

OPINION: AFGHANISTAN EXIT P.22 | FEATURES: TESLA, SLAMMING THE BRAKES P.34

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Chinese language in the international spotlight

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**North America Bureau**  
**Chief:** Yu Shujun  
**Tel/Fax:** 1-201-792-0334  
**E-mail:** yushujun@bjreview.com  
**Africa Bureau**  
**Chief Correspondent:** Ni Yanshou  
**Tel:** 27-71-6132053  
**E-mail:** casa201208@hotmail.com

**General Editorial Office**  
**Tel:** 86-10-68996252  
**Fax:** 86-10-68326628  
**English Edition**  
**Tel:** 86-10-68996250  
**Advertising Department**  
**Tel:** 86-10-68995807  
**E-mail:** ad@bjreview.com  
**Distribution Department**  
**Tel:** 86-10-68310644  
**E-mail:** circulation@bjreview.com

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## The Chinese Language on the Global Stage

Observed on April 20, is the UN Chinese Language Day. The exact date comes in tribute to Cangjie, the legendary figure credited with having invented Chinese characters. The theme of this year's UN Chinese Language Day is "Highlighting Pictographs," as pictographs are the origin of Chinese characters.

In 2010, the UN Department of Global Communications instituted language days for each of the organization's six official languages. The goal was two-fold: to celebrate multilingualism and cultural diversity as well as to promote the equal use of all six tongues.

Language is the carrier of communication, the bridge of interaction between states and the bond of mutual learning among civilizations. At the same time, a language and its individual written forms make up the "soul" of a nation's cultural heritage. Every language is worthy of respect and should be treated equally. The UN Chinese Language Day not only provides a unique platform for the world to better understand China, but also promotes the exchange of worldwide

languages and cultures.

As one of the six official UN languages, Chinese is the most widely spoken language in the world. Today, the Chinese language is increasingly learned and used in the international community as it has become a necessary language skill for international professionals in many countries.

Additionally, more than 70 countries have thus far incorporated the Chinese language into their education systems. Chinese plays an important role in the elevation of communication and cooperation between China and the world, as well as the advancement of exchange between nations worldwide.

As more and more foreigners start to study the Chinese language and experience Chinese culture, the world will have a better understanding of China and its rich history, its hard-working people, its development through innovation, and its inclusiveness. China, on its part, will also embrace the world with greater openness and make new, dynamic contributions to the international community. **BR**



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编委会：李雅芳 李建国 闫颖 杨琪 曾文卉  
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总编室电话：(010) 68996252 发行部电话：(010) 68310644  
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# HAPPY 110TH BIRTHDAY

An alumni art troupe performs at the 110th anniversary gala of Tsinghua University on April 25. As one of China's most esteemed institutions of higher learning, the university has cultivated pioneers in diverse fields ranging from politics to art. Tsinghua is the only Asian institution listed in the top 20 of the *Times* Higher Education World University Rankings 2021.



YINHEX

## Ecological Preservation

Photo taken on April 20 shows Tibetan antelopes in Hoh Xil, in the Sanjiangyuan region of Qinghai Province. The name Sanjiangyuan means the source of three rivers, namely the Yangtze River, Yellow River, and Lancang (Mekong) River. In recent years, Qinghai Province has been promoting ecological protection in the region, resulting in an increasing number of wild animals.

### Big Bone Disease

China has seen no new child cases of Kashin-Beck disease, also known as “big bone disease,” for two consecutive years, according to the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention. Kashin-Beck disease is a bone and joint disorder endemic to China that causes pain and can lead to disabilities.

During the conference, Li Bin, deputy head of China’s National Health Commission, said that China still has 179,000 patients with symptoms of Kashin-Beck disease, and that between 2019 and 2020, patients suffering from the disease had received over 130,000 treatments through medication and 802 had undergone surgeries.

“All 379 infected regions across China have met the

criteria necessary to qualify as having eliminated the disease,” Li said, adding that the cause of the disease is still unknown and that the commission will further prioritize disease-stricken areas with policies, funds and personnel to support treatment.

Lin Jianhao, an orthopedics expert with the Peking University Arthritis Institute, called for efforts to revise diagnostic criteria, stipulate guidelines for clinical treatment and carry out scientific research with cutting-edge technologies.

### Live-Streaming Regulation

Chinese authorities have rolled out a trial guideline to regulate the country’s booming live-streaming marketing industry, according to the Cyberspace

Administration of China (CAC).

The guideline, jointly issued by the CAC and six other authorities, aims to protect the rights and interests of consumers and minors, and prevent risks including false advertising, selling counterfeit items and selling substandard goods.

The guideline sets the minimum age for live-streaming operators and salespersons at 16, with minors above 16 required to obtain a guardian’s consent to enter the industry.

Live-streaming platforms are required to handle complaints from consumers in a timely manner and provide necessary evidence when disputes occur.

The guideline will take effect on May 25.

China has been the world’s largest online retail market for eight consecutive years and,

according to official data, had more than 24 million live-streaming marketing activities take place in 2020. A legion of leading online influencers have become household names through their sales success.

### Tibet Tourism

To celebrate the 70th anniversary of its peaceful liberation, China’s Tibet Autonomous Region has launched seven “red tourism” routes, covering historical sites of revolutionary significance.

The first tours following the new routes will be launched on China Tourism Day, which falls on May 19 each year.

“Against the backdrop of rural vitalization, promoting the integrated development of red tourism and rural tourism will provide support for consolidating the achievements of poverty alleviation and provide more platforms for people to increase their income,” said Wang Songping, Director of the regional department of tourism development.

Data showed that during the 13th Five-Year Plan period (2016-20), Tibet received more than 157.6 million tourists from home and abroad, generating nearly 212.6 billion yuan (\$32.7 billion) in tourism revenue.

### Survey of Parents

More than 92 percent of Chinese parents expect schools to organize safe and rewarding after-school programs for their children, Xinhua News Agency reported on April 24. The finding was the result of a survey conducted by *China Youth Daily*.

The survey polled 1,605 parents and found that after-school tutoring and on-site Q&A activities were favored by approximately 73 percent of the respondents.

Specifically, about 70 percent of the parents hoped that teachers could help students with their homework, 56.2 percent expected their children to pursue their hobbies and 50.8 percent preferred that sports activities would be offered.

The after-school programs are expected to better suit the needs of working parents who are not able to collect their children immediately after school.

## Doping Tests

China carried out over 14,000 doping tests on athletes in 2020 despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, Xinhua reported on April 22.

Although the cancellation of a large number of sporting events has led to a decrease in the overall number of the tests, the China Anti-Doping Agency (CHINADA) managed to complete 14,072 tests, of which 12,026 were urine tests and 2,046 were blood tests. In 2019, CHINADA conducted 20,314 tests.

According to a report released by CHINADA on April 20, a total of 25 cases of doping rule violations were found during domestic doping control activities, with an overall violation rate of 0.18 percent.

CHINADA said it was able to

find a number of solutions to the problems posed by the pandemic in the past year, in addition to formulating its own pandemic prevention measures.

Instead of using the usual practice of sending doping control officers (DCOs) from Beijing to locations around China to complete the necessary doping control activities, CHINADA stationed its DCOs in sports training bases around China.

## Permafrost Thaw

Chinese researchers have recently completed an assessment of potential thaw settlement hazards in the permafrost regions of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, known as “the roof of the world,” Xinhua reported on April 21.

Thaw settlement is a phenomenon that occurs when newly liquefied water drains from the recently thawed permafrost, reducing its volume and leading to settling and potential instability of the land. “The results of the study provide valuable references for engineering, construction and maintenance,” said Wu Tonghua, a researcher at the Northwest Institute of Eco-environment and Resources under the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

The study also provides an



## Technological Innovation

Workers assemble engines on an assembly line at a workshop of the Weichai Group in Weifang, Shandong Province, on April 22. Weichai Power Co. Ltd., a state-owned enterprise founded in 1946, has developed China's first high-speed and high-power engine with independent intellectual property rights, ending China's long-term reliance on foreign technologies for heavy commercial vehicles.

insight for early warning systems and ways to adapt to permafrost thaw settlement on the plateau, Wu added.

The Qinghai-Tibet Plateau is the world's highest and largest low-and-middle-latitude permafrost region. The permafrost on the plateau is characterized by its relatively high temperature, high ice content and environmental vulnerability.

More than 40 percent

of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau permafrost faces medium-high settlement risks.

The warming climate exacerbates thaw settlement hazards in the permafrost regions of the Qinghai-Tibet Plateau, and threatens the stability of engineering infrastructure there. However, the risks associated with permafrost thaw settlement have rarely been assessed until now.



## Experiencing TCM

International students from the China University of Petroleum in Qingdao, Shandong Province, learn to weigh traditional Chinese medicine (TCM) under the guidance of doctors at the TCM hospital in Huangdao District, Qingdao, on April 23. The hospital has collaborated with local universities to establish a base to enable international students to experience TCM culture.

## Coal Cuts

The share of coal in China's energy mix will drop to less than 56 percent this year, a guideline released by the National Energy Administration (NEA) on April 22 read.

The proportion was 56.8 percent in 2020, and 57.7 percent in 2019.

In 2021, China plans to further replace coal in final energy consumption with the electricity equivalent of 200 billion kWh, the document said.

Meanwhile, its energy production is expected to reach the equivalent of 4.2 billion tons of standard coal this year, while the outputs of oil and natural gas are projected to stand at around 196 million tons and 202.5 billion cubic meters, respectively.

The country will also strive to bring the installed capacity of non-fossil energy to 1.1 billion kW and cut energy consumption per 10,000 yuan (\$1,540) of GDP

by around 3 percent in 2021.

China will further strengthen its control of the total coal consumption, drive forward the efficient and clean use of coal, encourage the use of comprehensive energy services and enhance energy-efficiency management, according to the NEA.

## Aviation Recovery

The civil aviation industry in the first quarter (Q1) of the year saw continuous recovery across major indices, according to the Civil Aviation Administration of China.

The total transport turnover was 20.3 billion ton-km, a 22.8-percent year-on-year increase.

It handled 102 million passenger trips and 1.78 million tons of freight, up 37.5 percent and 28.7 percent, respectively.

Approximately 1.05 million flight movements were recorded, up 23.7 percent.

In March, the number of domestic air passenger trips hit 47.68 million, exceeding the level during the same period of 2019.

## Growing Profit

The software and information technology (IT) service industry collected 237.1 billion yuan (\$36.51 billion) in profit during Q1 of the year, surging 25.9 percent year on year, data from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) showed.

Revenue of the software sector came in at 1.9 trillion yuan (\$292 billion), up 26.5 percent. The growth rate accelerated from the 21.3-percent increase registered in the first two months.

Thanks to the rising demand stemming from the digitalization of the manufacturing industry, revenue of industrial software products expanded 20.9 percent, to 47.9 billion yuan (\$7.3 billion),

up 2.5 percentage points over the January-February period.

The application of new information technologies such as cloud computing and big data continued to speed up in Q1, generating a revenue of 170.6 billion yuan (\$26.2 billion), up 26.6 percent.

MIIT data also showed revenue from e-commerce platform technology services climbed 33.2 percent to 159.9 billion yuan (\$24.6 billion), while that from integrated circuit design rose 38.5 percent from January to March.

Software exports remained fast expansion, rising 15.4 percent year on year to \$11.1 billion.

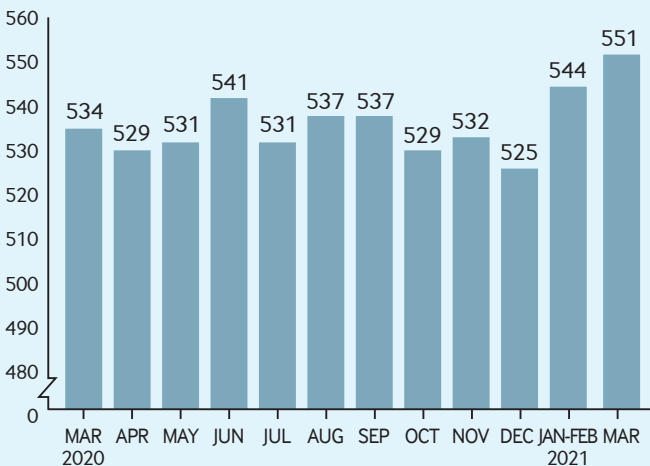
## Fintech Growth

Financial technology (fintech) has experienced rapid growth in China due to a favorable environment fostered by the wide use of mobile devices and the Internet, a strong digital payment ecosystem, and the

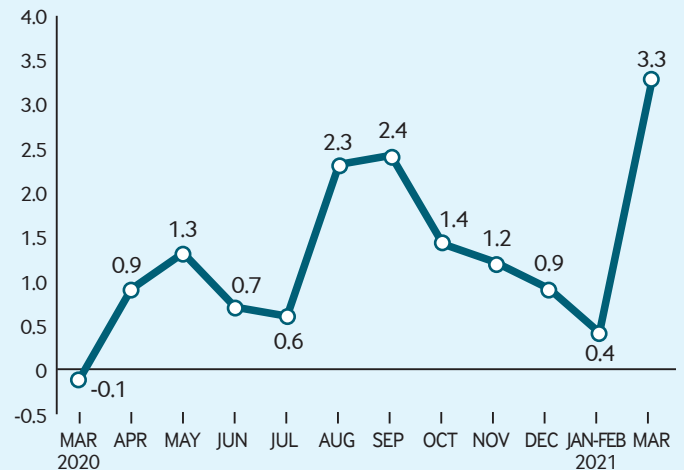
## NUMBERS

(\$1=6.5 yuan)

**Crude Oil Production**  
Daily Output (1,000 tons)



**Growth Rate of Crude Oil Production**  
(% y.o.y.)





government's promotion of technological and financial innovation to support economic growth, according to a report from credit rating firm Fitch Ratings on April 20.

Financial institutions have actively embraced fintech to protect their franchises and broaden business opportunities, enhance credit risk management, and improve efficiency.

"The trend has been accelerated by the COVID-19 epidemic as consumers today still increase their use of online services and purchases," the report said.

However, the risks associated with the rapid growth prompted regulators to step up their inspections, aiming to ensure a more sustainable development of the sector.

Fitch Ratings believes tightened regulations might pose short-term challenges to several industry participants while protecting a number of industry

incumbents. Nevertheless, the trend of rising fintech investment and innovation should swell given the benefits it entails.

## Rural Loan

The Asian Development Bank (ADB) and CD Finance Management Co. Ltd. (CD Finance), a Chinese rural micro-finance service provider, signed a loan deal on April 23, for a total sum in yuan equivalent to \$40 million, in a bid to support China's rural development.

Through the service provided by CD Finance, the loan will support farmers and micro businesses over the next five years, according to the deal.

"Accelerating access to rural finance, particularly for women, and bridging the gaps in financial services are key to achieving sustainable rural development," Ashok Lavasa, ADB's Vice President, said.

At least 60 percent of the

loan targets female borrowers and is expected to benefit over 30,000 women. Meanwhile, a gender action plan will support both financing and other services for women, including financial education and life skills training.

"CD Finance is delighted to work with the ADB in support of rural vitalization, facilitate productive activities of rural households, and improve their livelihoods," Liu Dongwen, CEO of the company, said.

## Securities Holdings

In the first three months of the year, overseas investors' net purchases of Chinese stocks and bonds totaled around \$73.7 billion, the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) said at a press conference on April 23.

Mainland investors' net purchases of Hong Kong-listed shares through stock connect programs amounted to 311.1 billion yuan (\$47.91 billion) during

the same period, according to SAFE.

The figures show that international payments and two-way cross-border investment are basically in balance, SAFE spokesperson Wang Chunying said.

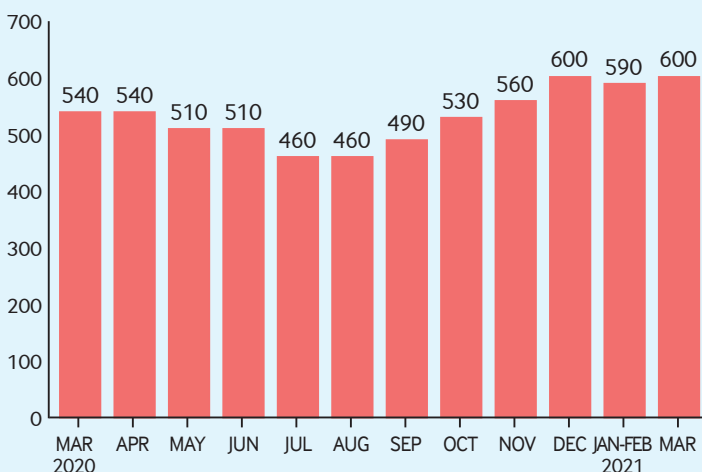
## Industrial Internet

Late March saw the interconnection of a total of 73 million industrial equipment items courtesy of China's industrial Internet platforms, with more than 590,000 industrial apps in use, according to the MIIT.

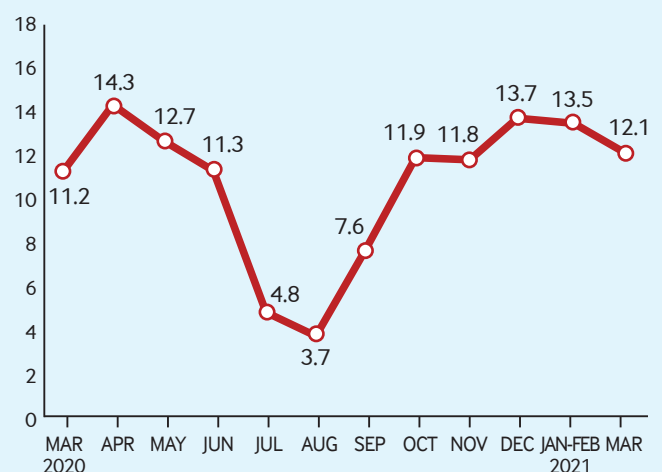
Firms witnessed a digitalization rate across key processes of 52.1 percent, and a penetration rate of digital tools for research and development of 73 percent.

China will develop its industrial Internet to help medium-sized, small and micro enterprises improve their innovative capacities, according to this year's government work report.

**Industrial Natural Gas Production**  
Average Daily Output (mln cubic meters)



**Growth Rate of Industrial Natural Gas Production**  
(% y.o.y.)



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

# THIS WEEK **WORLD**



## ITALY

The Italian aerobatic squad Freccie Tricolori performs during a ceremony marking Italy's Liberation Day in Rome on April 25



## SPAIN

Residents take their book pick on World Book and Copyright Day in Barcelona on April 23



## ALBANIA

President Ilir Meta casts his ballot during the parliamentary elections at a polling station in Tirana on April 25





## INDONESIA

Maritime police officers prepare for the search and rescue of submarine *KRI Nanggala-402* at Tanjung Wangi Port in Banyuwangi, East Java, on April 25. The wreckage of the missing submarine was located on the sea floor off Bali Island. All 53 crew members had died



## RUSSIA

People pay tribute at Vladimir Lenin's mausoleum to mark the 151st anniversary of his birth in Moscow on April 22



## IRAQ

A survivor of the Ibn al-Khatib Hospital fire is transferred to another hospital in Baghdad on April 25. The catastrophic blaze killed 82 and wounded another 110 in the COVID-19 treatment facility

# THIS WEEK PEOPLE & POINTS

## ATHLETE WHO DOMINATES 109 KG

Chinese record holder **Yang Zhe** lifted 200 kg in Snatch, resulting in new world and Asian records on the penultimate day featuring the 109 kg category for men at the 2020 Asian Weightlifting Championships held in Tashkent, Uzbekistan, from April 17 to 25. This event is a Gold Level competition for the upcoming Olympic Games in Tokyo. Participating athletes are trying to gather valuable points to add to their final ranking for the games.

Yang, 30, born in Liaoning Province, was fourth in the 105 kg category at the 2016 Rio Olympic Games. He upgraded the best Olympic result of fifth place obtained by Chinese athletes since the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. In 2017, Yang won the men's 105 kg category at the 13th National Games.

This is the first time that the name of a Chinese men's weightlifting athlete has appeared on the World Records list of the International Weightlifting Federation, for 109 kg, the second highest bodyweight category.



## Video Copyright Protection

**Economic Daily**  
April 23

As of June 2020, the number of short video users surpassed 818 million, taking up 87 percent of all netizens, according to a report released at the Eighth China Internet Audio and Video Convention last year.

The increasingly booming market of short videos has sprouted the thorny issue of copyright protection.

On April 9, more than 70 Chinese film and television show makers plus associations called for short video platforms to immediately take down any of their content without explicit authorization, China Central

Television (CCTV) reported.

Enticed by visual excerpts taken from films or TV shows, often without permission, hundreds of millions of Chinese Internet users have turned to short video platforms as a source of information.

The group, which includes video streaming platforms iQIYI and Tencent, published a list of demands calling on short video platforms to immediately purge any unauthorized content, according to CCTV.

Meanwhile, local governments should join forces to track and crack down on copyright infringement across platforms. In addition, public awareness of copyright protection can help curb cases of online infringement.



## She Power

**Lifeweek**  
April 21

Recently, directed by female filmmaker Yin Ruoxin, Chinese hit drama *Sister* led the domestic box office for 10 consecutive days since its debut on April 2.

Previously, the Spring Festival blockbuster *Hi, Mom* saw Chinese film director Jia Ling overtake Patty Jenkins as the world's

“World public health has now moved to the forefront of the great challenges facing the human race, which include climate change, tackling inequalities and imbalances, and disarmament. In times of polarity, international cooperation is urgently needed.”

**Xulio Rios**, Director of the Observatory of Chinese Politics in Spain, with Xinhua News Agency on April 25

“The significance of the event is that a number of little steps are sometimes needed to make great conclusions.”

**Henry Kissinger**, former U.S. National Security Advisor and Secretary of State, in a video speech marking the 50th anniversary of Ping-Pong Diplomacy on April 24

highest-grossing female director of a single film.

The recent female directorial success represents the growth of the so-called “She Power” movement in a male-dominated film industry over the past decade.

The female perspective brought to the big screen by these directors has become a topic of public debate. As the first of its kind in China, *Hear Her*, an eight-episode monologue series about women, touches on some of the most common social issues, ranging from domestic violence to midlife crises and the objectification of females.

The blight of gender inequality, such as women being paid less than men for the same work, or having their voices ignored, still plagues society to this day. There is no doubt that women’s social status has improved, albeit gradually, but many still face barriers and unwanted challenges as a direct result of their gender in their daily lives.

Though women creating films is still not commonplace, the massive box office successes as of late have added to the value of female directors and topics.

## Web Celeb Food

*People’s Daily*

April 21

Affected by the “single-person meal” and “stay-at-home economy,” harnessed by live e-commerce broadcasts, online celebrity food endorsements have become popular. At the same time, many people have voiced their concerns about food safety in this area.

With the rapid advancement of the “Internet Plus,” emerging consumer demands and different forms of consumption patterns have surfaced, contributing to the rise of Internet celebrity food. Data show that in 2020, China’s live broadcast

e-commerce market reached 961 billion yuan (\$147.97 billion).

On the other hand, without quality, the web celebrity food craze is an inevitably short-lived one. For companies, integrity- and quality-oriented management is mandatory.

From the perspective of potential market space, the online celebrity food niche still has many potential growth moments worth exploring.

To create a healthy and safe consumer environment, local governments should make greater efforts to optimize the regulatory framework, not only to strengthen food safety supervision, but also to innovate the methods of platform management.



### FAMED DIRECTOR’S FIRST SPY FLICK

Chinese director **Zhang Yimou**’s first spy thriller *Cliff Walkers* debuted in China on April 30, joining a packed screening lineup during the five-day May Day holiday starting on May 1, usually a busy movie-going period.

The action flick is Zhang’s first time trying his hand at the spy genre, as the director broadens his project list away from the kungfu epics that have dominated his body of work in the past decade or so. His martial arts thriller *Hero* made international headlines in 2002.

Zhang, 71, born in Shaanxi Province, is one of the most critically acclaimed Chinese filmmakers. In 1987, Zhang directed his first film, *Red Sorghum*. The epic won a Golden Bear at the Berlin film festival.

Zhang also produced a series of intensely moving period dramas about the emotional inequalities suffered by women in Chinese history, including *Ju Dou* (1990), *Raise the Red Lantern* (1992) and *To Live* (1994).



“It makes Australia less attractive as a location for Chinese investment and that’s bad for jobs and the Australian economy.”

**Daryl Guppy**, a financial technical analyst, commenting on Australia’s move to overturn the Belt and Road MOU signed with China on the CGTN website on April 23

“Time is running out, and there is much hard work ahead, but this is no time to raise the white flag. The UN will keep flying our blue flag of solidarity and hope. This Earth Day and over the crucial months ahead, I urge all nations and all people to rise together to this moment.”

**Antonio Guterres**, UN Secretary General, in an article on April 22



Kakhoro Avzalsho from Tajikistan studies Chinese calligraphy at the China University of Petroleum in Qingdao, Shandong Province, on June 13, 2019

# THE LANGUAGE OF SPRING

The Chinese language sees a surge in international use and foreign enthusiasts

By Tao Zihui

**W**hen did Chinese characters come into this world? Ancient

Chinese mythology claims this took place on an April 20, or so, some 5,000 years ago. Legend has it that Cangjie, the Grand Historiographer of Huang Di (the Yellow Emperor), one of the most legendary Chinese sovereigns and cultural heroes, had been tortured by the inaccurate results of keeping track of historical records via the tying of knots. One day, having been inspired after taking closer note of animal tracks, Cangjie felt compelled to create written characters that would replace the error-prone process of knot-tying, signaling a new era of Chinese civilization.

As the folklore continues, being touched by the power of this written language, the heavens rained down grain upon the fields, and ghosts were heard howling throughout the long night.

And that is why the sixth of the 24 solar terms on the traditional Chinese lunar calendar was named *Guyu*, literally meaning grain rain. Furthermore, as this period of rainfall is imperative for prosperous crop growth, *Guyu* heralds the end of winter's harsh weather conditions and the start of a hopeful and warm season.

In 2010, when the UN first

established language days for each of its six official languages, April 20, in honor of Cangjie and his contributions to the Chinese language, was selected as the UN Chinese Language Day. The day has since become an opportunity to dive into Chinese history and understand the Chinese language, one of the world's oldest languages as well as one of its most widely spoken ones.

## Chinese Language Day

The UN Chinese Language Day was established to promote multiple languages and cultural diversity as well as to inform the general public about the history, culture and achievements of the six official languages of the UN.

The theme of this year's UN Chinese Language Day is "Highlighting Pictographs" as pictographs are the origins of Chinese characters. The three-day events highlighted pictographs (Liangzhu inscribed symbols, the oracle bone script and Dongba script) associated with three sites, Liangzhu in Zhejiang Province, Anyang in Henan Province and Lijiang in Yunnan Province, according to Xiao Dun, Vice President of the UN Staff Recreation Council Chinese Book Club.

"The Chinese language, written in Chinese characters, is the ►►



manifestation of Chinese wisdom as well as a common asset of all mankind,” Zhang Jun, China’s permanent representative to the UN, addressed this year’s UN Chinese Language Day on April 20. This year’s events, all carried out online due to the COVID-19 pandemic, included a museum guided tour, a language class and a lecture.

He encouraged more people to use the Chinese language as a means of learning more about China and the UN. “We hope that the UN will continue to uphold multilingualism and strive to achieve equality in the use of Chinese and other official languages,” the ambassador said.

The Chinese language, he continued, has witnessed the history of the UN’s founding and China’s participation in UN endeavors. “In the five decades since the restoration of its lawful seat in the UN, China has actively participated in the UN’s undertakings, firmly upheld the UN-centered international system and the international order underpinned by international law and made significant contributions to world peace and development.”

## Cultural identity

Culture and language are the most significant aspects of one’s cultural identity. The UN has 193 member states, but the languages the UN staff speak outnumber 193. This is because many countries have several dialects, regional languages, and official languages. The ability to communicate in multiple languages is a key tenet of the UN, and at this time of deep division over multiple crises, the belief is that speaking each other’s languages can make a difference in bridging disagreements.

Language days were established to promote the equal use of the six official UN languages. Today, the UN Chinese Language Day is gradually becoming

an international festival for the Chinese language, Yong Ho, former Chinese Language Supervisor of the UN, said to *Beijing Review*.

The UN’s commitment to multilingualism is not just a matter of box-ticking, but a commitment to greater mutual understanding. As its website notes, “By promoting tolerance, multilingualism also ensures increased participation of all member states in the organization’s work, as well as greater effectiveness, better outcomes and more involvement.”

The Chinese Book Club has organized a series of events at the UN Headquarters in New York during the past years, such as painting and calligraphy exhibitions, folk music performances, tea art demonstrations and lectures, showcasing the Chinese language and the profound Chinese culture to UN staff and diplomats from all over the world.

Further, the UN World Tourism Organization (UNWTO) has announced that starting from January 25, the Chinese language has formally become an official language of the UNWTO, thus improving the status and proportion of the use of Chinese in international organizations.

This year’s Chinese Language Day was celebrated with a video festival at the UN Offices in Geneva (UNOG) for the first time, with the theme of Spring.

“Spring is what I like very much, a beacon of hope, especially in difficult times. Therefore, I think it is very meaningful to choose the theme of spring for Chinese Day this year,” Michelle Keating, Chief of Language Services of the UNOG, said in an interview with China Media Group. She also noted that on average about 70 new members sign up for Chinese language training courses at the UNOG

each year. They sign up for classes mainly to improve their understanding of Chinese, whether this serves their professional needs or personal interest in Chinese culture.

“In the new era facing new developments, international Chinese language education is making constant contributions to the advancement of exchange and mutual learning between and by the world’s diverse cultures,” Chen Dehai, Secretary General of ASEAN-China Center, said at the festival.

Archil Kalandia, Ambassador of Georgia to China, approached this topic from his own perspective. “The Chinese language is booming in Georgia and more and more Georgian students are studying the Chinese language,” he said. “In this regard, the Chinese language is adopted into the Georgian educational system as well.”

According to the ambassador, the Chinese language reflects the identity of the unique traditions and culture of China and brims with potential new discoveries. “If you learn Chinese and if you can speak Chinese very well, it means that you have a lot of doors open for you around the world.”

## More development

Besides the multilingualism that the UN advocates, another reason the Chinese language has been gaining more favor among the international community is China’s growing national strength, which has been upgrading the country’s international position since its reform and opening up. Moreover, with the increasingly frequent political, trade and cultural exchanges between China and other countries, the demand for professionals well-versed in the Chinese language continues to increase, attracting young people from around the globe to the study of Chinese.

“A country’s language becoming an official language of the UN will give this country a special status, because the voice of the UN is spread to the world through its official languages,” Ho said. “The popularity of Chinese Language Day shows the importance of China’s economic growth and increasing involvement in global affairs.”

Wan Lixin, a Chinese language teacher at Queen Margaret College in Wellington, New Zealand, talked about how the language could open up opportunities for students in New Zealand. For many students, China provides a bigger stage, and learning the Chinese language brings more possibilities.

“Learning Chinese is unlike learning any other language. It’s the language of one of the biggest





Peng Yi (left), Dean of the University of Johannesburg-Nanjing Technology University Confucius Institute, gives advice to a South African tourist guide attending a standard Chinese training program in Pretoria, South Africa, on March 18

populations in the world,” Wan told *Beijing Review*. “If you know this language, you know the culture, the values, the civilization, and the minds of the people.”

As for learning Chinese, Erin Zhang, a sophomore at Massey University in New Zealand, admits that it is hard work, but will ultimately be rewarding. “In my personal experience, the best thing about learning languages is that you have direct access to the writings and the thoughts of people that you would not normally speak to,” Zhang told *Beijing Review*. “If you master Chinese, you have access to this hugely fascinating culture and over 1 billion people.”

So far, more than 70 countries, with a combined total of over 4,000 colleges, have officially incorporated Chinese language teaching into their national education systems, including the UK, Russia, South Africa, Japan, Republic of Korea and Australia, according to Tian Xuejun, China’s Vice Minister of Education (MOE).

The demand for learning the Chinese language continues to soar, with the majority of overseas Chinese-language learners coming from Southeast Asia, Wu Yinghui, professor at Beijing Language and Culture University, told *Beijing Review*.

Wu added that more than 30 million Chinese nationals reside in Southeast Asia, accounting for about 6 percent

of the region’s population, laying the solid foundations for Chinese-language education across the region. As cultural and economic ties between China and Southeast Asia deepen, local interest in learning Chinese also grows.

According to the 2017 statistics from the Center for Language Education and Cooperation (CLEC), a non-profit professional educational institution for international Chinese language education, there are over 100 million people learning or speaking Chinese outside China. In order to regulate education in the Chinese language, the MOE and the State Language Commission jointly issued the Standard for Chinese Proficiency in International Chinese Language Education, which will go into effect on July 1. To guide all aspects of Chinese language learning, teaching, testing and evaluation, this standard aims to enhance the quality of education as well as its results.

## New trend

Harue Shi, a 25-year-old Japanese student at Yamaguchi Prefectural University in Japan, holds a multifaceted fascination with Chinese TV series.

“Watching Chinese TV dramas can improve my Chinese proficiency, and I can also learn a lot of things related to China. The process of watching TV dramas makes me feel happy,” she told *Beijing Review*.

Based on the novel by Ma Boyong, *The Longest Day in Chang’an* was the first show to catch Shi’s eye. Set in the Tang Dynasty (618-907), the series has received high ratings on both Amazon Prime and IMDb. Many foreign viewers like its intense plotlines, which took place within a span of only 24 hours. Some even consider it an epic based on its exquisite historical settings and costumes, superb cinematography, and an in-depth portrayal of people’s lives in the Tang Dynasty.

This international enthusiasm for Chinese dramas continues to swell with the emergence of several original, high-quality productions.

However, one of the greatest challenges for Chinese TV series going global is the language barrier. As there are huge differences between East and West, foreigners cannot fully grapple the plot without the help of subtitles or other ways of translation. This way, learning the Chinese language has become the better choice for many foreign audiences.

Compared to the dubbed version, Shi prefers to watch the original Chinese TV series. Watching these shows has become her go-to for improving her listening skills, adopting new words and phrases, and learning more about different aspects of Chinese culture. **BR**

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Comments to taozhui@bjreview.com

# FORGING A BRIDGE WITH A BRUSH

One former UN program manager explains how calligraphy reflects the roots of Chinese culture

By Tao Zihui



Yong Ho, former Chinese Language Supervisor of the UN

After setting up the Chinese calligraphy class at the UN in 2011, Yong Ho, former Chinese Language Supervisor of the UN, instinctively knew the task at hand was a challenging one. Despite acknowledging the lingering charm of this visual art form in traditional China, he knew that using English to illustrate the Chinese aesthetic and cultural ideas underlying this treasured art to foreigners would not be an easy feat.

Deeply rooted in Chinese culture and widely feted, calligraphy is about more than just characters. The

art, through the fewest of colors and in the simplest of ways touches upon the very philosophy of the Chinese people.

## Teaching UN staff

Ho was born in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province. After graduating from Jiangsu Normal University in 1978, he became a college teacher of English for several years. Specializing in Chinese anthropology and language, Ho began to study for his doctorate in the Department of Anthropology in 1986 at Columbia University. He graduated six years later and then started teaching at the New School University. In 2002, Ho joined the UN and was put in charge of the Chinese language program.

It was an obvious yet fundamental question for those setting up the UN in the aftermath of World War II: Which language, or languages, should the new body's business be conducted in?

The UN eventually decided on Chinese, English, French, Russian and Spanish, adding Arabic in 1973. These six tongues are now the UN's official languages, available via simultaneous interpretation to every delegate at every meeting.

It is a very meaningful task for the UN to maintain the effective balance and equality among official languages in international relations. Thus, from 1946 to this very day, the UN has made many efforts to support and promote the six official languages to make the UN, both its objectives and actions, as widely known to the public as possible.

From its inception, the UN has attached great importance to the language training of its employees, and provided ample

opportunities to encourage staff members and diplomatic personnel to master the official languages of the organization. Since the 1970s, the UN headquarters in New York City has offered language courses through its Language and Communications Program, creating the perfect conditions for the cultures represented by these six official languages to spread their wings.

However, learning Chinese is difficult for those students whose mother tongue stems from the Indo-European language family. They need strong motivation and a special attraction to maintain interest and confidence. For this reason, in addition to adopting a livelier teaching method inside the classroom, Ho and his teaching staff strives to create opportunities outside the classroom to allow students to really immerse themselves in Chinese culture.

In addition to these courses, the UN Chinese language program offers a three-week-long summer course at Nanjing University in China. The program, sponsored by the Chinese authorities, has been



well received over 16 years. In fact, for his endeavors, Ho earned his second UN21 Award in 2014, an award presented to UN staff members who have exemplified hard work and innovation.

## Interesting training courses

When Ho created the first UN calligraphy class, nearly 20 UN staff members enrolled. By the end of the first semester, it came as a surprise to Ho that many who, prior to taking this class, had never had a brush with calligraphy could in fact paint a few pretty decent Chinese characters.

“Chinese calligraphy can be understood by foreigners,” Ho told *Beijing Review*. Former Secretary General Ban Ki-moon, too, took private Chinese calligraphy lessons from one of Ho’s teachers and went on to gift his works to foreign leaders. He famously presented a calligraphic work entitled *Peace* when attending the UN Staff Calligraphy Exhibition in 2012. “The reason why I made this work is because peace is of great significance to the world and I will spare no effort to promote it,” Ban then told the exhibition.

Since 2004, Ho has been organizing the China Study Program for students of Chinese at the UN. His dedication has attracted hundreds of UN staffers and delegates to take up Chinese studies and has ignited a wave of enthusiasm for learning Chinese.

In 2013, the students who participated in the program celebrated its 10th anniversary and wrote a 100-meter scroll of the UN Charter in Chinese at

the Imperial Ancestral Temple in Beijing.

“These UN officials looked at the UN Charter they were holding and got very excited,” Ho explained to *Beijing Review*. UN staff are very familiar with it, as it exists as the organization’s highest guiding ideology. “Everyone felt extremely proud at that sacred moment of writing. Several students said that they must keep practicing calligraphy until they can write down the full text of the UN Charter. That was the most meaningful thing to me.”

Currently Ho serves as the co-chair of the Renwen Society at China Institute in New York City, a premiere organization in the U.S. promoting Chinese culture and language. The Renwen Society presents lectures and other Chinese language events to both domestic and international audiences.

“Every nation has its own culture and traditions that its people are proud of,” and “language is a tool that is essential for better communication and understanding among cultures,” Ho said.

## Different perspectives

Chinese is rated as one of the most difficult languages for English speakers by the U.S. Foreign Service Institute (FSI), which is responsible for training US diplomatic personnel. The FSI’s statistics show that to be proficient in French or Spanish, it takes only 600 hours, but the minimum amount of learning hours for Chinese is 2,200,” Ho told *Beijing Review*.

“So how to keep the students interested is of vital importance,” Ho said. The Chinese Language Program at the UN offers both regular Chinese courses, ranging from level 1 to level 9, and special Chinese courses with an emphasis on speaking or reading, as well as a calligraphy class, to UN staff for free. Every year features three semesters, with some 200 students

signing up each semester.

Behind the increasing interest in Chinese lies the fact that the visibility and influence of China are growing. What happens in the world arena also shapes people’s mindsets regarding the Chinese language inside the UN, therefore UN staff is getting more interested in this language, according to Ho.

The China Study Program also help Ho’s students gain firsthand knowledge of China, often involving new insights that challenge their preconceptions.

“To large extent, people in the West know much less about China than Chinese people know about the West. So, this was a real eye-opener for many students,” Ho said. “In many cases, it dramatically changed their view of China from what they had previously read in the media. I think this personal experience is quite important.”

During his 15 years with the program, Ho has witnessed many UN officials and diplomats making progress in Chinese learning.

Referring back to Ban, “The former UN secretary general likes to write a classic Chinese saying, namely *Qu Ze Quan*,” Ho said.

*Qu Ze Quan*, a three-character Chinese idiom that can be interpreted as “to make concessions for the common good,” stems from the ancient Chinese philosophy book *Tao Te Ching*.

According to Ho, the message these sayings convey is consistent with what the UN advocates: tolerance, inclusiveness, peace and compromise. “What we are doing here is helping those who work at the UN through language learning to understand other cultures in a comprehensive and in-depth way,” Ho said. **BR**



People visit an exhibition on the art of Chinese characters in Changsha, capital of Hunan Province, on September 21, 2019

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# DISCOVERING CHARACTER

U.S. physicist devotes his life to telling the stories behind the transformation of the Chinese script

By Li Qing

**R**ichard Sears grew up in a small town in Oregon in the U.S. where the people were mostly Caucasians. He was 10 when he saw a Chinese girl, the first time he saw a Chinese, and he was enamored by their physical difference. Many years later, this drove him to make a bold decision. In 1972, he bought a one-way ticket and flew to Taiwan to learn the Chinese language, though at that time, he knew nothing about it.

His father tried to oppose his plan. That year, there had been a historic event: U.S. President Richard Nixon had visited China for one week in February, the first visit by a U.S. head of state to the People's Republic of China since its founding in 1949, and opened the door for the normalization of bilateral relations.

"When it occurred to me that 7 percent of the people in the world use English, whereas 20 percent speak Chinese, I decided to learn Chinese," the 70-year-old, now living in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province, said.

That was the beginning of Sears' voyage of learning Chinese and getting connected with China. Almost five decades since his first adventure, the former physicist and computer engineer from Silicon Valley has become an Internet celebrity promoting Chinese culture.

## Tracing change

The most important thing in one's life, Sears told *Beijing Review*, is to find an interest and pursue it, which usually means taking a risk.

Sears regards the Chinese script as a miracle in human history as it is the only ancient script still in use in the world. He started to learn Chinese when he was 22 and progressed considerably in reading and speaking, but could not write characters until he turned 40.

When he started to learn the Chinese characters, called *hanzi* in Chinese, the complicated structure seemed to be too difficult to remember. He could not find any relevance between their shapes and meanings.

Tracing the evolution from the original pictograph to the present modern simplified characters, Sears got fascinated by the stories behind each character. When you compare them, you begin to have clues as to where they come from, he said.

While reading an English book based on *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*, the earliest existing Chinese dictionary dating back to the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-A.D. 220), he found the book had a lot of inaccuracies. This set him off, a bachelor's degree in physics and a master's in computer science, on a new path research, comparing and analyzing the ideas on the same topics from different books. "You never stop asking questions. It keeps getting deeper and deeper," he said.

## A gift to China

In 1994, Sears suffered a severe heart attack, which forced him to think about how he wanted to spend the rest of his life. "If I knew I had only 24 hours left, what would I do? All I could do is call my friends and say goodbye. What about a year? So I came up with the idea of computerizing *Shuo Wen Jie Zi*."

He started programming and building a database of



oracle bone inscriptions and other styles of ancient Chinese characters. It took him seven years to scan all the characters in the ancient Chinese books and finally, in 2002, supported by the database, his website Chinese Etymology ([Hanziyuan.net](http://Hanziyuan.net)) was launched.

A free website in English showcasing the origin of the Chinese script and providing the pronunciation of popular words in standard Chinese and dialects such as Cantonese, it explains the roots of nearly 1 million characters.

But despite the love and labor, the website initially had very few visitors. However, the number surged to 600,000 a day in 2011 after a blogger recommended the site on Chinese social media platform Weibo when Sears was in the U.S. He was affectionately dubbed Uncle *Hanzi* (the Chinese characters) in China because of his work and the Chinese character enthusiast became an Internet celebrity overnight. Till now, the website has been continuously updated. Sears funds the site himself, barring some donations.

When he embarked on his task, he imagined that one of the joys of studying Chinese characters was to better understand them. But he



Richard Sears in Nanjing, Jiangsu Province

found that Chinese children seldom experience the same joy when they learn the characters at the age of 4 or 5. So to make learning more fun for them, he recently worked with Shiwangme, a Nanjing-based company specializing in augmented reality (AR), to launch the Chinese Character Origin Cards, a pack of 108 cards that combine animation with AR. Scan one of them and it comes alive, describing how it evolved from the pictograph carved on ancient oracle bones to today's simplified character.

He also promotes Chinese character culture by producing videos on Bilibili, a video-sharing site popular with young netizens. Since last October, he has uploaded 29 videos, combining his daily life and character interpretation. They have brought him over 120,000 subscribers, and the most popular video has been viewed nearly 2.4 million times.

## Permanent home

As Sears wanted to stay in China to learn more about Chinese characters, he had to go back and forth between China and the U.S. every time his tourist visa expired. On December 23, 2020, the man studying the Chinese language for nearly 50 years got the Chinese permanent residence permit.

He was overjoyed since he thinks it is “difficult to get the Chinese green card for people like me, aged over 60 and without a Ph.D.” Now, Uncle *Hanzi* can go through the same facilities as the Chinese in entering and exiting the country, entrepreneurship and employment.

<http://www.bjreview.com>

## Evolution of Chinese Characters

The Chinese script emerged about 5000 years ago when the early humans used pictographs, drawing what they saw around them and expressing their thoughts. The pictorial representation started becoming more accurate and characters evolved. The earliest standardized characters in use discovered so far are the inscriptions found on tortoise shells and animal bones around 1200 B.C., known as the oracle bone inscriptions or *jiaguwen*, followed by more complex inscriptions on bronze ritual objects found from the Zhou Dynasty (about 1100-256 B.C.) known as *jinwen*, *jin* referring to metal or, more precisely, bronze.

In the Qin Dynasty (221-207 B.C.), Emperor Qin Shi Huang, founder of the dynasty, unified the six different—and often warring—kingdoms that existed in the fragmented China of the time. With that, he also unified their various writing styles into a standard style, ending a chaotic period when the same characters were written in different forms. The unified form became known

as *xiaozhuan* (the small seal characters) in history.

The characters were further simplified in the Han Dynasty (202 B.C.-A.D. 220). Known as *lishu* or the official script, they replaced the small seal characters and laid the foundation for the modern, simplified form. *Caoshu* and *xingshu*, also formed in the Han Dynasty, were created for quick writing.

In the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), a new character form, aka *kaishu*, came into being. Mostly composed with simple vertical and horizontal strokes, *kaishu* has been used as a standard Chinese character writing form ever since.

Simplified Chinese characters appeared as early as the 1920s. On January 1, 2001, the Law of the People's Republic of China on the Standard Spoken and Written Chinese Language took effect, confirming simplified Chinese as the national standard written language.

(Compiled by Beijing Review)

However, he has found it also comes with a quaint problem. “Few people have seen the card. So when I show it in some places, the staff have no idea what it is and whether they can trust me,” he laughed.

Sears visited the city for the first time in 2000. But still “it is a very nice place to live in,” he said. “We have this very beautiful area with gardens and parks, where I can do a lot of things, for instance, walk my dogs,” he said.

He quotes a famous line from Chinese poet Liu Yuxi's (772-842) *An Epigraph in Praise of My Humble*

*Home* to indicate his life philosophy, “My home is humble, but it is virtuous so long as I live in it... In this humble room, I can enjoy playing my simple zither or read the Buddhist scriptures quietly...” BR



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# ***XI JINPING: THE GOVERNANCE OF CHINA (III)***



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The first and second volumes of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China* have received an enthusiastic response from China and other parts of the world. Since the 19th CPC National Congress in 2017, Xi Jinping has put forward many more original ideas drawn from his experiences in state governance in the new era, charting the course of the country in line with the times and further enriching the theoretical base of the Party.

The third volume of *Xi Jinping: The Governance of China*, divided into 19 sections by topic, contains a compilation of 92 of Xi Jinping's spoken and written works from October 18, 2017 to January 13, 2020, along with 41 photographs. Notes are provided for ease of reading.

Since the 19th CPC National Congress, remaining true to the Party's original aspiration and founding mission, the CPC Central Committee, with Xi Jinping as its core, has fully considered the overall goal of national rejuvenation and the international situation in a context of change at a level unseen in a century, and has coordinated the country's efforts on the great struggle, the great project, the great cause and the great dream. It has united and led the whole Party and all the Chinese people in making significant progress in the undertakings of the Party and the country. The third volume vividly presents these achievements, along with new developments of Marxism in China and China's proposals for building a global community of shared future. It is the most authoritative book about Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.



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# Uncertainty, the Only Certainty for Afghanistan

By Li Wei

**A**fghanistan is the battlefield where the U.S. army fought the longest overseas. Since U.S. President Joe Biden took office in January, the war's future course has come in the spotlight.

According to an agreement signed between the Donald Trump administration and the Taliban in late February 2020, the U.S. military forces would withdraw completely from Afghanistan by May 2021 if the militant group meets the conditions of the deal, including severing ties with terrorist blocs.

Nevertheless, Biden has announced that he will commence the final retreat on May 1 and complete it by the anniversary of September 11 attacks this year.

Twenty years ago, shortly after the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center in New York City and the Pentagon on September 11, the U.S. invaded Afghanistan, accusing the then Taliban regime of harboring Al Qaeda network's chief Osama bin Laden, the architect behind the attacks. Biden said 2,488 U.S. military personnel were killed and 20,722 have been wounded in the prolonged war.

## Multifaceted considerations

On April 14, Biden addressed the nation from the White House, announcing that the U.S. had achieved the counter-terrorism objectives it outlined entering the war in Afghanistan. The time has now come to end America's longest-lasting war and allow its troops to come home. "I'm now the fourth U.S. president to preside over American troop presence in Afghanistan. Two Republicans, two Democrats," Biden said. "I will not pass this responsibility on to a fifth."

Nonetheless, not all U.S. military personnel will be pulled out. Some of them

will stay behind to protect the U.S. embassy in Kabul. Meanwhile, more staff will participate in humanitarian and diplomatic work and aid Afghan security forces. "While we'll not stay involved in Afghanistan militarily, our diplomatic and humanitarian work [there] will continue," Biden elaborated. "We'll continue to support the government of Afghanistan. We will keep providing assistance to the Afghan National Defense and Security Forces."

There are roughly 2,500 U.S. troops stationed in Afghanistan, according to the Pentagon. But U.S. media reported this number did not include the 1,000 additional U.S. special forces in the country. In addition, about 7,000 NATO troops in Afghanistan rely on U.S. logistics and security support.

**All in all, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan will set in motion a huge chain reaction, affecting the security situation in Afghanistan and the entire region**

Prior to Biden's announcement, predictions circulated that the U.S. would authorize smaller numbers of military troops to maintain their positions in Afghanistan. Yet Biden decided to withdraw all of them. What may have been some of the underlying considerations for doing so?

First, by finally ending the war in Afghanistan, Biden can gain a good and benevolent reputation. The war has cost the U.S. over \$2 trillion, with over 775,000 soldiers deployed to Afghanistan at least one time. It also caused more than 100,000 Afghan civilian deaths and injuries. Furthermore, the original American objectives for waging this war, namely defeating Al Qaeda and preventing Afghanistan from being the base of terrorism against the U.S., have already been accomplished. Overall, Biden's decision to withdraw will be viewed by the general public as a victory his predecessors failed to reach.

Second, Biden intends to dilute the role Trump played in this issue by rescheduling the withdrawal. Moreover, setting the deadline on September 11 allows the U.S. administration more time for follow-up action.

Third, the decision falls in line with, as well as commemorates, the attacks two decades ago. These acts of terrorism inflicted tremendous damage on Americans, and also in turn triggered the U.S. war in Afghanistan. Therefore, Biden's timing of September 11 is of huge symbolic significance.

Fourth, this withdrawal reaffirms the shift in focus on the part of U.S. national security. Under George W. Bush's administration, the fight against terrorism became the top priority on the agenda. When Barack Obama was in the White House, the importance of anti-terrorism had somewhat declined, and a major-power com-





The site of a bomb attack in Kabul, Afghanistan, on April 20

petition received more emphasis. Biden's full withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan further showcases this trend.

The war against terror is losing momentum, and the U.S. needs to deal with "other priorities" overseas. The raging COVID-19 pandemic and general health of the population are also a top consideration for the Biden administration. "We have to defeat this pandemic and strengthen the global health system to prepare for the next one," Biden said.

## Possible risks

Biden's announcement has sparked wide controversy at home. Republican headlines and the military, in particular, are eager to retain small numbers of U.S. troops on the ground as to prevent Afghanistan's situation from going out of control, potentially destroying the order established after years of American efforts. In addition, there are fears among government officials and people in Afghanistan that the country's fragile political stability might collapse amid a deteriorating

security environment.

Such concerns are reasonable. Terrorism and violence might make a comeback after the U.S. and NATO retreat. Afghanistan has been the base camp for various terrorist groups. According to UN data, over 30,000 Afghan civilians were hurt in terrorist attacks over the past 10 years. Nowadays, the Taliban has continued to carry out attacks on U.S. and Afghan Government targets; Al Qaeda and the "Islamic State" extremist group, too, are probably waiting to launch counterattacks once the U.S. troops leave.

In the meantime, the peace process in Afghanistan might be obstructed, and the scenario of a civil war is likely. After the U.S. and the Taliban signed the peace deal, the Afghan Government, too, initiated talks with the militant

group last September. During these negotiations, the U.S. troops in Afghanistan became critical bargaining chips. Nevertheless, thus far, the interactions have led nowhere. Against that backdrop, Biden's decision is seen as one further impeding the already slow negotiation process. If they lose the solid assistance and support from the U.S. military, Afghan security forces will be weakened and the Taliban will move into a position to put forward more demands. Consequently, the hopes for peace will fade.

All in all, the withdrawal of U.S. troops from Afghanistan will set in motion a huge chain reaction, affecting the security situation in Afghanistan and the entire region. In the next more than four months, the international community, especially the U.S., must come up with a proper plan to deal with the problems that might occur in the post-withdrawal era. **BR**

The author is an expert on anti-terrorism with the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations  
 Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon  
 Comments to yanwei@bjreview.com

# Economic Rebound Attracts More FDI

By Tom Pauken II

**T**he Western mainstream media has often lashed out against the Chinese Government and the country, but that has not resulted in a negative impact on China when it comes to attracting substantial flows of inbound foreign direct investments (FDI).

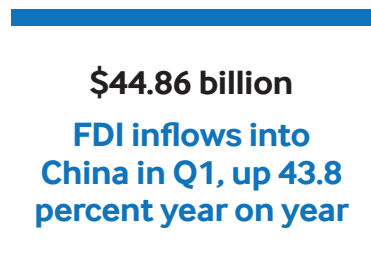
According to China's Ministry of Commerce, the nation welcomed 302.4 billion yuan of FDI for the first quarter of 2021, surging 39.9 percent when compared to the same time period last year. FDI inflows valued in U.S. dollars stood at \$44.86 billion, rising 43.8 percent year on year.

## Investment inflow

China has already surpassed the pre-pandemic levels of inbound FDI in the same period of 2019 by over 24.8 percent. That's a significant achievement considering the turbulent times and rocky geopolitical landscape of our world today. A number of national and regional sovereign governments have imposed economic sanctions on Chinese officials and enterprises connected to Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Economic experts had expressed concerns that China's outlook would dim as the rest of the world began to crawl out of lockdowns, quarantines and strict social distancing measures stemming from the outbreak of the coronavirus. But Western nations have not turned the corner like China has done to curtail the spread of the pandemic, while in Europe and elsewhere many countries continue to report high numbers of new infections.

China has barely been impacted by the virus in recent months and this explains why many foreign-owned companies and investors have poured huge cashflows into the country as they see the benefits of strong social stability,



ty, resilient domestic supply chains and manufacturing sectors along with soaring global demand for Chinese imports. China withstood the virus when it was spreading from late December 2019 to early April last year. The Central Government took prompt action by announcing the Wuhan lockdown, implementing partial quarantines nationwide and blocking the free flow of inter-city transportation. Back then, so-called China experts from the West were cheering on the pandemic as they hoped the virus would cause the collapse of the country.

But the countries of Europe and much of the Western world should have spent more time focusing on their own COVID-19 prevention efforts since the virus had struck those nations with a terrible vengeance. China was the only major economy last year to see a rise of its GDP, up 2.3 percent year on year.

There's also a common understanding among business people that "money chases after money." Smart companies are trendspot-

ters and they place their investment bets on perceived winners. China is holding the winning hand for the moment and the country will continue to attract more FDI since many other countries have struggled to rebound. But we should ask: What are the strengths of China's economy and what are foreigners investing into? According to the *Shanghai Daily*, about 40 percent of FDI growth came from foreign companies expanding operations and investing into fixed assets, which includes real estate, manufacturing and infrastructure. Meanwhile, China's service industry received 237.79 billion yuan (\$35.26 billion) of FDI, an increase of 51.5 percent year on year and FDI to the hi-tech service industry rose 43.9 percent. Investments from Southeast Asia rose 60 percent, countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative had a 58.2-percent increase and investments from the EU rose 7.5 percent.

During the first quarter, 10,263 new foreign-funded firms were opened and registered in the country. By reviewing the figures, we see China has deepened its business ties with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership is a free trade agreement signed last December by leaders of ASEAN member states, Australia, New Zealand, China, the Republic of Korea and Japan. China's cross-border trade and investment activities have soared while its regional partners in Southeast Asia are boosting their respective national economies. ASEAN countries participate in the Belt and Road Initiative and that has delivered positive results for them.

## Growth poles

Another bright shining star for China's economy has been retail sales, which increased by



An exhibitor introduces her company's products via live-stream during the 129th China Import and Export Fair, also known as the Canton Fair, in Guangzhou, Guangdong Province, on April 15. The 10-day event was held online

33.9 percent in the first quarter year on year, while fixed assets investments rose by 25.6 percent. China has emerged as one of the leading drivers of growth for the global economy and that's leading to a significant rise in imports for China, which in return boosts the manufacturing industry worldwide. Chinese people are going on shopping sprees as they have had stable labor market conditions.

Foreign investors should also take a closer look at China's tourism and hospitality sectors. During the pandemic times, many Chinese citizens were required to stay in the cities and towns they lived and worked in. They were not encouraged to travel to other cities or provinces; but China has reopened intercity travel. The Chinese are eager to travel and there will be good business opportunities for companies investing into domestic tourism venues. The five-day May Day holiday, with a huge upsurge of Chinese traveling to other cities within the nation's borders, has set the stage for a blockbuster

season of vacation travel this year. They have waited a long time to become tourists again, although international travel restrictions may not be completely lifted until after summer. The delays in international travel could prove beneficial to China's domestic tourism.

Another sector for foreign investors to explore will be the science and hi-tech industry. There have been rumblings that Washington stands prepared to lead its allies, such as the UK, the EU and Japan, to march ahead on imposing more sanctions on Chinese hi-tech firms and to begin the decoupling process with China. But such threats appear to be bluff. Chinese technology companies are tightly integrated with Western-based tech companies and to

decouple would inflict serious disruptions to the global economy. We may witness a backing down of the West's tough stance as they realize decoupling could cause more harm than good.

If the West turns around and embraces Chinese innovations in the hi-tech sector, you will see a big wave of fintech investments flowing into Shenzhen and its surrounding communities in Guangdong Province, recognized as China's Silicon Valley. The upsurge of investments into the hi-tech sector will enhance 5G telecom networks, boost automated manufacturing, as well as make people's daily lives much more convenient.

China's economic rebound is marching full speed ahead and that will attract much more inbound FDI for the rest of the year. **BR**

The author is a Beijing-based geopolitical analyst of Asia-Pacific affairs, who pens *US vs. China: From Trade Wars to Reciprocal Deal*. This is an edited excerpt of an article first published on Cnfocus.com  
Comments to yanwei@bjreview.com

# Asia's Approach To the Future

Many people say the 21st century is the Asian Century. During this year's Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in Boao, Hainan Province, in April, **Zhang Yunling**, chair professor and Dean of the Institute of International Studies at Shandong University, spoke to *Beijing Review* reporters Tao Xing and Wen Qing, sharing his opinions on the future development of Asia and China's role in the process. This is an edited excerpt of his views:

## The Asian Century

The phrase Asian Century actually refers to the regeneration and development of Asia. The process of going through stages of colonization, gaining national independence and rapid development has been difficult for much of Asia. The new century brings new prospects and one of its most salient features is China's modernization and development as a giant economy.

Broadly, Asia has several successful cases of development over the past decades.

The economies of the Republic of Korea (ROK), Singapore, and China's Taiwan and Hong Kong, commonly known as the Four Asian Tigers, experienced steady growth from the 1960s to the 1990s. However, they were relatively small economies.

The formation and expansion of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) constituted another fine example of economic improvement. The

cohesion of Southeast Asian countries ended a time of division and war, and launched a new beginning for member nations to grow together.

Most notably, China has been developing steadily after adopting the reform and opening-up policy in the late 1970s. It is important to realize that China's story of success in governance and modernization, and its approach to both, are different from those of the West.

China is currently the world's second largest economy in terms of GDP, Japan is the third largest, and India, currently the fifth largest, is expected to continue its rise in the world's economic rankings. The combined GDP of China, Japan and the ROK already exceeds that of the U.S. It is meaningful that Asia, occupying such a large proportion of the planet, began as one of the world's less developed regions and rapidly achieved this degree of economic development.

## A cooperative approach

Cooperation has been key to ASEAN's synergy, and at the core of China's economic miracle is the advocacy for cooperative coexistence between nations. China's commitment to cooperation draws on both the concept of harmony that exists within its culture and on modern ideas on governance. Simply stated, the concept boils down to: no conflict.

However, after many decades of U.S.-led competition between nations, the international community may be slow to recognize China and Asia's collaboration-oriented approach.

The U.S. once dominated the world in the area of security, a position based on its



An exhibitor promotes products using her social accounts at the 17th China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, on November 27, 2020

history of winning the two world wars and its status as a nuclear power. However, the U.S. also has a notorious record of forcing its values onto other nations with its economic and military power. Nevertheless, the U.S. hegemonic leadership has become increasingly unacceptable. Especially after the Cold War, countries around the world have begun to walk their own paths of development, believing that the world is diversified.

In general, the Asian approach could be summarized into two points. First, strategic ambiguity can be applied across issues which cannot be solved instantly. Second, consultation and communication on issues of common concern are needed.

For example, a number of contentious issues exist within the Asian region, including territorial disputes between China and Japan, Japan and the ROK, and China and India. Asian countries applying American methods to handle these disputes may quickly find themselves engaged in conflict. The Western culture of competition is zero-sum, whereas Asia's culture of cooperation seeks win-win results.

In cases where an issue cannot be dealt with immediately, acknowledging that fact, maintaining a positive attitude, and working toward finding a solution, perfect or imperfect, that is acceptable to all and avoids conflict is a core strength of the Asian approach.

Recently, the Japanese Government decided to discharge contaminated water from the wrecked Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant into the Pacific Ocean. Japan's neighboring countries are likely to suffer the most serious consequences of this decision.

It is advised that Japan allows expert groups from the international community, especially its neighboring countries including China, to examine and inspect the process in order to ensure the safety of the disposal. This kind of cooperation may also be a way to promote Japan's good relations with China and other countries.

The accident at the Fukushima Daiichi nuclear plant was caused by a natural disaster and could happen anywhere. The whole of Asia should deal with it together, seeing



The site of a railway reconstruction project in Jinan, Shandong Province, on April 12

it as a common challenge and not Japan's own problem.

It is also important to be aware that the creation of frameworks for cooperation such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership free trade agreement is the result of a long-term adjustment. It is a process of improvement, upgrading and deepening that cannot be accomplished in one stroke.

## Obstacles from the U.S.

Unfortunately, the Asian approach may not be understood well by the U.S. Competition between China and America is intensifying. However, all sides understand that the two countries will not go to war. Once that reality is commonly held by all parties, the world's governments and media should let go of competitive postures and

seek opportunities to move in the right direction together.

Throughout history, the two world wars and the Cold War were all confrontations between blocs. However, at present, it would be difficult for the U.S. to persuade other nations to join a confrontation against China. For example, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), an informal strategic dialogue between the U.S., Japan, Australia and India, continues to have difficulties in reaching a consensus on how to contain China.

The inauguration of the Joe Biden administration has opened up opportunities for China to once again promote cooperation with the U.S. Historically, China-U.S. relations have softened and become more productive in the second year of a new U.S. administration. Both sides need to obtain a deeper understanding of each other's actions and policies. **BR**

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Comments to [taoxing@bjreview.com](mailto:taoxing@bjreview.com)

# Safe Haven for International Capital

By Lan Xinzhen



**B**attered by the COVID-19 pandemic since March 2020, the world's major economies have adopted looser monetary policies as well as expansionary fiscal policies. The combined impact of the epidemic and these stimulus policies have initiated big swings in the global financial market. In a bid to skirt their losses, investors rushed to offload risky assets and buy safe assets. At first, funds kept flowing out of the bond markets in emerging economies, with China as an exception.

Since early 2021, with the recovery of major developed economies, bond yields have risen rapidly, and bond markets in emerging economies mostly have attracted a limited inflow of foreign capital. The Chinese bond markets are booming. The first quarter of this year saw a 173.4-percent jump in Chinese bonds purchased by overseas institutions on the interbank market.

The two waves of foreign capital influx into China are evidence that international investors consider renminbi assets a safe haven, the proverbial olive branch extended to international capital seeking risk-free refuge.

According to statistics from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange, since early 2021, the exchange rate of the yuan against the U.S. dollar has stayed between 6.46 and 6.55, maintaining a much more stable level than many other major global currencies.

From January to March, the actual use of foreign capital by non-financial businesses in China saw an increase over the same period of 2019 and 2020. This outcome should be partially attributed to China's economic recovery ahead of other nations thanks to its effective epidemic control. In January and February, the outbound investment of non-financial Chinese businesses remained on par with those of 2019

and 2020 during the same period.

The performance of China's foreign exchange market highlights a resilient and strong yuan in a global environment. That's one reason why international investors opt for renminbi assets as their safe haven.

Safe-haven assets help ensure stable investment while reining in speculation. This is an important feature of the ideal international currency.

China has taken a cautious

**The performance of China's foreign exchange market highlights a resilient and strong yuan in a global environment. That's one reason why international investors opt for renminbi assets as their safe haven**

attitude toward renminbi internationalization. In late 2015, the yuan was added to the International Monetary Fund's special drawing rights currency basket. In the following years, it managed to maintain a stable value both at home and abroad. Its share in reserve assets as well as international settlements is on the rise.

China's central bank is gradually internationalizing the renminbi exchange rate. Cities such as London have seen the establishment of offshore yuan markets. China has currency swap treaties with many countries, with several adding the renminbi to their foreign exchange reserves. For financial security reasons, however, China has yet to lift its control over capital account convertibility. As a result, the renminbi is not used in larger amounts on the international market.

The renminbi's global status lags far behind that of the Chinese economy. China is the second largest economy and the biggest foreign trade power in the world, but the renminbi accounted for only 2.2 percent of global settlements in the SWIFT system this February. In 2020, the renminbi made up only 2.25 percent of global foreign exchange reserves.

Given China's deep connection with the global economy, greater openness on the part of China will assist with the free movement of capital, talent, technology, data and services.

Against this backdrop, international capital may increasingly resort to renminbi assets as their safe haven, revving up demand for the currency. The trend might spur on renminbi internationalization, but at the same time pose new challenges to China's financial regulators. **BR**



# THROUGH THEIR EYES

People from around  
the world take you  
on a journey to  
rediscover China



# In China, for China

Swiss manufacturing companies eye closer cooperation in a robust market By Ma Miaomiao

**T**he largest robotics manufacturing and research facility of ABB, a Switzerland-based technology company, is set to start operating in Shanghai by the end of this year. Its annual production capacity is expected to reach 100,000 robots, about a quarter of the world's total back in 2019.

Those industrial and service robots will not only serve the Chinese market, but also other economies across the globe. They can be used in the fields of new-energy vehicle, 5G, consumer electronics and healthcare sectors in the post-pandemic era, according to the company. The new factory also features a comprehensive research and development (R&D) center and will become a key part of the ABB global robotics supply system.

Liu Chao, President of the Swiss Chinese Chamber of Commerce (SwissCham) Shanghai, told *Beijing Review* that many Swiss companies prioritize China, the largest manufacturing market in the world, in their development.

SwissCham China has more than 600 members. So far, Switzerland has invested in more than 1,000 projects in China with a total investment of over \$8 billion, according to Xinhua News Agency.

"Expanding trade with China is the first step, followed by local production or local R&D to meet the needs of the Chinese market," Liu said, adding that Swiss companies such as ABB have already set up either R&D centers or production lines in China.

"This is a major breakthrough, which can be explained as 'in China, for China'," he said.

## Promising outlook

Starting with its iconic watch industry in the 16th century, Switzerland has developed a highly industrialized precision cluster, making it a world leader in the mechanical, electrical and metal (MEM) sectors.

While addressing the first edition of the Swiss Machining Seminar in Beijing on April 14, Bernardino Regazzoni, Swiss Ambassador to

China, said almost 80 percent of Swiss MEM products are sold overseas. The country holds second place in the international comparison of per-capita export of machinery.

Many Swiss manufacturing giants, including ABB, have rolled out the global supply chain system since the early days and are pioneers for the Chinese market. The two countries have been collaborating in high-end manufacturing such as precision machine tools.

Through its cooperation with Swiss companies, China has enhanced its technological capabilities and transformed and upgraded its industries, Liu said. The two countries have established joint industrial parks across cities such as Zhongshan in Guangdong Province and Chongqing.

According to Liu, they have also explored the cultivation of technical personnel, driving the sustainable development of the MEM industry at large. The dual-track approach combining theory and practice, the backbone of today's apprenticeship framework in Switzerland, can apply to China as well.

In September 2017, both countries signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in vocational education and training and decided to hold regular dialogues, providing a platform for exchange and scientific communication.

## Vital innovation

As the world is rushed by the waves of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese branches have contributed more than ever to the business growth of many a Swiss company. "The lesson here is that we can no longer rely on the



Delegates from China and Switzerland sign an agreement at the booth of STOR-H Technologies SA, a Swiss low-carbon solution provider, during the Third China International Import Expo in Shanghai on November 6, 2020



headquarters as much as we used to, whether it be in terms of technical problem-solving capabilities, or the management of operations, production and supply. We need to be more independent and innovative,” Liu said.

China is driving the construction of new infrastructure including 5G networks and data centers, and enterprises across different sectors need to enhance their manufacturing capability. This presents a new array of opportunities for global companies, Sami Atiya, President of ABB’s robotics and discrete automation business, told *China Daily*.

According to the International Federation of Robotics, despite a decelerated growth in the shipment of industrial robots worldwide, collaborative industrial robots, known as cobots, are expected to become a growth engine for the sector. China is poised to take center stage in this new trend.

With smaller sizes and more safety built into their functionality, compared with traditional robots, cobots eliminate caging in the industry and are able to work closely with humans. ABB unveiled such cobots, designed by a team of international R&D personnel including Chinese staff members, in March.

The company has also been providing solutions by partnering with Chinese companies such as cargo container producer China International Marine Containers (Group) Ltd., CRRC Qingdao Sifang Co. Ltd., a high-speed train manufacturer, as well as 5G equipment supplier Huawei.

Switzerland remained first in the top-performing economies in the Global Innovation Index (GII) 2020, according to the UN’s World Intellectual Property Organization, while China retained its 14th position. The ranking also showed that China has established itself as an innovation leader, having been the only middle-income economy in the top 30 for years.

The innovative strategic partnership between China and Switzerland, established in 2016, is the first of its kind between China and a foreign country.



The first edition of the Swiss Machining Seminar takes place in Beijing on April 14

Innovation, which means “having good ideas and creating value out of them,” is crucial for both China and Switzerland. A competitive environment, an educational system with a broad basis for all, and the mobility of talented people are essential to his country’s innovativeness, according to Regazzoni.

“As the international number one in innovation, I believe that Switzerland is the ideal gateway for any groundbreaking Chinese company willing to internationalize its business and develop its activities in Europe,” he added.

## Free trade

In 2013, China and Switzerland signed a free trade agreement (FTA), the first China had ever reached with a continental European country. Three years ago, both sides agreed to work on elevating the agreement.

In a recent phone call with Vice President and Foreign Minister of the Swiss Confederation Ignazio Cassis, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said China appreciates Switzerland’s openness in cooperation with Chinese-funded enterprises, and as China is moving faster in advancing high-level opening up, both countries are seeing broad prospects in cooperation.

Roger Germann, deputy head of the Swiss Business Hub China, told *Beijing Review* that “due to this FTA, especially in the manufacturing sector, around 90 percent of products would be tariff-free until 2024.” The institution is the Beijing-based representative of the official international trade and investment promotion agency Switzerland Global Enterprise.

China is the third largest trading partner of Switzerland. Bilateral trade has doubled in a decade, and much of that growth has occurred since the FTA came into force. Data showed that there are trade creation effects of over \$1.09 billion per year both in exports and imports, Yves Morath, head of the Swiss Business Hub China, said.

“Additionally, the FTA is today used by broadly 60 percent of all Swiss companies, which in our understanding is already a very good rate. As this rate climbs, we consider that a positive tendency in the application of the FTA,” he said. **BR**

# Taxing the Digits

A global taxation framework is underway and perhaps China should care more

By Ma Xiaowen

China needs to take on a more active role in the application of taxes to the digital economy in order to avoid a potential “new tariff war,” forewarned Zhou Xiaochuan, the nation’s former central banker. The remarks, made during a news conference at the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference in Hainan Province on April 21, came in response to a new U.S. government proposal that could allow major economies to agree on uniform tax rules for digital firms.

According to Zhou, former Governor of the People’s Bank of China, China has not yet paid enough attention to the issue of taxation on digital goods and services, which have become an important item on the international agenda.

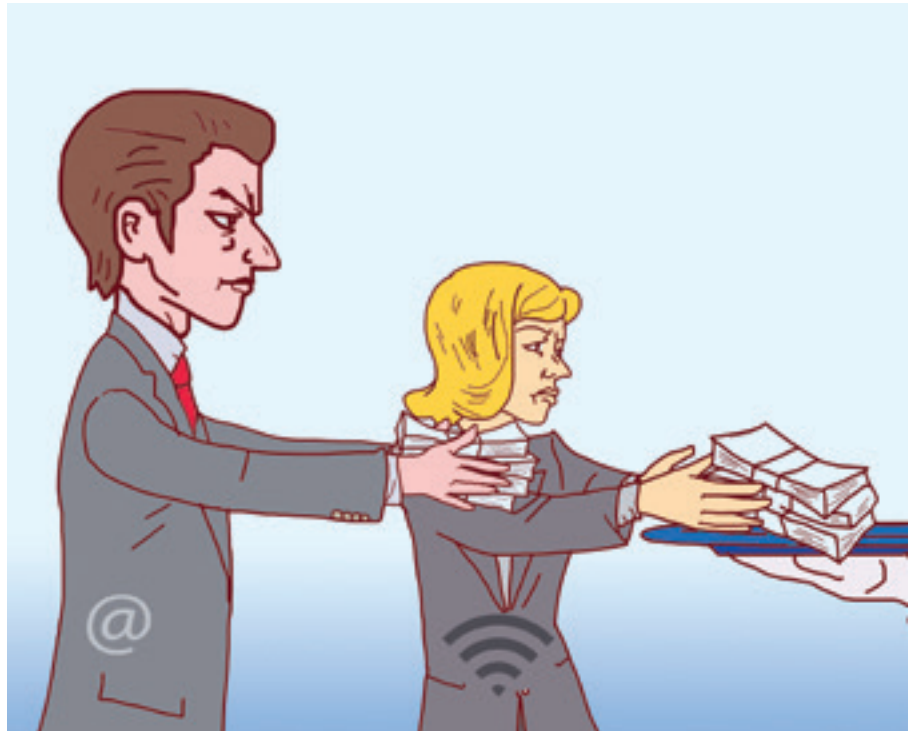
## Back and forth

The Digital Services Tax (DST) is a tax on selected gross revenue streams of large digital companies. Operating under a Group of 20 (G20) mandate, the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) is directing efforts for an international solution. The group suggested Pillar One and Pillar Two, basically a set of proposals toward reaching a multilateral, consensus-based solution to the tax challenges arising from the digitalization of the economy.

In October 2019, the OECD Secretariat released its proposal for a “unified approach” under Pillar One. It introduced a revised profit allocation rule applicable to all multinationals that are “in scope” with potential carve-outs for selected industries.

However, each of the OECD’s proposals comes with its own complexities, in turn possibly affecting their interaction with one another.

Advocates of a global DST framework argue that multinational corporations should not have permission to extract massive, tax-free profits from countries with heavy digital consumption. At the same time, the creation of a multilateral framework has repeatedly run into roadblocks amid a globally intensifying sense of protectionism and unilateralism.



In the past three years, more than 20 countries have sought to go it alone with DSTs. About half of all European OECD countries have thus far announced, proposed, or implemented a DST.

Amid concerns that a unilateral tax will fall disproportionately onto the shoulders of U.S. tech and Internet bastions, then U.S. Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin laid out the U.S. point of view in September 2018, saying “tax should be based on income, not sales, and should not single out a specific industry for taxation under a different standard.”

Because these taxes mainly impact U.S. companies and are thus perceived as discriminatory, the U.S. has responded with retaliatory threats. The Donald Trump administration withdrew from the Pillar One discussions in 2019, and launched investigations into various DSTs under Section 301 of the Trade Act of 1974, targeting 10 trading partners, including the EU, the UK, Spain, and Austria, in 2020.

## Uniform scheme

The stalemate between the U.S. and the EU loosened as Joe Biden claimed the U.S. presidency in January. In February, Janet Yellen, U.S. Treasury Secretary, announced during a G20 meeting the withdrawal of a safe harbor proposal for digital companies, which first came to light in December 2019.

This move was hailed by German and French finance ministers as a breakthrough for a global DST framework. This partly fulfilled the two-pillar global taxation scheme pushed by the OECD, which involves taxing digital giants where they make their profits even if they do not have a physical presence within that jurisdiction.

In early April, Yellen urged for the adoption of a minimum global corporate income tax, citing a “30-year race to the bottom” in which countries have slashed corporate tax rates to attract multinational businesses. She stressed that competitiveness is about ensuring governments have stable tax systems and revenue to “invest in essential public goods.”

After a meeting of G20 finance ministers and central bank governors earlier this April, Italian Finance Minister Daniele Franco said during a virtual news briefing that the bloc was “committed to reaching an agreement, and hopefully we can expect it to take place in July.”

Franco confirmed the discussions homed in on the two pillars of global international taxation: The fair allocation of profits among different countries where multinationals operate, and the global minimum effective tax rate.

### Concerns for China

According to data from the Chinese Academy of Cyberspace Studies, China’s digital economy reached 35.8 trillion yuan (\$5.45 trillion) in 2019, ranking second in the world and accounting for more than 30 percent of the GDP.

*Qiushi*, a flagship magazine of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, published an article on November 1, 2020, entitled Some Major Issues in the National Medium- and Long-Term Economic and Social Development Strategy. It mentioned the necessity for China to actively participate in the formulation of international rules, including those addressing the topics of digital currency and digital tax, to shape new competitive advantages.

China’s taxation system already covers the digital sector, according to Zhou, as companies need to pay value-added and corporate income taxes. However, the country has not yet paid

enough attention to the perspective of cross-border taxation.

Zhou pointed out that the major Internet service platforms operating in China are mainly developed by domestic firms, so that China does not face the same taxation challenges as nations in Europe, where U.S. tech giants seek to house their operations in low-tax EU countries.

“China’s study on DSTs should demonstrate a global vision and falls in line with the needs of a community with a shared future for all,” Zhou said.

While acknowledging that protectionist sentiments or tariff wars are not escalating or becoming increasingly tense as they have been in the past several years, Zhou warned about the possibility of a new tariff war over the DST issue.

“If it does occur, it will be very likely that most countries will respond by displaying protectionism. That is why we need to study the digital taxation issue,” he added.

Zhou suggested countries avoid fighting each other over the digital tax issue, especially about where the money came from and whom it belongs to.

Fan Zhixia, a researcher with the China Academy of Fiscal Sciences, told *China Youth Daily* that, as a big player in the digital economy, China should study related taxation challenges, as well as formulate targeted policies.

Nevertheless, a systematic assessment of the two-pillar international tax reform program’s actual impact on China and its enterprises is of the utmost importance.

One main concern is that the minimum corporate tax concept could bear potential risks for Hong Kong, since one of the key advantages for a business to establish itself in the region is its low tax burden. Forcing Hong Kong to raise its level of corporate taxes could subsequently reduce its appeal.

On the short term, the reform has basically managed to establish a structure, but many details remain up for discussion, Fan said. **BR**

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Comments to maxiaowen@bjreview.com

The OECD’s two-pillar global taxation scheme involves taxing digital giants where they make their profits, even if they do not have a physical presence within that jurisdiction

# The PR Crisis of A Darling Brand

U.S. electric car maker Tesla faces blowback against its market expansion

By Li Xiaoyang

**W**hile it tops the list of global electric car brands in terms of sales, U.S. electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer Tesla recently triggered quality concerns among consumers in China. A viral video on Chinese social media showed a woman climbing on top of a Tesla Model 3 car during an auto show in Shanghai on April 19. She reportedly performed the stunt in order to draw attention to her concerns regarding the brake malfunction of her own Tesla vehicle.

The company later issued an apology on China's Twitter-like platform Weibo. After first claiming that it would not bow down to unreasonable demands, Tesla then gave way to public anger, pledging that it would improve services for and respect customers, abide by China's laws and regulations, and cooperate with all government investigations. On April 22, the company turned over data relating to the woman's car without the consumer's consent, which, however, sparked criticism regarding the protection of consumer privacy.

Founded in 2003, Tesla has grown into one of the world's largest EV makers, delivering 499,550 sedans globally in 2020, up 36 percent year on year. The company has continuously explored the Chinese market, becoming the first foreign carmaker to establish a wholly owned subsidiary in the country. Its total revenue in China reached more than \$6.66 billion last year, up 123.6 percent compared with the previous year.

Nevertheless, the emergence of domestic auto brands and increasingly demanding Chinese consumers have placed tougher requirements on foreign players in the market. For Tesla, retaining its market share is no longer a given.

According to Liu Wenting, a researcher



with Beijing-based CCID Consulting, China has become the world's second largest market for Tesla cars. As Teslas are among the most widely sold EVs globally, their quality issues are likely to affect not only public safety, but also consumer confidence in the development of the entire industry.

## Business in China

Tesla broke ground for a gigafactory in Shanghai in January 2019, its first overseas plant. It took less than 10 months to build the factory, which manufactured more than 140,000 of the Tesla vehicles sold in China last year.

Despite the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and a current shortage of automobile chips, in the first quarter (Q1) of the year, the company's operations in China delivered a record-breaking 184,800 vehicles, all versions of its two low-cost models—Model 3 and Model Y.

Made-in-China Tesla Model 3 vehicles in Shanghai on November 19, 2020



According to the company, the second phase of its Shanghai Gigafactory is about to be completed ahead of schedule this year, lifting its annual production capacity to 550,000 vehicles.

To further entice consumers and to improve its after-sales services, Tesla has made efforts to expand the coverage of its charging points throughout China. It unveiled a plan to invest 42 million yuan (\$6.4 million) in building a supercharger manufacturing plant in Shanghai last year. Manufacturing in the plant began in February, with an initial planned annual production capacity of 10,000 superchargers.

In addition, the company said in April that it had built and opened more than 780 supercharging stations with over 6,200 superchargers across China.

As Tesla continues to introduce more low-cost models, competition in China's EV market is mounting. The company's competitors include both domestic startups such as Nio, Lixiang, and Xpeng, and multinationals such as Volkswagen.

Though the sales of the Chinese startups still fall far behind those of Tesla, Cui Dongshu, Secretary General of the China Passenger Car Association, said, "EV startups in China have produced vehicles that can meet diversified and personalized demands, which have improved their competitiveness."

## Quality trap

Although Tesla has been improving its output and sales in China, unresolved quality issues have resulted in complaints regarding battery fires, brake failures and unexpected accelerations. In its responses, Tesla has mostly attributed these safety issues to collision damage to the vehicles' high-voltage lithium batteries, or to inappropriate driving behavior. Nevertheless, its arguments have stirred controversy among users and media. Worse still, the company has been discovered to have downgraded components used in some of its vehicles by using older-version chips.

Last October, Tesla recalled 48,442 vehicles in China due to safety problems. In February, it further recalled 36,126 imported Model S and Model X vehicles due to problems with their

touch-screen control panels.

After the recent protest by the female consumer in Shanghai, there have been growing calls for Tesla to improve the quality of its products and protect the legitimate rights and interests of consumers in accordance with the law.

The State Administration for Market Regulation said on April 21 that it had urged local market regulators to safeguard consumers' legitimate rights when addressing Tesla-related quality disputes. The administration also demanded companies fulfill their responsibilities to ensure the quality and safety of their products and services.

As EVs entered the global market only recently and EV technology is still in the nascent stages of its development, it's not surprising that Tesla is not the only EV brand to have reported malfunctions, failures and accidents.

Data from Yilanzhong, a new-energy and smart vehicle market research consultancy in Shenzhen, Guangdong Province, showed that the more than 60 electric car battery fires in China in 2020 involved various brands. The consultancy stressed that EV safety issues can pose higher risks compared with gasoline-powered vehicles, as problems in electrical systems can cause fires that are harder to extinguish.

According to Liu, the safety of lithium batteries is still a major hurdle in the development of EVs, as they are vulnerable to overcharging, overdischarging, heat, shocks, and other external damage. Compared with traditional car manufacturers, EV makers focus on shorter cycles of technological innovation, seeking profits while lacking experience in manufacturing components and developing effective internal management systems.

"To promote the sound development of the EV sector, manufacturers need to enhance quality control, improve maintenance services, and increase investment in safety-related research and development. Related government departments also need to improve supervision, develop industrial standards and tighten penalties for enterprises that violate rules and laws," she said. **BR**

**Tesla's total revenue in China reached more than \$6.66 billion last year, up 123.6 percent over 2019**

Copyedited by G. P. Wilson  
Comments to lixiaoyang@bjreview.com

# Unmanned Vessels Set Sail

One Hong Kong entrepreneur draws on the industrial strengths of Guangdong to develop his business By Zhou Lin

**F**or Figo Zhang, an entrepreneur in his 30s, April 16 is a memorable day. On that day 11 years ago, the unmanned surface vessel (USV) he dreamed of building set sail from Zhuhai, a coastal city in Guangdong Province.

Zhuhai Yunzhou Intelligence Technology Co. Ltd., a company founded by Zhang, is China's first domestic producer of USVs. Starting from scratch, it has filled a vacuum in China's USV market over the past decade. The company's research and development team has developed a number of core and key USV technologies and obtained more than 390 patents. It also participated in the compilation of all nine existing industrial standards for USVs in China.

In 2008, the technology of artificial intelligence was becoming increasingly popular in China. With a strong interest in the field of USVs and confidence in the industry's promising future, Zhang, then a first-year doctoral student, decided to start a business creating USVs.

In his view, the decision to start his business in Zhuhai was not made on a whim. As one of China's first special economic zones, Zhuhai has strong roots in science and technology-based development. The municipal government always regards independent innovation as a source of business vitality. "With rich marine resources, a good ecological environment, low living costs and attractive policies for drawing talented people to the city, Zhuhai is an excellent choice for business startups and innovation," he said.

According to Zhang, with the support of the Zhuhai Municipal Government, his company, Yunzhou, took part in the Second China Innovation and Entrepreneurship Competition in 2013 and won the national championship in the startup category. This helped the company attract venture capital from multiple sources. "The governments of Zhuhai and Guangdong also have provided a lot of support for Yunzhou," he said.



COURTESY PHOTO

An unmanned surface vessel developed by Zhuhai Yunzhou Intelligence Technology Co. Ltd. in collaboration with its partners

Between 2010 and 2020, Yunzhou launched a number of independently developed products such as the world's first unmanned vessel for environmental monitoring, China's first unmanned vessel for marine surveying, an unmanned vessel for rescue and a cargo ship that sails autonomously. Yunzhou has sold these products to buyers across more than 40 countries and regions.

Now an increasing number of college graduates from Hong Kong and Macao travel to the mainland in search of career opportunities, just as Zhang did 11 years ago. "The researches conducted by universities in Hong Kong and Macao are cutting edge, however, due to the industrial structure within these two cities and insufficient local demand, it can be difficult to transfer some research results into production," said Zhang. He added that by relying on the strong industrial foundations of Guangdong, talented people in the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay Area will be more capable of applying their research achievements to production, and generate wealth in a sustained way.

"Young people will gather in the area to pursue a common dream, and favorable policies from the government will provide them with a more convenient living and working environment," Zhang said, adding that he believes that the USV industry will spur on the transformation of many other related industries. **BR**

The author is a reporter with *China Today* magazine  
 Copyedited by G. P. Wilson  
 Comments to wanghairong@bjreview.com

# Agrosystem of Harmonious Coexistence

Three young people from Hong Kong pursue their agricultural dream in Guangdong Province By Zhou Lin

Inside the greenhouses of a modern agricultural base in Jiangmen, Guangdong Province, grow hydroponic vegetables, ranging from ordinary ones to varieties rarely seen on the market. Trickle water circulates within the hydroponic structure. Inside the pools seven species of fish are raised, living in harmony with the hydroponic vegetables.

“Fish farming without the need to change the water and growing vegetables without the need to fertilize. This is the fish-vegetable symbiosis system we have developed, essentially a model of circular agriculture,” said Fung Leung, a young man from Hong Kong and co-founder of the project. “All the vegetables are free of pesticide residues, because once pesticides and fertilizers are applied, the fish will die.”

Founders of this eco-friendly hi-tech agricultural project are three young people from Hong Kong, all born in the 1990s. Classmates in high school, they graduated from different universities in Hong Kong. In their senior year in university, they came up with the idea of building their own fish-vegetable symbiosis system.

“In 2014, we set up a rooftop farm for the design and implementation of this organic farming system. But as the scale of the farm expanded, our limited space in Hong Kong was not enough for our experiments,” said Leung. In 2016, the trio began looking for agricultural parks on the mainland. After visiting several other cities without success, they came to the comprehensive demonstration base of modern agriculture in Jiangmen. The city’s agriculture bureau offered a great deal of assistance to support the startup.

Since starting their business in Jiangmen, Leung has also witnessed the development that has taken place in the city and also in the Greater Bay Area, an area covering Guangdong Province and Hong Kong and Macao special administrative regions.

“Better transportation and more frequent exchanges between the mainland and Hong Kong and Macao have also helped us reduce transport costs,” he said.

According to Leung, the three entrepreneurs expanded their project in 2019, establishing 8,000-square-meter smart greenhouses that can produce a total of 400 tons of vegetables per year. They then established a second project in Jiangmen, which covers an area of 26.67 hectares and is capable of producing 8,800 tons of vegetables per annum for Hong Kong, as well as Zhuhai and Zhongshan, two other cities within the Greater Bay Area.

“Food safety is what people are most concerned about in their pursuit of quality life. Local agriculture in Hong Kong is unable to satisfy the city’s demand for such products in terms of scale and quality. Vegetables supplied to Hong Kong from the mainland must meet very high standards throughout the whole process of production and processing,” said Mandy Tam, co-founder of the project. According to Tam, it is promising business opportunities such as these that have convinced the trio to focus on growing organic vegetables in the mainland in the long term.

Leung said the opportunities for coordinated development in the Greater Bay Area, as well as the institutional building that encourages innovation and business startup, fill them with high hopes for the future. **BR**

The author is a reporter with *China Today* magazine  
Copyedited by G. P. Wilson  
Comments to wanghairong@bjreview.com



Mandy Tam (first left), Victor Lo (center) and Fung Leung in their farm in Guangdong Province

# A New Chapter

Reading becomes more diversified in China as e-reading gains popularity

By Ji Jing

A reading challenge was launched in dozens of Chinese cities on April 23 to mark World Book Day, a day created by UNESCO on April 23, 1995 in celebration of books and reading.

To take part in the challenge, readers were required to register online before 6 p.m. on April 22 and then head to the bookstore of their choice the next day to read books out loud. They could either bring their own books or get those from the bookstore. Those who completed the challenge of continuously reading for four hours and 23 minutes would win a prize—a book.

The activity was jointly launched by the China Pictorial Press (CPP), in collaboration with News.qq.com, an Internet portal run by Tencent Holdings Ltd., and Shumeng, an alliance of Chinese brick-and-mortar bookstores. Over 100 bookstores in more than 60 cities across the country took part in the activity, including the PageOne Bookstore at Beijing Fun, a commercial and cultural complex in central Beijing.

Mu Shuang, Marketing Director of the CPP, told *Beijing Review* that the event aimed to bring more people into bookstores and appreciate the beauty of books.

## Reading online

In addition to reading paper books, Chinese people are embracing digital reading. The 2020 Digital Reading Report published by the China Audio-Video and Digital Publishing Association on April 16 showed that the market size of digital reading reached 35 billion yuan (\$5.4 billion) last year, up 21.8 percent year on year. Meanwhile, the number of digital book readers reached 494 million, up 5.56 percent year on year.

It's worth noting that children have become a fairly large reader group of digital books. The report shows that over 74 percent of children started reading digital books from the age of 2, and over 65 percent of them prefer digital books to paper ones. The amount of money spent by parents on children's digital books increased over 56 percent and children spent 29 minutes

e-reading on average every day.

Similarly, KaDa Story, an online reading website for children's picture books, released its 2020 report on April 16, together with the Chinese Academy of Press and Publication. The report demonstrates that children accounted for a larger proportion of those engaging in digital reading in third- and fourth-tier cities, while the number of parents paying for their children's e-reading in fifth-tier cities and below had increased by over 100 percent.

Yang Bo, cofounder of KaDa Story, told Xinhua News Agency that the expansion of Internet technology has helped with the promotion of education equality. "Parents in small cities are paying more attention to reading and digital books have provided them with a new option."

More and more readers are willing to pay for high-quality digital content, with 26.8 percent of readers spending an average of over 100 yuan (\$15) on online content every month last year.

Online literature proves most popular among e-readers. The 2020 Digital Reading Report further read that of those e-consumers paying over 100 yuan a



Children read inside a library in Longyao County in Xingtai, Hebei Province, on World Book Day on April 23



**According to the 2020 Digital Reading Report, people in China read 6.2 paper books per person on average in 2020, whereas they read 9.1 digital books and 6.3 audiobooks**



month for online content, nearly half were acquiring online literary works.

On Qidian, a Chinese online literature site owned by online publishing and eBook company Yuewen Group, readers have developed the habit of paying for online books in recent years. In addition to the traditional model of subscribing to online content, readers nowadays are more willing to pay via other ways, such as directly reimbursing the writers to obtain faster updates of their preferred novels.

However, although more people are willing to pay for digital content, their satisfaction levels with the online reading experiences are not high. Over 80 percent of readers said the quality of online publications should be improved.

Audiobooks, too, have begun to gain popularity in recent years. According to big data on reading-related search activities published by Internet search giant Baidu on April 23, the popularity of both digital and audiobooks increased rapidly in the past year. Searches for digital book and audiobook apps rose by 97 percent and 82 percent, respectively. Those born after 1990 prefer digital books, whereas senior consumers prefer audiobooks.

In 2020, audio content on Ximalaya FM, an online audio-sharing platform, increased by over 60 percent year on year.

According to the 2020 Digital Reading Report, people in China read 6.2 paper books per person on average in 2020, whereas they read 9.1 digital books and 6.3 audiobooks. The number of audiobooks read per person surpassed that of paper books for the first time ever.

The books on Ximalaya FM cover a wide range of topics, from learning a new language, a new skill, to cultivating a new hobby or humanities-related materials.

During this year's World Book Day, the platform hosted its online audiobook festival for the fourth year in a row, launching over 1,000 new audiobooks in collaboration with various publishing houses.

## Passing on a legacy

One library in Zhuhai, Guangdong Province, houses an open space which, unlike other sections of the library, features no shelves or book, but only 24 pairs of headphones. This is a full-fledged audiobook reading area created in cooperation with Ximalaya FM. Wu Junqiu, a 74-year-old reader, was listening to audiobooks telling the history of

the Communist Party of China (CPC).

"I have poor eyesight and easily feel tired when reading paper books for long hours at a time. I also listen to audiobooks on my phone," Wu told Xinhua News Agency.

This year marks the 100th anniversary of the founding of the CPC. A campaign on Party history learning and education was launched in February.

The 2020 Digital Reading Report shows that digital reading platforms have become an important arena for spreading Party theories. In 2020, multiple digital reading platforms collaborated with online platform Xuexi.cn to set up special columns on the latter covering Party history and theories. Readers have affirmed that these digital resources have facilitated their deeper understanding of Party history.

Additionally, publishing houses have intensified their collaboration with digital reading platforms to expand the reach of Party ideologies. Wang Tong, Deputy Secretary of the Party committee of the People's Publishing House, said the press has published several digital books on the fight against COVID-19 on Xuexi.cn and Migu, a digital content subsidiary of China Mobile, to illustrate the achievements in China's fight against the epidemic.

As a rule of thumb, experts today say that no matter what ways of reading one chooses, it is important that people develop the habit of reading.

Meng Man, a professor at the School of History and Culture at Minzu University of China, told China Central Television that people can start by reading for half an hour every day. After one or two months, one would consequently feel that without reading, something is lacking from their general routine. Just like this, reading would gradually become an intrinsic part of daily life.

Zheng Yuanjie, a writer of fairytales, revealed he'd never had much of a school education and the reason he eventually was able to become a writer was because of his reading habits. He said that whether a person can succeed in life strongly depends on whose influence they are under. Not everyone can have the chance to communicate with a master, but reading a master's book is like meeting them. Therefore, instead of signing their kids up for all kinds of training institutions, parents should help their children develop regular reading habits so as to enable them to develop that competitive edge. **BR**

# High Up to Fuel Up

The highest gas station in the world offers much more than fuel By Yuan Yuan

**A**t an altitude of 5,000 meters in the north of Tibet Autonomous Region, oxygen levels are only 40 percent of those at sea level. Strong winds batter the area over 200 days a year. The average annual temperature runs below zero degree Celsius. The harsh climate and geological conditions have rendered the area “unsuitable for human life to flourish.”

The name of this sparsely populated place is Shuanghu County, in Nagqu Prefecture of Tibet. Covering 116,700 square km, even larger than the whole province of Jiangsu, it has only about 10,000 residents. With a relocation project in operation since 2018, a number of residents have moved to places at lower altitudes. Yet one gas station, the one and only in the county for more than four decades, remains.

## Challenging location

“For the residents of Shuanghu, oil is as important as water and air,” Tsen Pazom, the 29-year-old

manager of the gas station, said. As this place is vast, herdsmen need motorcycles to herd livestock and thus are in great need of petrol.

“In the old days, the residents had to fetch petrol from gas stations in neighboring counties, which are over 300 km away,” said Tseta, a 55-year-old worker at the gas station. He has been working at the station for almost 20 years. “It would take you two days to fetch petrol from those places.”

In 1979, a temporary gas station was set up locally. Back in the early days, oil would be delivered to the station in big barrels and the delivery would take fuel tankers about one month each run.

In 2002, the China National Petroleum Corp. (CNPC) initiated its support for this gas station and invested 400,000 yuan (\$61,640) to move it to its new location, right next to the long-distance coach station of Shuanghu County.

With the improvement of road conditions and transportation, the delivery of oil to the station now only takes fuel tankers two to three days. This gas station has been the only provider of petrol within a radius of over 300 km for decades.

With a convenience store and a duty room, the gas station now runs 24/7, despite being far less busy than other regular stations. It is common for the station to see no business or just a handful of vehicles coming in to refuel over a whole day.

The station employs four staff members, with Tseta, the most senior



A truck is on its way to deliver petrol to the Shuanghu gas station on April 15

**“The gas station’s light at night serves as a beacon for locals and those who are lost, especially travelers unfamiliar with the area.”**

—Guo Guanghai  
from China National  
Petroleum Corp.

employee, looking to retire in a few months. Working at high altitudes for long periods of time has left him with a number of altitude-induced health issues, such as gallstones and rheumatoid arthritis. Nowadays, he needs a stick to walk most of the time.

Tsen Pazom has been working there since 2017, together with her husband Samdrum. They have brought along their three-year-old son. Sonam Tsering is a 27-year-old CNPC employee who only joined the station this January.

“Working at this station comes with many challenges,” Wen Decheng from CNPC told *Beijing Review*. “Except for the harsh living and working conditions, the language, too, can be a major challenge. As the Tibetan language has many a dialect, it is common for the locals of Shuanghu not to understand the dialects from other areas. The workers at the station all have to learn and practice local dialects to smoothen communication.”

## The commitment

For locals, the gas station is much more than a mere provider of petrol. It serves as their post, water and rescue stations.

As tap water is not available in the county,

locals for a long time had to chisel out chunks of ice from a snowy mountain, or shovel snow and wait until it melted to obtain water for daily use. When temperatures went up, they would head to a lake 10 km away to fetch water. As water was so precious, it was normal for locals to take a bath only once every few years.

In 2018, the gas station took the lead in digging a well. Others followed suit and dug a few more wells in Shuanghu, much to the benefit of people living around.

No courier service can reach this place and postal service delivery, usually rather slow, used to be the only option for locals to employ. The truck for delivering petrol to the gas station has been a favorite alternative for locals to obtain urgently needed goods, including medicine.

In November 2020, a local herdsman got stuck on his way to a neighboring town as the transmission shaft of his truck broke down. He contacted the gas station for help. The truck from the station happened to be in Lhasa at the time, and managed to bring back the parts the herdsman needed for repair in time. “This wasn’t the first time I had asked for help from the station; they’ve always showed up on time,” the herdsman said.

Biscuits, pickles and instant noodles are the common food for staff at the gas station. Fresh fruits and vegetables are luxuries due to the difficulties in transportation. In 2018, a relocation project was launched to move locals into places at lower altitudes such as Shannan and Lhasa. In 2020, the first batch of 2,000 residents left the area, reducing local demand for petrol from over 3,000 tons to over 2,000 tons, but the gas station will keep operating there, 24 hours a day.

“The gas station’s light at night serves as a beacon for locals and those who are lost, especially travelers unfamiliar with the area,” Guo Guanghai from CNPC, said.

“We plan to send our son to Lhasa. There he can stay with my parents and go to kindergarten,” Tsen Pazom said when talking about their plan for the future. “But we will still stay here. Oil acts as a lifeline for locals. Without oil, all vehicles here will be useless.” **BR**



Tsten Pazom fuels the motorcycle of a local herdsman at the Shuanghu gas station on April 13

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# Decoding Beauty and Happiness

Survey reveals what makes a city beautiful and happy By Lu Yan

**L**iu Ruiyi is an accountant at an auditing firm in Dalian, a coastal city in Liaoning Province in northeast China. She once worked in Shanghai for one and a half years, and then decided to return to her hometown of Dalian because she could save on rent and be with her family.

“Although our income is not as high as that of people in more developed cities, I feel happy living here because of the beautiful ocean scenery, pleasant climate and easy pace of life,” Liu told *Beijing Review*.

In April, Dalian was selected as one of China’s top 10 most beautiful cities as well as one of its top 10 happiest cities, based on a survey on people’s livelihoods and their levels of satisfaction with the cities they reside in.

## What matters

Both the most beautiful and happiest cities were selected based on a survey on city life. Conducted for 15 consecutive years, the survey was jointly launched by several organizations, including China Media Group, the National Bureau of Statistics, China Post and the National School of Development at Peking University. Questionnaires were administered door to door or via airlines to over 100,000 households in more than 150 cities.

The beautiful oceanic scenery and mild climate with four distinct seasons are some of the main reasons for people’s high sense of happiness in Dalian. What’s more, among cities in the three provinces in northeast China, Dalian features the highest economic aggregate and per-capita income. It is also an important tourist destination as well as a port, trade, and industrial hub. Its major industries include locomotives, shipbuilding, bushings, and large-scale production of chemicals.

A surprising laureate among the top 10 most

beautiful cities is Guiyang, as it is not as famous as other metropolises on the list such as Shanghai, Beijing and Shenzhen, nor does it display a beautiful seascape like Dalian. In fact, Guiyang has been working on ecological conservation since 2015, when the local government launched a project on building and renovating 1,000 parks to feature forest, wetland and mountain views. Today, the city has reached its goal, with 1,025 parks for citizens and tourists to enjoy. Its overall forest coverage has increased to 55 percent.

“There are more and more parks in Guiyang, and each one of them has its own unique and bewitching beauty,” said Liu Xiaoyun, a shutterbug who has a gallery of pictures featuring Guiyang’s various parks on his smartphone.

Located in Guizhou Province in southwest China, Guiyang boasts a comfortable climate with an agreeable annual average temperature of 15 degrees Celsius. Moreover, according to the local ecology and environment department, the number of days with good air quality was as high as 98.9 percent of the total in 2020.

Guiyang is beautiful not only on the surface, but also at its core. Aside from its ecological progress, the local government has been working on making the city an intelligent and convenient one. Guiyang uses big data to improve the efficiency of local governance and social services. Application for many municipal government services such as social security and medical insurance can be submitted and processed online.

Wu Jun is an entrepreneur who wanted to start a human resources service company in Guiyang, thus he needed to apply for a human resources service license. After logging on to the municipal service platform, Wu followed the relevant guidelines and submitted his application materials in less than 20 minutes. Half an hour after that, he received a text

**“Urban development must not only increase financial and material income for everyone, but also provide citizens with more spiritual satisfaction.”**

—Ni Zijun, a researcher with Tsinghua University





A father and his daughter stroll around a wetland park in Dalian, Liaoning Province, on July 22, 2019

message saying his application had been approved. One day later, Wu got his license.

Furthermore, smart technology facilitates transportation. When people take the subway, they can enter or exit the station through facial recognition. The big data will help calculate the total travel cost according to the distance between the stations they entered and exited, and the fare will be automatically deducted via a mobile application.

## Happiness differs

So which Chinese cities boast the happiest residents? The survey revealed, although metropolitans such as Beijing, Shanghai, Guangzhou and Shenzhen are glamorous and rife with development opportunities and other possibilities that many people dream of, residents there, however, are significantly less happy than those in third-tier cities, for residents living in small cities generally reported having fewer troubles and living a more comfortable life.

The survey surprisingly showed no obvious correlation between income

level and happiness. The annual personal income of 120,000 to 200,000 yuan (\$18,490 to \$30,820) was found to be an inflection point. Below this point, people in lower income groups were less likely to feel happy; however, above this point, people in higher income groups were not more likely to feel happy. Actually, for groups with an annual income above 500,000 yuan (\$77,050), the higher the income, the lower the percentage of people feeling happy.

Nevertheless, worries about children's education have directly affected people's sense of happiness. The anxiety caused by children's education today is the highest in recent five years. Those with children see their happiness levels decrease as the number of children increases.

The survey also revealed some other factors related to people's happiness, such as family housing situations. Homeowners reported higher degrees of happiness than renters, as the latter felt less happy because of worries about rent hikes and moves. The survey also showed that people living in the north are generally happier than those in the south due to their more straightforward and carefree take on life. Data from 2011 to 2020 show that women's happiness levels were consistently higher than men's.

In light of these, experts suggest cities attach importance to both material and spiritual wellness. "Urban development must not only increase financial and material income, but also provide citizens with more spiritual satisfaction," said Ni Zijun, a researcher with Tsinghua University. She commended Chengdu, capital of Sichuan Province, also one of the happiest cities. Chengdu has been working on providing high-quality public services and building a friendly and inclusive society for residents of all ages, she said, adding that it has child- and senior-friendly communities with facilities catering to everyone's needs.

Chengdu also supports the entrepreneurial dreams of younger generations and creates a high-quality business environment by offering favorable policies. "These policies attract talented young people to Chengdu, who, in turn, facilitate the development of the city and make it more dynamic and lively," Ni said. **BR**

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Comments to [luyan@bjreview.com](mailto:luyan@bjreview.com)

# CHINA MOSAIC

Weekly video commentary direct from Beijing

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# A Taste of Tea

**W**arm the cup. Wait a few seconds. Here we go. Various Chinese teas satisfy the palates of tea tasters at the 13th China (Beijing) International Tea and Tea Ceremony Exhibition.

As a large producer of tea in the world, China began consuming tea some 5,000 years ago and is home to a variety of the leafy infusions.

The four-day exhibition, starting from April 23, attracted some 900 domestic and foreign exhibitors. On display were

tea, tea sets, costume designs inspired by a longstanding tea culture and other tea-related utilities.

In addition, a culture forum, a *hanfu* (traditional Chinese costumes) show, a tea art contest and other activities took place. The integration of tea culture with other traditional and modern cultures enables more people to appreciate the beverage's unique fragrance. **BR**

(Text and photos by Wei Yao)

Comments [weiyao@bjreview.com](mailto:weiyao@bjreview.com)







1. Visitors have a taste of Puer tea during the 13th China (Beijing) International Tea and Tea Ceremony Exhibition on April 26
2. Visitor at a booth exhibiting porcelain tea sets from Jingdezhen, the city of porcelain in Jiangxi Province
3. A visitor has a sip of tea
4. An exhibitor introduces his products to a visitor
5. An exhibitor from a Tibetan tea enterprise in Yaan, Sichuan Province, brews Tibetan tea



## Community Through Common Unity

By Rochelle Beiersdorfer



**A**udiophile: someone who loves music and strives to reproduce music in its purest form.

As someone who bopped around as a toddler to reggae and had huge unrealistic dreams of becoming a top-notch sound engineer traveling the world working every music festival from Glastonbury to Midi, I am arguably someone who fits into the audiophile category.

Without music, I'm pretty sure life, well "my" life at the very least, would be a mistake. It gives our existence meaning and is a constant, through thick and thin. When life is not ideal, music is played to escape. When life is going great, music is played to celebrate. So, back in 2010, when I started studying Chinese and needed to find some way to stay motivated, obsessively seeking out Chinese music was the no-brainer.

As someone with a proclivity for the more underground of musical scores, obscure opuses than popular hits, I found it difficult to unearth music that I could learn from. At that time, my Chinese was not yet good enough to decipher what aspects of the human condition the bands I had found were screaming about or the Chinese history lessons they were preaching. Also, my circle of Chinese friends,

equally enthusiastic about music and patient enough to explain things, could be counted on a closed fist.

This all changed with my discovery of 666 Rock Shop. Nestled in the *hutongs* near the Drum Tower, 666 Rock Shop is a heavy metal music paradise among all the snack stalls, cafes and street vendors peddling their goods. Managed by diehard music fans, it is where you go to for new releases and meaningful conversations with like-minded individuals about anything under the sun. With conversations centered around music, abrupt interruptions by everyone breaking out in song were commonplace. Quintessential heavy metal classics were a favorite to incite shop-wide singing.

A study-abroad-student in the early 2010s, my every Saturday afternoon was spent at 666 Rock Shop nerding out over music and receiving a deeper cultural education. Through my time loitering and the more than occasional chitchat with random customers, I learned a lot of slang terms, as in what is considered *lao* Beijing (native Beijinger) as well as about China's music history. I got to hear many stories about how people discovered their passion for music. These stories usually began with Michael Jackson.

And though the above combined may suggest otherwise, it wasn't just me spending as much time as possible at 666 Rock Shop. A group of us did. 666 Rock Shop is not just a record shop, it is a community space. Meaningful relationships and memories have been forged there. Several couples have their "how we met" stories firmly cemented in the guiding framework of 666 Rock Shop; one regular customer even proposed to his wife there.

In the fields of social science, such as anthropology, the importance of human connection and community is a major topic of study. As humans, we instinctively seek out and find people like us because the company and support from others help us as individuals and as a group to flourish. Needing a community is part of our human makeup, regardless of differences. So, finding a place where I could be surrounded by compatible compadres proved a huge comfort. It helped create a home over 6,400 km away from my actual hometown. It gave me a family of likeminded people who didn't just look at my physical appearance and write me off. I was not seen as some foreign girl who sticks out like a sore thumb and should be ignored and not engaged with because of it at all costs.

Instead, our shared love for soaring guitar solos, power anthems and profound lyrical concepts transcended any cultural or linguistic differences.

Since being stuck outside of Beijing because of COVID-19 and far away from the community I now call my second family, I have found myself reminiscing about those humid summer nights at 666 Rock Shop debating what we should eat once the shop closed for the day and discussing the one thing that brought us all together, music. **BR**

The author is an American freelance writer  
Copyedited by Elsbeth van Paridon  
Comments to [dingying@bjreview.com](mailto:dingying@bjreview.com)



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