on its journey in the coming days, tasked with bringing back samples from the moon's little-known far side, the China National Space Administration said in a news release.

A Long March 5 carrier rocket, with the 8.2-metric-ton Chang'e 6 probe on top of it, was moved on Saturday morning to its launch service tower at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province, the administration said, adding that the flight will take place early next month.



The Long March 5 carrier rocket carrying the 8.2-metric-ton Chang'e 6 probe at its launch service tower at the Wenchang Space Launch Center in Hainan province on Saturday. It is set for launch in early May. SU DONG / FOR CHINA DAILY

Chang'e 6 was transported to the launch center in January, while the Long March 5 rocket arrived in March.

They were assembled and test-

ed at the spacecraft.

In the next few days, engineers will conduct final functional examinations and pump propellants into the rocket, the release said.

If everything goes according to plan, after entering its moon-bound trajectory, Chang'e 6 will make a series of flight maneuvers before landing in the South Pole-Aitken Basin on the far side of the moon.

Like Chang'e 5, its predecessor, Chang'e 6 is a product of the China Academy of Space Technology in Beijing and also consists of four components: an orbiter, a lander, an ascender and a reentry module.

After collecting dust and rocks on the moon, the ascender will transport the samples to the lunar orbiter for transfer to the reentry module, which will carry them back to Earth.

Meanwhile, scientific instruments on the lander will continue to perform their operations as long as they have sufficient power.

The United States, the former Soviet Union and China have returned lunar samples to Earth, but none has ever obtained soil from the far side of the moon.

Although the far side had previously been photographed by spacecraft, no probe had ever landed on it until January 2019, when China's Chang'e 4 mission landed in the South Pole-Aitken Basin.

China's most recent lunar mission, Chang'e 5, took place in late 2020 and lasted 23 days. It was the country's first lunar sample-return mission and one of its most sophisticated and challenging space endeavors.

The landmark mission retrieved 1,731 grams of rocks and soil, becoming the first lunar exploration program to bring back samples from the moon since the Apollo era in the late 1960s and early 1970s.

European companies welcome preferential policies

By LI MENGHAN
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European companies have profited from China's efforts to boost foreign investment, the president of the European Union Chamber of Commerce in China said on Friday, adding that economic security concerns should not be obstacles to win-win cooperation between the EU and China.

At a conference in Beijing organized by the General Office of the National Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Jens Eskelund said: "The trade relationship between China and the European Union has created enormous value ... but we must accept that both sides have reasonable economic security concerns. We should not let these concerns obstruct the otherwise productive relationship."

The conference brought together representatives from multinational corporations and international business associations in China.

Eskelund said European companies have taken encouragement from preferential policies issued by the General Office of the State Council.

They include a 24-point action plan to promote high-level opening-up and make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign investment, which was published last month, as

well as a 24-point guideline unveiled in August designed to optimize and attract foreign investment.

Eskelund said that if the measures are implemented in a timely and consistent manner, they "will go a long way to improve and enhance business profit."

He said measures such as shortening the negative list, expanding market access in more sectors, integrating foreign-invested enterprises in government procurement activities, and promoting the safe, orderly, and free flow of data, can boost investor confidence.

In addition, measures such as a four-year extension of foreign nationals' nontaxable income, adding routes by international airlines, and facilitating the entry, exit and residency of foreign executives, technical personnel and their families, are conducive to offering appealing employment conditions for vital foreign talent amid intense global competition, Eskelund said.

But there were concerns in Europe about the growing imbalance in trade, he said, and many European companies were concerned they could be priced out of their home market.

Eskelund said that there should be no such fear in the process of international business cooperation, and such thoughts should not hin-

der the deepening of cooperation.

"The Ministry of Commerce has helpfully explained that China's self-reliance will also do good to foreign companies," he said. "Self-reliance means that China will aim at ensuring a certain capability for the survival of domestic companies, while at the same time allowing space for foreign companies."

He said the new quality productive forces proposed by China are "a natural next step in China's development path toward higher value-added industries" and "part of the things that happen in terms of technological development globally."

"I think there's no doubt that China has emerged as a leader within green technologies," he said. "China would be an indispensable part of ensuring that the world will develop and hopefully try to minimize the risk of man-made climate change."

Justin Yifu Lin, deputy director of the CPPCC's Economic Committee, said that while market expansion remains crucial for all nations, there are pessimistic views regarding China due to factors such as an aging population and the so-called balance sheet recession.

"Such China collapse hypotheses have been repeated many times," Lin said, adding that such conjecture was groundless and China's economy will continue to thrive.

Lin said the key to growth lies not in the quantity of workers, but in their quality, an area where China continues to see improvement.

He added that the country is committed to bolstering its opening-up policy to attract foreign investment and is also eager to invest in foreign countries, leveraging technological innovation and industrial upgrading to enhance global economic growth.

Susanne Rademacher, head of the German Chamber of Commerce in China, said German companies want to deepen cooperation with China in industries like renewable energy and electric vehicles, given their cost-effectiveness and their contribution to facilitating green transition.

John Zhang, senior vice-president of Corning, a leading manufacturer of glass, fiber optics and ceramics that is headquartered in the United States, said it entered the Chinese market in the 1980s and has continued to deepen collaboration with local industry.

"The government is committed to creating a first-class business environment that is market-oriented, law-based and global," he said. "Our company has witnessed and experienced firsthand the benefit of government initiatives. We have confidence in the future development of our business as China continues to grow."

COMMENT

Editorials

‘Overcapacity’ claims Washington’s latest offensive in its misinformation campaign

US Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen’s claims about China’s “overcapacity” in her interview on the US economy with the media on Thursday should be seen as the US side’s latest stance on Beijing’s rebuttal of the unfounded allegations Yellen made in this regard during her visit to China early this month.

Yellen intentionally turned a deaf ear to Beijing’s reasonable and objective countering of her “overcapacity” blame game. Instead, she hyped up her baseless charge that China is dumping its electric vehicles, solar power panels and other clean energy goods in overseas markets.

The claim that China has an unfair competitive edge does not stand up to even cursory scrutiny. The allegations of “heavy state subsidies” fueling the growth of the sector have no basis in fact. The financial support provided to the EV sector in China is markedly lower than the subsidies provided in the United States and Europe.

China’s electric vehicle output was 9.59 million units last year, of which the domestic market accounted for about 90 percent. Due to Chinese EVs’ high performance in relation to the cost, Chinese-made EVs are highly valued in the world market. China actually lacks the capacity to produce enough EVs to meet the overseas demands.

Also, about 80 percent to 90 percent of China’s wind turbine production capacity goes to meet the needs of the domestic market. A similar situation is observed in other clean energy product sectors.

As it has ramped up its efforts to realize its ambitious dual carbon goals — peaking emissions by 2030 and achieving emissions neutrality by 2060 — China has had to increase its green product and energy supplies over the past few years to meet the domestic demand in the foreseeable future.

Smearing China’s contribution to global green transition as “China exporting its way to full employment” and as “threats” to other countries’ jobs and industry interests is done with malicious intent.

In saying that the Biden administration is not taking any options off the table to respond to China’s “overcapacity”, which is “a top concern” for the administration, Yellen is not only scapegoating China for the US’ lack of competitiveness in these sectors, but also highlighting that the US is broadening its attack on the Chinese economy.

It is simply disingenuous for Yellen to say, “We have no problem with China producing and selling globally and exporting, but the United States and Europe and other countries also want to have

some involvement in the ability to produce clean energy products that are going to be of great importance”.

That clearly reveals the US’ concerns about its own competitiveness in the green economy, where, due to the previous administration’s climate skepticism, it lags behind, and its intention to try and drive a wedge between China and the European Union.

China does have some industrial “overcapacity” issues in the upstream and downstream industries of the real estate sector, which are mainly caused by the downturn of its housing industry. It is a shame that Yellen told the media that Chinese officials acknowledge a problem with industrial “overcapacity” during her visit without explaining that what the Chinese side acknowledged and what she tries to hype up refer to totally different sectors.

Yellen is in a better place than many others to know that it is the US that has tried to use subsidies and protectionist practices to boost domestic manufacturing. But those efforts have been offset by the country’s high production costs and lack of skilled workers, while a strong dollar has dampened US products’ competitiveness in the world market.

Despite Yellen claiming that it’s important that China recognize the concern about Chinese “overcapacity” and begin to act to address it, that charge is a politically motivated fabrication of the US side.

Western companies are not in a position to replace Chinese products, and China is not in a position to help reinvigorate US manufacturing from the woes of the US’ own making.

It would be remiss not to point out that it is a presidential election year and China is habitually a punching bag for the two US parties ahead of voting. It would also be remiss not to point out that by “securitizing” the economy and trade with scaremongering false narratives about China, ranging from “decoupling” and “de-risking” to “overcapacity”, the Biden administration is trying to distort the world’s view on China and make it a pariah.

By endorsing that kind of politicized misinformation campaign, the technocrats in the Biden administration, such as Yellen, are sacrificing their professionalism and expertise to downgrade themselves to being political puppets.

The administration’s puppetry is removing the scabs that have recently been forming over some wounds in Sino-US ties that had just been Band-Aided.

US should be part of solution to Gaza conflict

Representatives of the Palestinian Fatah movement and the Islamic Resistance Movement, or Hamas, met in Beijing on Friday to discuss ending the internal divisions in Palestine. This latest development, although not confirmed by Beijing, not only contributes to forging Palestinian unity but also is conducive to defusing the ongoing crisis in the Middle East.

Ahead of the meeting in an interview with the media on Thursday, Khalil Al-Hayya, a leading member of Hamas’ political bureau, said the movement was ready to disarm and transition into a political party that is part of a unified Palestinian government on condition that an independent Palestinian state is established along the pre-1967 borders in accordance with the international resolutions.

China has taken a low-key approach to the meeting, with the Foreign Ministry simply saying that the country consistently supports internal reconciliation among the different Palestinian factions through dialogue and firmly backs strengthening the internal unity in Palestine.

The meeting is a clear indication that China is making every effort to resolve the crisis in Gaza.

By seeking to facilitate reconciliation between the two Palestinian factions, China hopes the political forces of Palestine can show greater solidarity in promoting a political solution to the conflict that upholds the legitimate rights and political status of Palestine with the support of the international community.

With the Gaza conflict still ongoing, China is maintaining close communication with all relevant parties, actively participating in United Nations Security Council consultations, and pushing for efforts to de-escalate the situation and promote peace talks.

Last month, Chinese diplomat Wang Kejian visited Egypt, Palestine, Israel and Qatar, which also included a meeting with the head of Hamas’ political bureau, Ismail Haniyeh, during his visit to Qatar. The latest development in Beijing was only made possible thanks to a series of such diplomatic mediation efforts.

What China has done so far in its efforts to resolve the Israel-Palestine conflict, which includes promot-

ing Palestinian unity, upholding justice at the United Nations Security Council and calling for an immediate cease-fire, stands in stark contrast to those who have constantly fanned the flames of the conflict.

US President Joe Biden on Wednesday signed into law legislation that includes \$26 billion in assistance for Israel, the majority of which is earmarked for military spending. Turning a deaf ear to domestic and international calls for it to press Israel to stop the brutal killing of Palestinian civilians, the Biden administration has continued to get blood on its hands by supplying arms to Israel and repeatedly blocking the UNSC’s efforts to call for a cease-fire. Earlier this month, it vetoed a UNSC draft resolution to grant full UN membership to the State of Palestine despite its alleged support of the two-state solution.

To date, more than 34,200 Palestinians have been killed in Gaza since Israel launched its military offensive against Hamas. The conflict has not only caused a humanitarian catastrophe but also spilled over to other parts of the region, dragging more parties into the fray.

At present, apart from losing the moral high ground because of its callous support of Israel’s relentless military offensive in Gaza the US itself is feeling a strong backlash from what it has sowed in the Middle East: Many university campuses in the US are convulsed in chaos as students stage pro-Palestine protests. Hundreds of demonstrators have been arrested amid allegations of police brutality, all triggered by the US’ lopsided policy on the ongoing conflict.

The Gaza conflict and its resulting effects show once again that the perpetual denial of the legitimate national rights of the Palestinian people is the root cause of the Palestinian question. It is high time the US stopped being part of the problem with its blind support of Israel and instead became part of the solution by putting its weight behind international peace efforts and joining hands with those countries, such as China, that are actually working to try and secure a meaningful cease-fire in Gaza and a long-term solution to the Israel-Palestine conflict through dialogue and consultations.

Cai Meng



Opinion Line

More talk than substance in Japan joining AUKUS

At a regular news conference of the Ministry of National Defense on Thursday, in response to a question from reporters about “Japan formally announcing its participation in the AUKUS alliance”, spokesperson Wu Qian expressed China’s “concern” about the move.

Countries like the United States, the United Kingdom, and Australia, disregarding the concerns of regional countries and the international community, continue to seek the expansion of AUKUS, which severely impacts the peace and stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

However, many analysts both in and outside the three member nations have raised questions about Japan joining AUKUS, which has a strong “Anglophone” character. Incorporating Japan, a non-English-speaking country, into the alliance will make the composition complex and inconsistent.

Furthermore, the true foundation of the AUKUS framework lies

in the high degree of market, technology and equipment sharing among “Anglophone” countries in cutting-edge defense and high-tech fields. However, in recent years, US trade protectionism has prevailed, making cooperation among the three countries within the AUKUS framework increasingly difficult. Exactly because of this, AUKUS has only implemented one “project” in two and a half years, which is the sale of nuclear-powered submarines to Australia, and this project itself has been progressing slowly and experiencing constant delays.

If Japan were to be included, it would be even more difficult for AUKUS to achieve anything. In fact, some US politicians have begun to frequently criticize Japan for inadequate protection of US intellectual property rights.

According to Reuters, citing diplomatic sources, Australia has the most negative attitude toward including Japan, fearing that adding a fourth

country to the alliance will make things more complicated and divert attention from the task of procuring nuclear-powered submarines.

It is worth mentioning that the Japanese government, which is plagued by low approval ratings and internal factional divisions within the Liberal Democratic Party, quietly lowered its tone after Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s visit to the US. On April 8, an anonymous senior Japanese government official stated that discussing Japan’s accession to AUKUS before it reached any achievements only disrupted the cooperative framework on which it is based. On April 10, Kishida himself admitted at a news conference in the US that no decision has been made regarding Japan’s cooperation with AUKUS. Clearly, all the signs indicate that Japan has not truly joined AUKUS, and the formation of the AUKUS framework, due to various constraints, has been all thunder and no rain up to now.

— BEIJING NEWS

Literary works key to thriving sci-fi industry

According to the 2024 China Science Fiction Industry Report released on Saturday the domestic science fiction industry generated revenue of 113.29 billion yuan (\$16 billion) in 2023, growing 29.1 percent year-on-year.

Compared with the rate of growth of the revenue from other films and TV works and the even doubling speed of cultural tourism, the publication part looks less significant with a growth rate of 4.3 percent, but that’s a hard-won result against the background of the fall in revenue for the whole publication sector. Especially,

works of literature that tell the stories first and lay the intellectual property basis for all the other parts of the whole science fiction industry.

Writers usually earn less compared to the TV, film and tourism industries, it is they that make it possible for the rest to make money. The China Science Fiction Overseas Influence Report (2018-23), which was also released on Friday, shows that *The Three-Body Problem*, a science fiction novel authored by Liu Cixin, is the leading domestic literary work that has gained a large audience overseas,

while his another novel *The Wandering Earth* that tells a story of how humanity has to move the Earth away from the dying sun to escape the latter’s harmful effects has also gained widespread recognition.

All these point to the future direction for the development of domestic science fiction. Of course films and TV series with eye-catching special effects are needed, but more importantly, support is needed for emerging writers and their books so as to sustain the whole industry in the long run.

— ZHANG ZHOUXIANG, CHINA DAILY

What They Say

Keep cautious eye on risk of safe-haven funds

The latest data released by the US government shows that the GDP of the United States for the first quarter of the year increased at an annualized rate of 1.6 percent, lower than the expected 2.4 percent and significantly slower than the 3.4 percent growth rate in the fourth quarter of last year. The US’ core inflation rate for the first quarter was 3.7 percent, up from 2 percent in the previous quarter.

The slowdown in US GDP growth is a result of both consumer and government cooling. In the first quarter, personal consumption expenditure, which accounts for about 70 percent of the US economy, grew by 2.5 percent, a decrease of 0.8 percentage points from the fourth quarter of 2023, which is also lower than the market’s expected growth of 3 percent.

Another reason is the widening trade deficit, as US exports grew by 0.9 percent while imports surged by 7.2 percent in the first quarter, dragging down economic

growth due to the net exports of goods and services.

Meanwhile, the Personal Consumption Expenditures Price Index for the first quarter increased at an annualized rate of 3.4 percent, far exceeding the previous value of 1.8 percent and marking the highest growth rate in a year.

Government spending in the first quarter increased by 1.2 percent, far lower than the 4.6 percent in the fourth quarter of last year. In a high-interest-rate environment, government spending is an important driver of US economic growth, but the sustained increase in government debt and high deficits behind it are unsustainable. For the market, short-term risks include the impact of persistently high US interest rates on asset prices and economic growth, while in the long term, the snowballing size of US government debt poses a significant risk.

The current fiscal policy stance of the US is not sustainable in the long

run. In addition to increasing the already heavy debt burden of the country, it may also make it more difficult for inflation to fall to the Federal Reserve’s target. However, if the US reduces government spending, its economy could immediately fall into recession.

Due to the increased uncertainty in the US economy and the expectation of higher interest rates for a longer period, both dollar assets and Asian currencies are experiencing turbulence. While the US stock market continues to decline, the yen has fallen below 156 against the dollar.

However, unlike the slowdown in US economic growth to nearly a two-year low in the first quarter and the rebound in inflation, China’s economic growth in the first quarter exceeded expectations, with inflation levels and asset prices remaining low, making China a safe haven for international capital to hedge against risks associated with dollar assets.

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COMMENT



China and the World Roundtable | China's Space Exploration

Editor's note: The space industry is a critical element of China's national strategy. In order to better serve the economy and society, China integrates space science, technology and applications and upholds the principle of exploration and utilization of outer space for peaceful purposes. Three experts share their views on the issue with China Daily.

Quentin Parker

Lunar missions exciting time for space

The success after success of China's space program, with all its diverse elements for scientific exploration and technological development in what remains a risky business, is as impressive as it is exciting.

China launched three astronauts into low-Earth orbit on Thursday night for a six-month mission at the Tiangong space station, as part of its preparations to send astronauts to the moon by the end of the decade. During a press conference on April 24, China Manned Space Agency stated that the development and construction of systems for a Chinese manned lunar landing are progressing as planned, with the aim of achieving a moon landing by Chinese astronauts before 2030.

China's accomplishments in space exploration and technology over the past five years, in particular, are without precedent. This includes the completion of China's space station Tiangong (Heavenly Palace), whose first major component, the core module Tianhe, was launched in April 2021 and the two major science modules, Wentian and Mengtian, were launched in 2022.

China's space station continues its program of development and progress from its current T-configuration but with plans for further expansion. Indeed, the docking time for "taikonauts" from launch to entry into the space station has recently been reduced from an already impressive six-seven hours to just two and a half hours due to the development of space rendezvous and docking technologies.

Tianzhou 7, the latest automatic cargo resupply vessel, took off from the Wenchang Satellite launch center in the Hainan island in January and docked in three hours compared with the 16-19 hours taken by the Elon Musk Space-X "Dragon" capsule to dock with the International Space Station (and the about six hours taken by the old Soyuz capsules).

Also, there was the Tianwen 1 Mars mission with Zhurong Rover in May 2021 — perhaps the most complex and hazardous of China's space missions. This should be seen in the context of about 60 percent of Mars missions failing to land on the surface of the Red Planet.

Also, the Chinese Space Station Telescope, Xuntian, is scheduled for launch and operation in 2025. Xuntian is an optical and ultraviolet space observatory that will boast a 2-meter-diameter



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lens, making it comparable to the venerable Hubble Space Telescope. Although the resolution of China's telescope will be similar to Hubble's, its field of view will be 350 times larger.

More important, China's Chang'e (Beautiful Moon Goddess) series of lunar missions have proved amazingly successful, with the Chang'e 3 lander making the first landing on the moon way back in December 2013. The mission included a lunar lander and a small *yutu* (jade rabbit) rover that was set down in the Mare Imbrium region of the moon, a prominent lava filled basin from one of the largest impact craters known in the entire solar system and easily visible to the naked eye. It made China only the third country to achieve a lunar soft landing.

Chang'e 4, a similar mission of lander and rover, followed in 2019. It was

designed as a backup in case Chang'e 3 failed. What set the mission apart was that its landing zone was on the far side of the moon, which is not visible from Earth, the first such landing in space exploration history.

This feat was made possible by the success of Chang'e 3 that gave the mission planners and scientists the opportunity and confidence to reconfigure Chang'e 4 for the more challenging but interesting far side alternative. Since this made the mission far more complicated, to maintain essential communication with the Earth a separate *queqiao* (magpie bridge) relay satellite was deployed into a halo orbit around the so-called L2 Earth-moon Lagrangian point of gravitational equipotential for stability. This mission, too, was a big success.

The Chang'e 5, which followed, was China's first lunar mission that involved bringing back rock sample from the moon. It was launched in November 2020 and landed on the moon on Dec 1, 2020. The return module came back with its precious cargo of 1.7 kilogram of moon rock two weeks later. The scooping device attached to the lander was developed by the Polytechnic University of Hong Kong while my own university, the University of Hong Kong, was fortunate enough to

get a small sample of the moon rock for scientific study.

As a result, China became only the third country, after the United States and the former Soviet Union (now Russia), to bring back rock samples from the moon.

Just like Chang'e 4 was a backup for Chang'e 3 so was Chang'e 6 for Chang'e 5. Given the success of Chang'e 5, the Chang'e 6 mission has been redesigned to collect rock samples from the far side of the moon for the first time. This mission is due to be launched in the near future. If successful, this will be another science bonanza, as game-changing amounts of water ice are suspected to exist in the shadowed lunar craters which can be used as fuel for future space missions or to breathe by future space explorers.

However, international cooperation is vital in space exploration. And I believe China is keen on deepening cooperation as it has made clear in its white paper on space program published in January 2022. Indeed, many of the scientific payloads on the Chang'e landers have had international scientific packages. For example, Chang'e 4 had scientific packages by Germany, Sweden, the Netherlands and Saudi Arabia.

And while the European Space Agency supported the Chang'e 5 mission by providing essential tracking from both its Kourou station in French Guiana and Maspolomas station in the Canary Islands at various crucial parts of the mission, different scientific payloads have been provided by France, Italy and Sweden again, and a Pakistani ICUBE-Q CubeSat for Chang'e 6 for detecting ice traces on the lunar surface from orbit.

The Chang'e series of missions is not over, for Chang'e 7 is planned for around 2026 and Chang'e 8 for around 2028, with both focused on the south pole of the moon in order to build a China-led lunar base in the 2030s.

Anticipating further international cooperation, this follows the recent unveiling of the most comprehensive lunar atlas ever created, crucial for guiding future lunar endeavors. This remarkable achievement is the result of over a decade of meticulous work by Chinese lunar scientists and geologists. With this in mind, "watch this space" as humanity sets its sights on new aspirations of lunar exploration and envisions moon bases as a gateway to further frontiers.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



MA XUEJING / CHINA DAILY

Wu Jinyuan

First keep steps firmly on the moon

The moon, planet Earth's only natural satellite and our closest celestial body, beckons us from 380,000 kilometers away to explore the vast expanse of the cosmos. Since ancient times, humans have dreamt of exploring space, with the moon serving as their first stop. Indeed, the moon is the first step toward uncovering the unknown — exploring the secrets of the limitless universe.

China launched three astronauts into low-Earth orbit on Thursday night for a six-month mission at the Tiangong space station, as part of its preparations to send astronauts to the moon by 2030.

The journey to realize our initial dream began in earnest in 1959 with the launch of the first scientific lunar exploration. From then till 1976, the United States and the Soviet Union engaged in a frenzied lunar race, sending 83 lunar probes into orbit, marking what historians later dubbed as the "First Lunar Rush".

While the initial surge in lunar exploration may have been driven by political, military and technological competition, the later expeditions were spurred by the true allure of space exploration. Beyond the tantalizing prospects of helium-3, a future energy source hidden in the lunar regolith, lie five types of minerals not found on Earth. That aside, the moon is also believed to have reserves of rare metals that complement those on Earth, with



The author is vice-president of Aerospace Knowledge Magazine.

lunar mare basalt alone containing at least 100 trillion tons of extractable titanium metal.

In the 21st century, several countries have proposed "returning to the moon" as part of their exploration. But to date, only China has systematically pursued it through its Chang'e program. From 2007 to 2020, China completed the lunar exploration phase beginning with Chang'e 1 through five missions, culminating in the historic landing of the Chang'e 4 rover and lander on the far side of the moon in 2019.

China's lunar exploration road map till now can be divided into reconnaissance, landing and establishment. Having achieved unmanned exploration, China's next horizon is manned lunar landing. After achieving that, China's goal is to prepare for short-term habitation, conduct lunar surface research, and carry out exploration and mining.

The upcoming Chang'e 6 mission represents the first task of a new phase of the Chang'e program. Originally intended as a backup for Chang'e 5, the program is intended to fulfill a new mission: bringing back soil samples

from the far side of the moon. The Chang'e 6 and subsequent missions will survey the lunar topography, land forms and material composition, and make preparations for future manned landings and establishment of lunar bases. Not surprisingly, China's manned lunar exploration program now has a detailed timetable, with the target set for 2030.

The return to the moon has become a focal point for space-faring countries this year. In April, NASA announced plans to send equipment to the moon for long-term scientific exploration. And SpaceX and Blue Origin, as providers of manned landing systems, have been making progress in developing lunar landers for large cargo.

In fact, the NASA-led Artemis program includes the space launch system rocket, ground exploration equipment, Orion spacecraft, manned landing systems, next-generation spacesuits, rovers and the "Gateway" lunar space station.

The moon, described poetically in ancient Chinese literature as a "jade plate", is once again poised to play a grand role in humankind's quest for excellence — the establishment of a manned lunar base, paving the way for future manned missions to Mars.

However, the long-term exploration of the moon and construction of lunar research stations require substantial resources, including energy, and material support. At the current level of technology, the cost of transporting 1

kilogram of materials from Earth to the moon ranges from \$50,000 to \$90,000. This means, if the construction and operation of lunar research stations were to rely solely on Earth's supplies, it would entail enormous costs.

This is where the lunar soil brought back by Chang'e 5 comes in. It has opened new avenues for scientists, some of whom believe it is possible to build bases using the resources available on the moon. According to Chinese scientists' research, some components of the lunar regolith can serve as catalysts for four processes: photovoltaic electrolysis of water, photocatalytic water decomposition, photocatalytic reduction of carbon dioxide and photo-thermal catalytic hydrogenation of carbon dioxide. Simulated solar radiation will help these processes to convert water and carbon dioxide into oxygen, hydrogen, methane and methanol. While oxygen is vital to human survival, hydrogen and methane are essential components of rocket propellants, and methanol is a key chemical raw material.

As German philosopher Immanuel Kant said, "Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe — the starry heavens above me, and the moral law within me."

The moon serves as humanity's first stop and transit on way to the cosmos, and China is determined to keep each step firmly on the way.

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

Wang Yanan

China, Latin America entitled to forge close space cooperation

Considering the unfathomable expanse of the universe, Earth, the only cosmic body we can call home, appears like a speck on a vast ocean. Yet in the cosmic expanse, a realm of boundless possibilities and uncertainties, lies the future of humankind. From the humble beginnings of human flight in a hot air balloon in 1783 to the monumental achievement of landing on the moon in 1969, our journey into space has been marked by remarkable achievements. Yet, given the grandeur of the cosmos, our accomplishments may seem modest.

Space technology offers a plethora of promising avenues for exploration and discovery. In space, we can unlock the mysteries of biology and life. We can explore space to make breakthroughs in medicines, cultivate more productive and resilient crops, and develop superior materials. The prospect of exploring distant planets and future migration paths of humans beckons us with tantalizing possibilities.

Unfortunately, access to these promising prospects is limited to only a few countries. There is significant imbalance among countries when it comes to space technology. While some countries possess advanced space capabilities, others lack even the basic communication satellites, and are thus deprived of the benefits of space technology.

China, as a developing country, has made significant strides in space technology, and prioritizes cooperation with other developing countries to ensure equitable access to space resources.

In recent years, China's cooperation with Latin American countries in space technology has expanded. China's collaboration with Venezuela on a future lunar exploration station project, including the possibility of sending Venezuelan astronauts to China's space station, exemplifies this trend. China's commitment to equitable and mutually beneficial global cooperation ensures that the participating countries can synchronize their access to space technology, expand the frontiers of human knowledge and leverage China's experience in space research to develop their agriculture, industry and healthcare sectors, and boost their economy.

China's involvement in Latin American countries' space endeavors goes beyond mere provisions for satellites, because it has been participating in the construction of satellite ground control facilities, training technical personnel, and helping enhance their satellite manufacturing capabilities. This collaborative approach has not only facilitated the sustainable development of space applications in Latin America but also enabled China to use satellite tracking and communications facilities in the region to support its own space program, including deep space exploration.

But China's deepening space technology cooperation with Latin American countries has made some countries, particularly Western countries, uncomfortable, with some of them saying China's involvement could destabilize the existing space exploration order and undermine the strategic interests of other space-faring nations. By saying so, however, they reveal their refusal to accept Latin American countries' desire to develop space technology and their willingness to engage in mutually beneficial cooperation with China.

The establishment of the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency in Mexico in 2021 is testament to the region's commitment to space exploration and development. However, China's collaboration with Latin American countries in space technology predates the establishment of the agency; it began in the late 1980s.

Over the years, China has launched satellites for several Latin American countries, including Brazil, providing vital support for their communication and resource survey efforts. It has also established space technology cooperation with countries such as Venezuela, Bolivia, Chile and Argentina. Such collaboration has not only bolstered Latin American countries' space capability but also fostered economic development and technological advancement in the region.

In the broader context, space technology cooperation represents a fundamental shift in the way we approach the exploration and exploitation of outer space. Instead of viewing space as a geopolitical battleground, we should embrace it as a platform promoting global collaboration and scientific discovery. By working together, countries can leverage their respective strengths and resources to address common challenges and realize the full potential of space exploration for the benefit of all humanity.

China's increasing role in space technology cooperation with Latin American countries holds great promise for the future of space exploration and development. By boosting collaboration and sharing resources, China and Latin American countries together can boost their space capabilities and help achieve the broader goals of scientific exploration and technological innovation.

The future of human civilization does not depend on individual countries' ability to set foot on celestial bodies, but rather on how much space technology can benefit humanity. As we journey into the cosmos, let us embrace the spirit of cooperation and partnership, and recognize that our collective future lies among the stars.

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



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GLOBAL VIEWS



Editor's note: The world has undergone many changes and shocks in recent years. Enhanced dialogue between scholars from China and overseas is needed to build mutual understanding on many problems the world faces. For this purpose, the China Watch Institute of China Daily and the National Institute for Global Strategy, Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, jointly present this special column: The Global Strategy Dialogue, in which experts from China and abroad will offer insightful views, analysis and fresh perspectives on long-term strategic issues of global importance.

NI FENG

US all-round strategic competition with China has taken shape

The United States launched its all-round strategic competition with China in December 2017, when the Donald Trump administration released its National Security Strategy. Since then, the US strategic competition with China has lasted for more than six years, with the Joe Biden administration palming the baton offered by its predecessor.



In retrospect, former US President Trump, an anti-establishment politician, launched the strategic competition with China in a "wild" way. President Biden, a typical pro-establishment politician, has been upgrading and rationalizing the US' competitive strategies against China since taking office in 2021.

In October 2022, the Biden administration unveiled its first formal National Security Strategy, saying that "the People's Republic of China is the only competitor with both the intent to reshape the international order and, increasingly, the economic, diplomatic, military and technological power to do it... In the competition with the PRC, as in other arenas, it is clear that the next 10 years will be the decisive decade".

It is also clear that the US strategy for all-round competition with China, centered on strategic competition and based on long-term competition, has basically taken shape. In a nutshell, it is a four-pronged approach.

To start with, the US is attempting to gradually and selectively decouple from China in economic and trade areas.

The trade war initiated by the Trump administration was the start of the US' all-round strategic competition with China, with the administration developing that into the concept of "decoupling".

However, over 40 years of reform and opening-up have made the Chinese economy deeply integrated with the outside world, including the US. All countries will rise or fall together with it. A sudden decoupling from China will be too much to bear for the US and its allies, which has been made clear by what has happened since the US launched its trade war against China and during the COVID-19 pandemic.

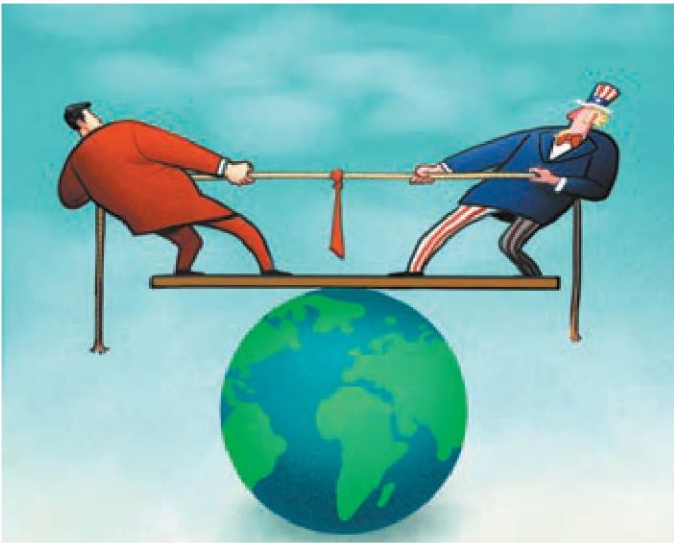
However, the US thinks that it has to decouple from China to contain its rise. Thus, after taking office, US President Biden replaced decoupling with "de-risking", which is nothing but a euphemism for selective, gradual decoupling.

The Biden administration has not made any adjustments to the Trump administration's elevated tariffs on imports from China. De-risking has two aspects. The first is the "small yard, high fence" approach in the hi-tech sector, which attempts to isolate China from the US-led West, so as to maintain the US' technology leadership. Second, in economic exchanges and trade, the US is attempting to move some important and critical industry chains out of China through near-shoring and friendshoring in order to reduce its reliance on China. The ultimate goal is to build industry chains excluding China and create two connected but mostly parallel market systems.

Second, in geopolitics, the US is repeating what it did to the Soviet Union during the Cold War period.

Despite claims from President Biden and officials from his administration that the US will not fight a Cold War with China, many US moves resemble what it did against the Soviet Union during the Cold War.

For instance, the US is strengthening its



LUO JIE / CHINA DAILY

bilateral alliance system, enhancing the role of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue that groups the US with Japan, India and Australia, elevating the role of the AUKUS trilateral security partnership of the US, the United Kingdom and Australia, and promoting NATO's eastward expansion. All these US moves are aimed at suppressing China by magnifying the role of its system of allies and partners.

The US is also strengthening its presence and deployment along the "first island chain", particularly around the East China Sea, the Taiwan Strait and the South China Sea. It aims to create a center stage battlefield for strategic competition with China, particularly by means of the Taiwan question. This is the ultimate reason for the US to inject more and more strategic resources

in the Taiwan area in recent years.

In terms of influence over neutral forces, the US, joining hands with its allies and partners, has made frequent moves to smear and sabotage Belt and Road cooperation. Recently, the US has been cozying up to the European Union and India, in an attempt to alienate China from the Global South. All these US moves are aimed at competing with China for greater influence over neutral forces.

Third, the US is reactivating the US-style "militarist system" domestically. Prior to the outbreak

of World War II, the US did not have a powerful national security system to cope with major-country competition, by virtue of the country's diversified social interests, decentralized yet balanced state power, and advantageous geographical location. After the end of World War II, the US passed the National Security Act of 1947 to mandate a major reorganization of the national security system, due to it becoming the world's top superpower and its Cold War struggle with the Soviet Union. The act created many institutions including the Department of Defense, the National Security Council and the Central Intelligence Agency. The common anti-communism stance of the Republican and Democratic parties strengthened government-congress and government-society coordination, thus

forming a national security interest chain and creating the military-industrial complex.

Domestically, the US calls such a system a "National Security State", a de facto US-style "militarist system". The system played a crucial role in the US-Soviet Union Cold War, but faded away in the wake of the collapse of the Soviet Union.

The system was partly reactivated after the Sept 11 terrorist attacks in 2001, most importantly by passing the US Patriot Act. After the outbreak of the financial crisis, some US strategists proposed the so-called "whole-of-government" approach, by referring to experiences in mobilizing government and social resources during Cold War with the Soviet Union and summarizing US experiences in its war on terrorism. This approach aims to mobilize all resources and unify all forces to compete with China on all fronts.

Fourth, the US is going all out to promote the so-called ideology-based and values-based diplomacy. In ideology-related topics, the US has been emphasizing the politics of national identity, magnifying the impacts of differences in political systems and selling the idea that the West can never get along with China. By doing so, the US aims to mobilize all resources to form an anti-China consensus domestically and to draw more countries into an anti-China camp globally.

The above-mentioned four areas are the major components of the US' all-round strategic competition with China. In recent years, China-US relations have suffered great difficulties. The root cause is that some people in the US cling to the Cold-War and zero-sum game mentality, and are obsessed with viewing China as the US' foremost competitor and most consequential geopolitical challenge. This seriously-distorted perception of China will inevitably lead to wrong policies, wrong actions and wrong results.

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DJOOMART OTORBAEV

Reconsidering Eurasia connectivity and trade

As maritime trade is threatened by ever-increasing tensions, more countries are realizing the need to develop a railway trade route linking China and Europe

The recent conflict between Israel and Iran has not only escalated tensions in the Middle East but also emerged as a severe and imminent threat to the global order, including maritime shipping. Given the pivotal role of shipping in international trade, these developments can potentially disrupt supply chains and significantly impact the global economy.



Geopolitical and climate concerns have triggered a series of unprecedented disruptions in global supply chains, particularly along vital maritime trade routes. These disruptions, from the COVID-19 pandemic, the *Ever Given* incident in the Suez Canal, the persistent drought in the Panama Canal, the hostilities in the Black Sea, to the ongoing attacks on commercial ships in the Red Sea by the Houthis rebels, have sent shock waves through the global economy. With 90 percent of goods still reliant on sea transport, the potential impact on the worldwide economy is not just a cause for concern, but an immediate crisis, threatening to exacerbate inflation and other significant economic issues. Industries such as automotive, electronics, and fashion, which rely heavily on just-in-time delivery, are particularly affected.

While the shipping industry is undergoing numerous crises, rail transportation across the Eurasian landmass is thriving and developing rapidly. According to statistics released by the China State Railway Group, freight traffic on the China-Europe route reached 17,523 trips in 2023, carrying 1.902 million twenty-foot equivalent units of goods, representing yearly increases of 6 and 18 percent, respectively.

Among these, 9,343 trips were west-bound, and 8,180 were eastbound. The number of China-Europe freight train trips reached 2,928 in the first two months of 2024, up 9 percent year-on-year. During this period, the route carried 317,000 TEUs, up 10 percent from the year before.

The world of trade is constantly changing, and keeping up with these changes is essential. Global trade restructuring is both necessary and urgent. Humanity must adapt to the changing political and economic landscape to reshape trade and stay ahead of the curve. Governments and businesses must take these steps quickly to build a prosperous future for all.

The railway route now connects 120 Chinese cities with 219 cities in 25 European countries. The China-Europe railway is an intelligent and environmentally friendly means of transporting freight. The share of capital-intensive and time-sensitive products such as photovoltaic modules, new energy vehicles, lithium-ion batteries, electronics, machine parts, jewelry and plastic products is proliferating.

The soft infrastructure for such transportation is being improved at a rapid pace. "On the China-Europe Express Railway routes, customs clearance and inspection are becoming more convenient, the business environment at ports of entry is constantly improving, and the rules and regulations related to cross-border transportation are becoming more standardized," Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Mao Ning said at a press conference on Feb 29. For example, port facilities were

expanded at two railway crossings between China and Kazakhstan, and customs procedures were optimized, reducing train stopping time to six to eight hours.

The rail connections are not just growing. They are becoming more resilient and adaptable. Today, trains take about 10 days to travel 9,908 kilometers from Xi'an in Shaanxi province to Duisburg in Germany, two days less than in 2023. Average carbon dioxide emissions during this journey are 15 times less than air travel and 10 times less than road transport, making it a more sustainable and secure option for global trade.

If rail transport in the Eurasian continent continues to grow, the obvious beneficiaries will be the landlocked Central Asian countries, as they will have direct access to both the Chinese and European markets, as well as the markets of the South Caucasus and Turkey. Being a transport bridge between Asia and Europe, Kazakhstan remains the only beneficiary of the growing traffic among the Central Asian countries. In addition to the direct benefit of being able to trade directly with Asia and Europe, Kazakhstan Railways generated a revenue of \$4.2 billion and a net profit of \$344 million last year, with year-over-year growth of 29.3 percent and 400 percent, respectively. The planned construction of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan railway will allow three more countries, including Turkmenistan, to access direct and transit rail trade. These countries are particularly interested in developing railway trade along the shortest so-called Middle Corridor, which links China and Europe via Central Asia, the Caspian Sea, the South Caucasus, and Turkey. The European Union has expressed its readiness to support such a project and



WANG XIAOYING / CHINA DAILY

invest 10 billion euros (\$10.66 billion) in constructing the Middle Corridor.

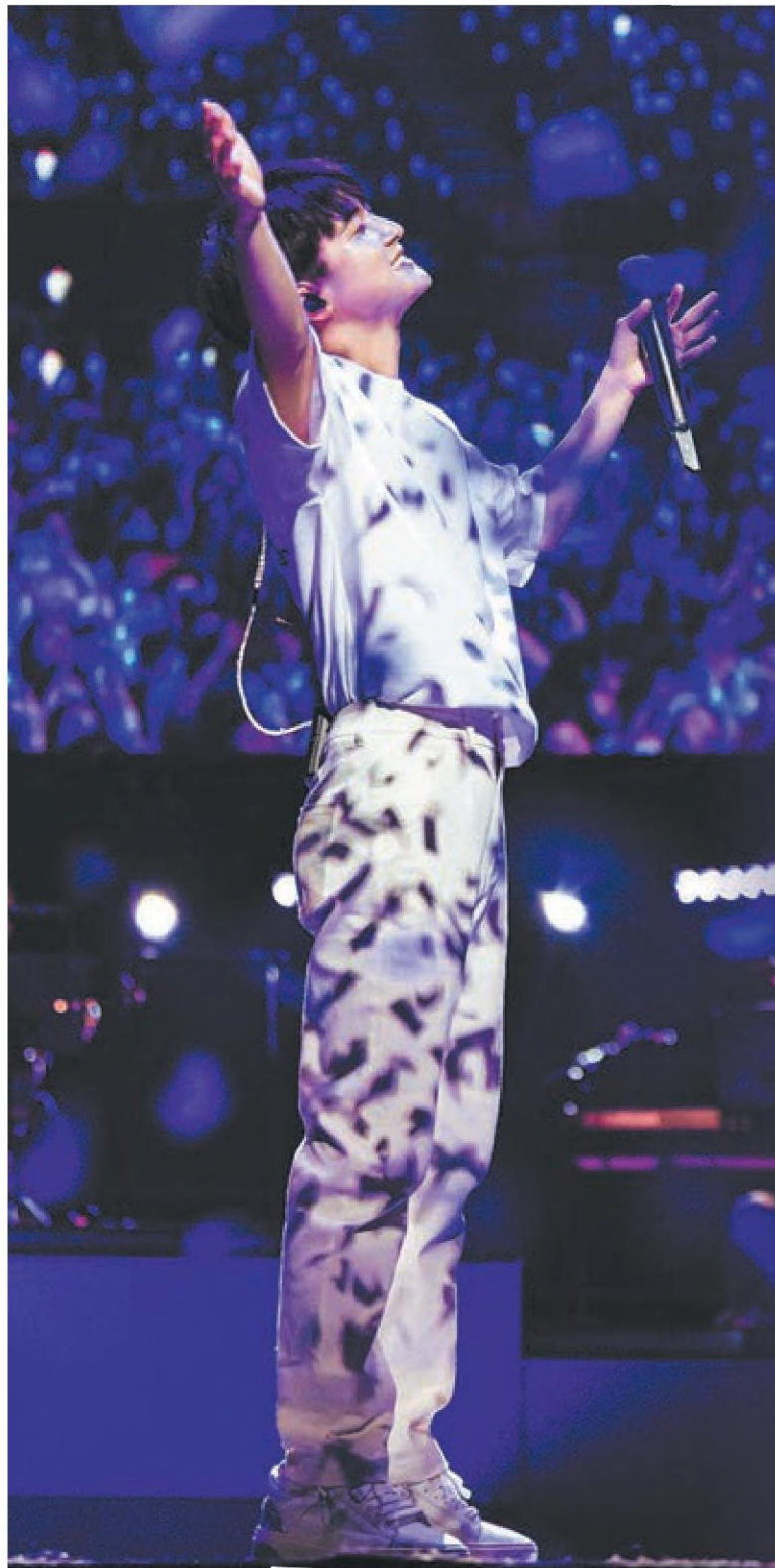
One of the drawbacks of using this corridor is the requirement to cross the Caspian Sea, which is both costly and time-consuming. This drawback can be addressed through the utilization of cutting-edge technologies, such as drawing upon China's extensive experience in ferrying trains across the ocean.

The sustainable development of maritime trade is threatened by ever-increasing geopolitical tensions, military escalation in the oceans, increasing regional fragmentation, and the need to reduce the carbon footprint. At the same time, the quality and efficiency of rail transport are growing. The

world of trade is constantly changing, and keeping up with these changes is essential. Global trade restructuring is both necessary and urgent. Humanity must adapt to the changing political and economic landscape to reshape trade and stay ahead of the curve. Governments and businesses must take these steps quickly to build a prosperous future for all.

The author is former prime minister of the Kyrgyz Republic and a distinguished professor at the Belt and Road School at Beijing Normal University. The author contributed this article to China Watch, a think tank powered by China Daily. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

LIFE



Singer shows the world his talent at UN

From humble roots in a mountain village, Zhou Shen is at the summit of success, **Minlu Zhang** reports from the United States.

At the conclusion of the United Nations Chinese Language Day, fans of singer Zhou Shen accompanied him from the conference room all the way to the elevator doors. The singer waved goodbye and said "thank you" to those who enjoy his music as he stepped into the elevator. "What I feel very happy about is that there are many people behind me who support and love me," Zhou told China Daily in an exclusive interview inside UN headquarters in New York. "I feel that they are with me on every stage I stand on. I also want to tell them that we can work together to realize the dreams we want to realize."

News of Zhou singing at the UN went viral last week. The topic has garnered in excess of 180 million views, and more than 1.72 million posts included it on social media platform Sina Weibo.

UN Chinese Language Day usually falls on April 20, but this year it was held on April 18. It was rainy and cold in New York, with the temperature reaching a maximum of 11 C. Some of Zhou's fans waited outside the UN the entire afternoon to see him.

Talking about how he went from a mountain village in Hunan province to becoming one of the most popular singers in China, Zhou said that doing what he enjoys feels like the right thing for him to do.

"I think the right thing to do is to pursue what you enjoy and continuously explore your desires as you grow. I'm also figuring things out along the way, like which step may truly be my own? Follow your desires, or take steps that genuinely feel right when you take them," he said.

Born in 1992, Zhou grew up in a family from a remote mountain village. Up until the age of 6, he was often left at home by his parents and so music became his most important and precious companion.

"Especially when I was feeling down or sad, music comforted me. I was less confident and introverted as a child,

and music allowed me to move from my own small world to the bigger world outside, step by step," he said during his speech on UN Chinese Language Day.

When Wu Zhongbei, clinical assistant professor of music and language at Alfred University in upstate New York, introduced one of Zhou's songs to the students in her *guzheng* (a zither-like traditional stringed instrument) class, she found that even those who didn't speak Chinese had already heard it.

"They all loved your song *Big Fish*," Wu said, recalling how after listening to the song, one student in her class expressed an interest in studying Chinese during the upcoming semester and even traveled to China earlier this year, and some of the students also sent Zhou cards with their best wishes written in Chinese.

As his most famous song, *Big Fish* has more than 2 million views on YouTube. The top comment on the video explains the vocal technique Zhou uses at the end of the song.

"It is called countertenor, and it is a falsetto singing technique. It has nothing to do with gender theory. He is a deeply skilled singer, singing beautifully," user halvordlund4782 wrote.

"How did they manage to hire an angel to sing this? Did they just fish one out of the sky or something?" user YolaroozXD wrote.

Zhou said he was proud to know his song was loved by people outside China and could serve as a bridge to spread Chinese culture.

"When I watch videos on the internet of foreign listeners reacting to *Big Fish*, I feel very proud. Because everyone thinks, 'wow, this Chinese music is very beautiful'. And they read the lyrics, as there are translations, and they say that the lyrics are meaningful and the song is very moving," he said.

Zhou is also pleased that his song has become a starting point for people to find a way to understand Chinese culture, and added that he thinks music is very important to the spread of culture.

On YouTube, vocal analysts have discussed his singing skills. In one YouTube video with 128,000 views, a voice teacher who goes by the name Bethany says that after listening to Zhou for the first time, she is "over the moon" to hear a singer with the skill and agility he displays in *Big Fish*.

"He is doing something very smart but also very cool. When you're in falsetto, sometimes it can be tricky to get your vocal cords to fully adduct. Rather than a neutral onset ... he's putting a little 'h' in there ... so it adds this really cool effect, making it sound really breathy, but it also is a healthy way of getting your cords together when you're in falsetto," she says in the video.

Zhou's music takes inspiration from traditional Chinese culture, and he weaves elements of ancient melodies and poetic themes into his compositions.

"In fact, I have many songs that are related to Chinese opera. I have one called *Brightness*, which is a combination of pop music and Chinese opera," he said.

"It is actually quite difficult to combine the two without being obtrusive, and creating a sense of dialogue between ancient and modern times in just three to four minutes is not easy. Moreover, this blending of ancient and modern elements has to be smooth and natural," Zhou told China Daily, adding that he is continuing to make more attempts.

As popular as he is now, Zhou's voice

caused him some trouble in school because he said that he sounded like a girl.

"During adolescence, my voice didn't change much when everyone else's did. The cynicism surrounding me at that time greatly affected my self-esteem," he said.

Faced with the pressure of both family and academic expectations, he abandoned his musical aspirations after graduating from high school and became a medical student in Ukraine. However, after a year, he decided to quit and applied to the Lviv National Music Academy.

He began his career by covering other people's songs on social media. He gradually gained followers and caught the attention of *The Voice of China*, the Chinese version of *The Voice*, the television singing competition.

"Through these years of hard work, voices of support and encouragement have gradually increased. I feel the acceptance and love from strangers, and I have also gradually transformed from a teenager lacking confidence to a calmer, and more determined version of myself," Zhou said.

"I was once just an ordinary boy who loved to sing. Besides singing and music, I often thought about how to pass on the goodwill and encouragement I received in different ways," he added.

Zhou premiered his new song, *Ode to Peace*, on Chinese Language Day. He calls it "very relatable".

"As a pop singer, I usually perform more popular songs, but this one has a more aria-like feel, and its lyrics are relatable to everyone. It speaks about the importance of peace to humanity, and today, it is being performed in a special place like the United Nations.

"By singing this song, I aim to highlight its universal message to the fullest extent, so that everyone can resonate with it deeply. I also hope to sing it in a place that advocates for peace and the development of a beautiful world, so that more people can hear it and recognize the importance of peace," said Zhou, who also performed the theme song for the 15th Meeting of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Convention on Biological Diversity (COP15).

He said that singing *Ode to Peace* at the UN shows Chinese cultural confidence.

"My biggest belief today is that we should sing our own songs in Chinese on the platform of the United Nations. I think this showcases our greatest cultural confidence, as does wearing Chinese-style clothing," Zhou said.

Zhou said that he feels extremely fortunate. "I hope to convey this message to everyone who might think themselves ordinary. I want you to know that each of us has the potential to be fortunate.

"Through our efforts, strengths and talents, we can generate warmth and shine. I believe we can all achieve this. I am proof of this belief. As a very ordinary person who loves to sing and comes from an ordinary place, I stand here today. And so can you."

Contact the writer at minluzhang@chinadailyusa.com



Online
See more by
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code.



Top and above left: Zhou Shen performing during a concert last year. Born in a mountain village in Hunan province, he has become one of the most popular singers in the country. **PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY** **Above middle:** Zhou performing at the Chinese Language Day event at the United Nations headquarters in New York on April 18. **MINLU ZHANG / CHINA DAILY** **Above right:** Zhou touring the UN headquarters in New York. **PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY**

French martial arts enthusiasts get a kick out of China experience

GUIYANG — With sunlight glinting on the leaves of trees and the running water in a brook at the world heritage site of Mount Fanjingshan, 62-year-old Yves Perrin sat beside the water wearing tai chi clothes, practicing traditional *qigong* breathing exercises.

Despite his Western features, Perrin blended in with the surrounding environment of this famous Taoist mountain, and exercised as he always does in his home country of France.

Between April 7 and 19, a group of 50 French martial arts enthusiasts

visited Guizhou province to practice tai chi and *qigong* with their teacher Ke Wen, the founder of the Les Temps du Corps, an association that teaches energy techniques and Chinese culture in Paris.

Driven to improve his health, Perrin has been learning *qigong* for 15 years and tai chi for 10, and partakes in the traditional Chinese practices for between 10 minutes to an hour every day.

"They have become a part of my life," he says.

To master more skills, Perrin studied under Chinese teachers and

visited a rehabilitation center for *qigong* teaching, research and therapy at the Beidaihe coastal resort in 2015.

"*Qigong* and tai chi help me take care of my emotions and become more peaceful. It's an excellent technique," Perrin says.

Perrin also gives lessons and shares his knowledge of *qigong* and tai chi with his compatriots. "I love Chinese culture, and I hope it can help more people," he says.

In 2020, tai chi was inscribed on the Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of

Humanity by UNESCO.

A traditional Chinese martial art, tai chi has spread to more than 150 countries and regions, and has more than 100 million practitioners.

Anne-line Loygue Quellien, 39, learned tai chi from her father, a martial arts enthusiast who visited China to learn the technique and now runs a health center in northern France for massage rehabilitation therapy, as well as tai chi and *qigong*.

Quellien says that she has a strong affection for China and its traditional culture. When she was

sick, her father would treat her with *guasha* — a traditional Chinese scraping technique to relieve pain.

With nearly 30 years spent studying *wu qin xi* (five-animal boxing) and 20 years studying tai chi and *qigong*, Quellien has made promoting Chinese culture her career since 2010. At present, she is mainly in charge of the tai chi lessons at the health center.

"Tai chi and *qigong* help me connect with other people and find the true meaning of life by feeling at one with myself. They also serve as a bridge for communication between

the East and the West," says Quellien.

Ke has taught tai chi and *qigong* in France for the past 30 years and has accompanied more than 12,000 French martial arts enthusiasts to China.

"This trip strengthened the cultural exchange between China and France and deepened the friendship between the French people and the people of Guizhou. We'll share the beautiful experience in China with France, Europe and the world," Ke says.

XINHUA

LIFE

In the summer of 2018, Chang Jianjun, honorary president of the Guangxi Theater Association and playwright of the new folk opera production, *Liu Liuzhou*, awaited the arrival of a group of theater experts in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region.

One of the guests suggested they visit the memorial temple of Liu Zongyuan (773-819), a renowned writer, philosopher and politician from the Tang Dynasty (618-907).

Chang had visited the temple many times. But this time, the expert posed a thought-provoking question: "How would you write about Liu Zongyuan?"

He thought for a moment. Then, inspiration struck. He would create a dialogue between Tang poetry and Guangxi's folk songs.

"In early 2022, I actually received the invitation to write a folk opera about Liu Zongyuan," Chang recalls.

"I first delved into extensive historical records and then plunged into a long period of contemplation. I thought: What are we telling the audience by writing about Liu today?"

Despite Liu's aspirations to contribute to the imperial court, he faced an ill-fated political career. He was demoted and exiled from the then capital, Chang'an, which today is Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

From 805 to 815, he was exiled to Hunan province's Yongzhou and was subsequently exiled to the even more remote Liuzhou, where he served as an official until his death.

While he was dissatisfied with his position and longed to return to the capital, he took measures to popularize Confucianism, free the poor from servitude and cultivate the wastelands. This changed locals' lives, and he was given the sobriquet, "Liu Liuzhou".

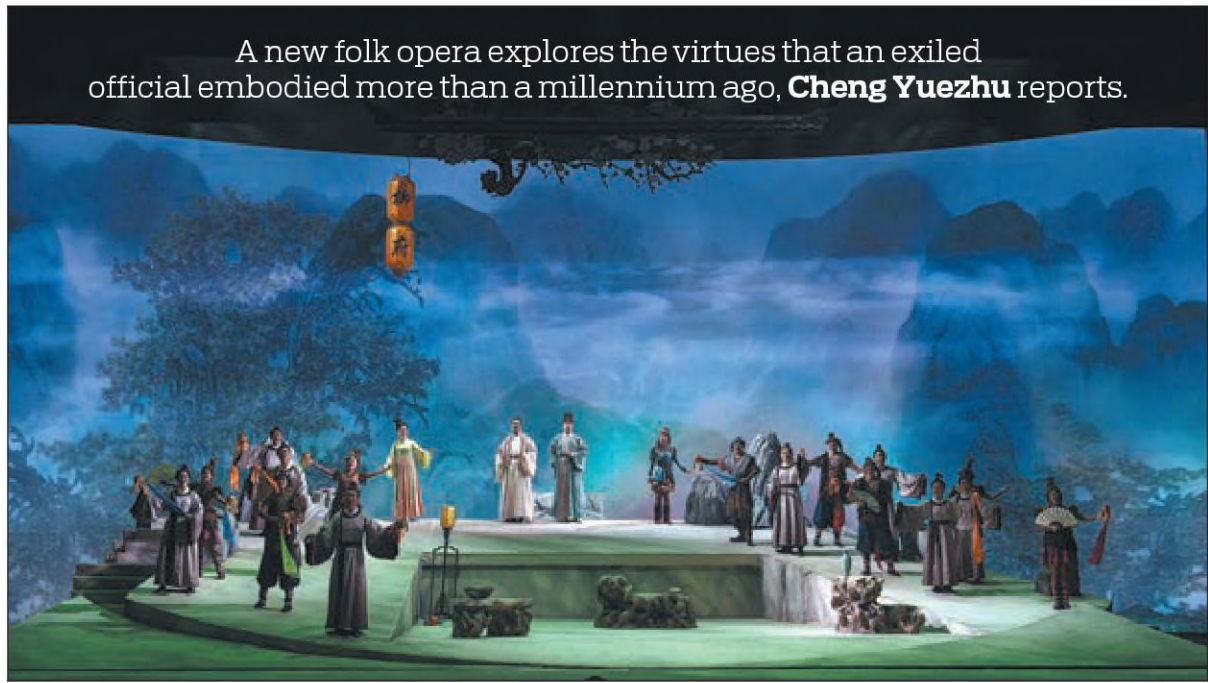
The opera *Liu Liuzhou* premiered on April 11 at the China National Opera House in Beijing.

Liu is considered one of the eight most influential essayists of the Tang and Song (960-1279) dynasties and is a household name in China. Chang believes it is meaningful to highlight the last years of his life, when he faced adversities yet continued to pursue his goals and ideals, embodying his inner strength and rectitude.

"The reason I chose to highlight the final four years of Liu's life in Liuzhou as the main storyline is to enable contemporary audiences to better reflect on the past and to revere history and tradition," Chang says.

The production aims to

A new folk opera explores the virtues that an exiled official embodied more than a millennium ago, **Cheng Yuezhu** reports.



Singing his praises, across the ages



Folk opera production *Liu Liuzhou*, centered on Tang Dynasty (618-907) writer Liu Zongyuan and his connection with the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, made its premiere on April 11 at the China National Opera House in Beijing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

depict major historical events but also to creatively narrate the details of Liu's four years in Liuzhou.

In addition to such historical figures as Liu Zongyuan and his friend, renowned poet and philosopher Liu Yuxi, the production imagines several fictional characters, especially Guangxi locals who present unique folk singing styles.

Composer Du Ming says the production merges traditional Chinese music based on the pentatonic scale; instruments that ancient literati adored, such as *guqin* (a seven-string zither) and *xiao* (a bamboo flute); Guangxi's folk songs; and traditional Chinese operatic elements to develop the characters, ambiance and plot.

"We aim to not only uphold China's musical tradition but also to showcase distinctive local cultural characteristics," Du says.

"Based on the pentatonic scale, the songs of characters from central parts of China adopt music that sets a melancholic tone, which matches their sense of dejection. But for Guangxi characters, the brighter styles commonly used in folk songs are adopted to convey their optimism and positivity despite undesirable living conditions."

The dramatic contrast in musical tones is gradually replaced by the interaction and integration of different musical styles, reflecting the changes in the characters' states of mind.

In the production, the audiences can hear solo performances of authentic folk songs, antiphonal harmonies among the scholarly characters and the folk song singers, as well as a grand group song that incorporates different vocal genres.

The Beijing premiere fell on the third day of the third lunar month on the lunar calendar — a day when people of the Zhuang ethnic group offer sacrifices to their ancestors and when young people socialize through antiphonal singing.

Before the premiere began, performers sang representative folk songs and performed ethnic dances onstage to give audiences a sense of Guangxi's folk music.

"An artistic portrayal of Liu's adherence to the concepts of serving the people and his unwavering integrity undoubtedly delivers positive social implications," Chang says.

"Audiences of all backgrounds can find enlightenment from this sage from more than a thousand years ago."

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By CHEN NAN

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The Forbidden City Concert Hall has announced a series of programs to mark the 25th anniversary of the venue's reopening. From Friday to May 19, it will host performances of classical music, choral singing, chamber music and traditional Chinese music.

Conductor Zheng Jian, the Beijing Musicians Association Choir and the China Broadcast-Film Symphony Orchestra will present the opening concert on Friday, playing such works as *Ode to the Red Flag* and *Swan Lake*.

On April 27, Fang Jinlong will play the *pipa* (Chinese lute), while jamming with French jazz musicians, including pianist, organist and composer Benoit Sourisse; drummer and composer Andre Charlier; and accordion player Christophe Lampecchia.

Chinese art songs will be performed by soprano Shi Yue and baritone Yuan Chenye, along with pianists Xu Hong and Chen Xi, on April 28. During the May Day holiday, the Beijing Symphony Orchestra will perform under the baton of conductor Tan Lihua on Wednesday. Other highlights include a concert for children with works adapted from songs featured in classic Chinese cartoons and a shadow-puppet show by artists from Tangshan, Hebei province. The award-winning Amber Quartet, and



Left: Conductor Tan Lihua will play with the Beijing Symphony Orchestra on Wednesday at the Forbidden City Concert Hall. Right: Guests, including Zhang Heping (middle), Tan (second from right) and Xu Jian (right) at the ceremony marking the 25th anniversary of the reopening of the concert hall in Beijing on April 22. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

pianist Sheng Yuan will team up for a concert to close the festival on May 19.

Located in Zhongshan Park near Tiananmen Square, the Forbidden City Concert Hall was first built in 1942 as one of Beijing's first modern theaters. From 1942 to 1996, it undertook three major renovations and has been transformed from an open-air theater to an indoor venue, which has since staged live performances and national-level meetings.

In 1999, led by Zhang Heping, then the director of Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture (now the Beijing Municipal Bureau of Culture and Tourism), the Forbidden City Concert Hall reopened following another renovation.

A weeklong festival was held in April 1999 to mark the reopening, and became an important cultural event in the city that year.

The year 1999 marked the 50th anniversary of the founding of the

People's Republic of China. At that time, Beijing only had one professional concert hall to stage classical music — Beijing Concert Hall, recalls Zhang, 78.

"With the reopening of the Forbidden City Concert Hall, people had another place to go to enjoy music. Since it's located inside the beautiful Zhongshan Park, coming to the Forbidden City Concert Hall has become a joyful trip not only to enjoy art but also have a great time

in the park," he says.

"Since 1999, we decided to run the weeklong festival every year, making it an annual event to commemorate the reopening."

Conductor Tan, the former head of Beijing Symphony Orchestra, says that when the venue was renovated in 1999, it was used as a home for the Beijing Symphony Orchestra, where he and the orchestra did rehearsals and gave many performances.

"It's like a home to me," Tan says.

"The venue has also witnessed the growing fan base of classical music in the capital, especially young people."

Tan is credited with co-launching the Gateway to Arts summer festival, an annual event that started in 1995 and has become one of Beijing's biggest arts festivals for children during the summer vacation.

Now, every summer, the two-month festival offers children not only live performances and public lectures but also summer camps. These feature diverse classes, including classical music, traditional Chinese operas and Chinese instrumentation.

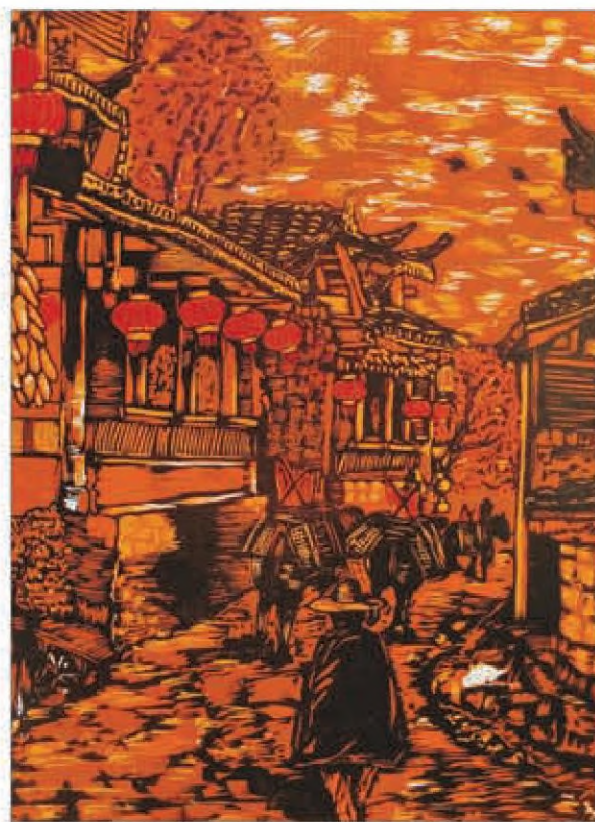
"I am very proud that we have run the place for 25 years and launched many festivals that have become our popular brands," says Xu Jian, general manager of the Forbidden City Concert Hall.

The former volleyball player has been in charge of the venue since 2002. She can still remember the first show she ever watched there. It was a performance by a children's choir led by the late music educator Yang Hongnian (1934-2020) on May 31, 1995.

"The kids choir stood in the hallway of the venue, singing songs to welcome the audience. It was a very touching moment," Xu recalls.

"During the past 25 years, the venue survived many difficult times, such as the pandemic, and we have built a deep connection with our audiences."

CULTURE



From left: Li Tengcong, a trainee at Pu'er University's reduction woodblock print studio, depicts horse caravans and the ancient Tea Horse Road in Yunnan province; Li Hang, a fellow trainee, depicts the scenery around Nakeli village in Yunnan province; *Lahu Human Scenery*, by Zheng Xu, winner of the Golden Prize at the sixth National Exhibition of Fine Arts in 1984. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Beauty of reduction

Artists revolutionize woodblock printing and provide a lifeline for their village.
Hou Chenchen and Li Yingqing report in Pu'er.

The group of artists, struggling to make ends meet, were faced with a conundrum. While their specialty, traditional woodblock printing, was highly satisfying spiritually, it exacted a heavy toll on them both physically and financially, as well as on their environment.

That's because the artistic technique requires a single wooden layer for each color that goes into these multicolored works.

It was in Pu'er, Yunnan province in the 1980s, and the artists embarked on a quest to discover a technique that would vastly simplify their task: a single wooden board carrying many different colors. Soon, they would come up with a style of woodblock art that would revolutionize their art and solve their financial woes.

In fact it may not have been quite as revolutionary as it seemed to them, for decades earlier another artistic master, Pablo Picasso, had played with the same idea in doing linocuts.

"To me a picture has always been a sum total of destructions," he is quoted as saying.

In his exploration of the art he eschewed multiple blocks in favor of a single block that he continuously carved into while pigmenting and printing the evolving images. This dynamic process of carving and deconstructing gave birth to what we now know as destructed print, or reduction print.

Leng Guangmian, chief of the reduction woodblock print studio and the teaching base of Pu'er University's fine art students, says he first encountered the technique at Pu'er University in 2003.

"I had experimented with various painting techniques such as oil painting, wash painting and watercolor sketching outdoors," he said. "However, I ultimately returned to reduction woodblocks because its artistic language resonates most with my expression."

A reduction woodblock print is characterized by three things, he says: its unique layered texture; harmonious color blending; and the unpredictability of the production process.

In contrast to traditional woodblock printing, in which colors are sequentially pressed onto paper from different boards, resulting in defined color edges, reduction woodblock are printed and simultaneously cut into the boards.

This dual action creates a textured color pre-

Farmers' paintings are boldly expressive, offering a unique perspective on farming, daily life and traditions. They employ vivid shapes and colors freely, creating dynamic compositions."

Leng Guangmian, chief of Nakeli's reduction woodblock print studio

sensation and smooth color transitions, and because the boards are ultimately destroyed and discarded, the process is largely unpredictable and utterly irreversible. It is precisely this, including the continuous changes needed while carving and printing, that for Leng produces one of the most satisfying elements of his work: the feeling of serendipity.

Indeed, it may have been serendipity that was at work in 2015 when President Xi Jinping, attending a training session at the central Party school in Beijing, asked a local official of Ning'er county in Pu'er: "Is that road still open?"

He was referring to the ancient Tea Horse Road, a historic trade route that linked China's inland regions with Xizang, extending as far as West Asia and the Red Sea coast. Nestled within Ning'er county is the village of Nakeli, once a vital station along the Tea Horse Road and now home to Leng's reduction woodblock print studio.

"Nakeli and Pu'er are holy lands for artists to paint from life," Leng says. "There are many ethnic minority settlements where the most primitive characteristics of clothing, language and other ways of life thrive to this very day."

The name Nakeli, derived from a minority language, means a fertile field by the bridge, and those who live in the village represent eight minority ethnic groups, including Hani, Yi, Dai, Lahu and Bai, who comprise 63 percent of its residents.

Reduction woodblock is closely linked with Pu'er's ethnic and native culture over 40 years, marked by a well-known Zheng Xu work, *Lahu Human Scenery*, portraying the traditional lives of the Lahu ethnic group. In 1984, the work was honored with the Golden Prize at China's sixth National Exhibition of Fine Arts, which is held

every five years.

Five years later, *Village*, by Wei Qiong, won the Golden Prize. These back-to-back achievements catapulted reduction woodblock print into prominence, solidifying its top academic place in Chinese woodblock fine art.

Rural Art

While Nakeli could bask in glory artistically, it was classed as a poor ethnic minority area. Ning'er county, where Nakeli village is located, was hit by an earthquake in June 2007, which killed three people, injured 562 and left much of the village in ruins.

However, its fortunes began to change after Xi, then the country's vice-president, visited it a year later and encouraged locals to embrace rural tourism centered on the cultural legacy of the Tea Horse Road.

Local governments began to become aware of the treasures that lay under their noses in the form of woodblock prints, and Nakeli's reduction woodblock print studio, backed by local governments, became a thriving center for farmer artists. Hundreds have graduated over the years, venturing into the world of woodblock art, and they have prospered financially.

Tao Shuangquan, a farmer who had had no formal art education, created popular horse caravan prints after a month of training in a woodblock print studio, and his prints became wildly popular.

Another farmer, Li Jinchang, 30, achieved success with prints depicting rural life scenes such as village views from a cow's back and shepherd boys herding or catching crickets.

Tao and Li are part of a government-sponsored training initiative that involved 100 farmers from

around Nakeli that aims to rejuvenate culture in the village and to boost cultural tourism.

Prints measuring 40 centimeters x 30 centimeters take one or two weeks, with each reduction woodblock yielding about 12 copies sold at the equivalent of up to \$40 a piece, greatly increasing local villagers' incomes.

"Farmers' paintings are boldly expressive, offering a unique perspective on farming, daily life and traditions," Leng says. "They employ vivid shapes and colors freely, creating dynamic compositions."

Today hotels, homestays and restaurants in Nakeli proudly display farmers' woodblock prints, showcasing their rich multicultural heritage to visitors and guests.

While celebrating the success of farmer woodblocks, Leng points out the absence of a sustainable long-term framework, given the prints' appeal and profitability. Moves are afoot to offer free spaces for farmers to learn woodblock and engage in regular creative activities, he says, and to develop markets.

In addition to innovation with subjects covered, there have been technological advances to tackle problems such as the moisture that plays havoc with prints in Pu'er's subtropical climate. Leng has set up a greenhouse to provide the ideal environmental conditions required for precise printing.

Drawing inspiration from digital oil painting, Leng is pioneering digital reduction woodblock printing, revolutionizing the once intricate process into a fast and accessible method. Through digital design and procedures, woodblocks can now be cut in just two hours.

This digital breakthrough has sparked widespread interest on social media, attracting a wave of tourists eager to experience the digital art. Recognizing the importance of immersive experience, Leng hopes to bring reduction woodblocks into elementary and secondary schools.

"Experiencing local customs is the best way to understand a culture. It is my lifelong goal to attract youngsters to experience reduction woodblock printing, develop the next generation of reduction woodblock artists, and bring the vibrant Yunnan culture to the world."

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Kuang Hanying contributed to this story.



From left: A farmer-painter, carrying his daughter on his back, carves a woodblock during a training project by the woodblock print studio targeting farmers in Nakeli village, Pu'er, Yunnan province, in 2017; Farmer-painters carve a woodblock at the reduction woodblock print studio in Nakeli village in 2017; Students from New Zealand's Lincoln University visit the studio in Pu'er, Yunnan province in 2017 and experience reduction woodblock printing. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY