



A LEAGUE OF THEIR OWN
HERDERS FIND JOY IN
WORLD OF FOOTBALL, P7

ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW CHINA WATCH

CHINA DAILY 中國日報



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The power of openness

Party learns from other countries to provide more effective governance.

Chen Yingqun reports

In 1986, when Koh King Kee organised the first-ever seminar on China's reform and opening-up policy in Kuala Lumpur, he was impressed that the Chinese government officials — all members of the Communist Party of China — who spoke at the seminar were open, inquisitive and eager to acquire fresh knowledge.

"They asked me a lot of questions, including how the outside world saw China and how the country could better develop itself," he said. "They were sincere and keen to interact with the outside world and learn from other people's experiences."

Over the ensuing decades Koh, president of the Centre for New Inclusive Asia, a think tank in Kuala Lumpur, has frequently been asked similar questions by CPC members and Chinese government officials.

"If you review the history of the CPC's 100 years, it is easy to see that the Party has been open in listening to outsiders' ideas and constantly trying to improve itself in its long struggle for national liberation and to improve governance of the country after the founding of the People's Republic of China, especially after reform and opening-up in the late 1970s," he said.

Indeed, the CPC leadership's openness to learning from more advanced countries helped China find a development path suited to its own national circumstances and become the world's second-largest economy in about 30 years, lifting domestic living standards and contributing to global economic growth, Koh said.

Since the start of reform and opening-up, China has lifted more than 770 million people out of poverty and has reached the poverty-alleviation target set by the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development 10 years earlier.

China has also been willing to share its expertise with the world, and its achievement is a great contribution to alleviating global poverty, Koh said.



SONG CHEN / CHINA DAILY

President Xi Jinping, who is also general secretary of the CPC Central Committee, has called on the world to build a future based on openness, inclusiveness, mutual respect and love for the planet, he said.

"China has also proposed the Belt and Road Initiative, an international co-operation project that aims to better connect countries through policy co-ordination, infrastructure connectivity, unimpeded trade and investment, financial integration and people-to-people ties," Koh said.

"The BRI is China's offer of public goods to the world, which embodies the Silk Road spirit of peace and co-operation, openness and inclusiveness, mutual learning and mutual benefit."

In the keynote speech

delivered via video link at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2021, Xi reiterated China's commitment to make the BRI "a public road open to all" instead of a "private path owned by one single party".

"All interested countries are welcome aboard to take part in the co-operation and share in its benefits," he said. "Belt and Road co-operation pursues development, aims at mutual benefits and conveys a message of hope."

Koh said the concept of building "a community with a shared future" and promoting development of the BRI under the principles of extensive consultation, joint contribution and shared benefits were added to the CPC constitution in 2017, which best

demonstrates the Party's openness.

Since the onset of the Covid-19 pandemic, China has joined the world to combat the common enemy of humankind and extended help to many countries, such as offering vaccines and masks, which is another example of the Party's and Chinese government's openness.

Wang Yiwei, Jean Monnet chair professor at Renmin University of China in Beijing, said China has had openness as a basic State policy and included it in the country's constitution and the ruling party's constitution, which is rare in the world and shows that the Party and Chinese civilisation have always adhered to openness.

SEE "PATH" ON PAGE 3

Subaquatic magic

By **CHEN NAN**

An ancient and legendary tale of romance is given a new setting and still provides enthralling viewing for a modern audience. In a manner of speaking, it is not of this world. Fittingly for a legend, it is not constrained by the normal forces of gravity, nor will it be impeded by the weather. The alluring tale is portrayed in what seems like slow motion.

Ode to the Goddess of the Luo River, a signature work by Cao Zhi, the son of Cao Cao, a warlord of the Eastern Han Dynasty (25-220), tells of a son's enchantment with the Goddess of the Luo River. She is believed to be the daughter of emperor Fuxi of prehistoric legend, who became a nymph after drowning in the river, a tributary of the mighty Yellow River.

Her story has inspired countless contemporary artists, who have portrayed the goddess of peerless beauty through various art forms, such as movies and dance dramas.

On June 12 the Goddess of the Luo River came alive in a video distributed by Henan TV Station on the social media platform Sina Weibo. It has been viewed more than 20 million times.

But the reason the video, which runs for about two minutes and is titled *Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess*, created such an impression and has generated such a wave of publicity is that it was shot underwater.

He Haohao plays the role of goddess. She masters not only her art but the technique of holding her breath as her lungs struggle to carry out their function. All this is done with the most serene expression.

The tale captures the enchanting appeal of that ancient Chinese goddess, whom Cao Zhi said was "as elegant as a startled swan goose and as supple as a swimming dragon".

"The performance is amazing and almost dream-like," one viewer wrote on Sina Weibo. "It vividly brings a flying fairy alive."

Another viewer wrote: "The combination of underwater cinematography and traditional Chinese dance is so beautiful, which enables viewers to appreciate traditional Chinese culture in a fresh way."

He said that after she was invited to play the role she read a number of books about ancient Chinese goddesses and was inspired by flying fairies portrayed in the mural paintings of the Mogao Grottoes in Dunhuang city, Gansu province.

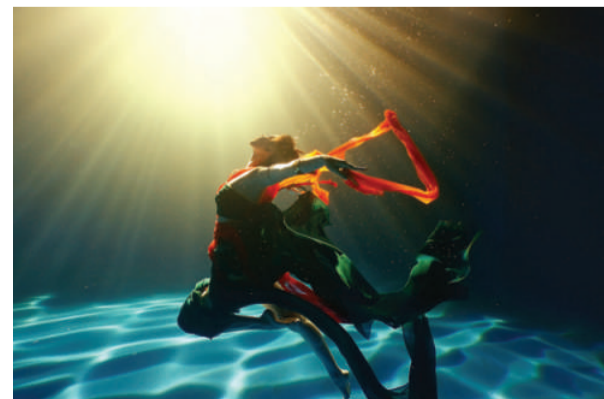
"I've always been interested in traditional Chinese culture and I am happy to share the beauty of it with my performance. In weightlessness my body blends with the waves under the water, which easily presents the image of an elegant and flying goddess. The choreography showcases not only the goddess' beauty but her power as well."

"I have to move very gently, very softly and gracefully in the water, which is not easy."

To control buoyancy she wears specially adapted weights of about 10 kilograms to help her stay submerged. She also tied fishing lines to her costumes to prevent the material from becoming entangled under water.

Without the use of breathing apparatus, she took a large gulp of air before entering the water.

SEE "WATER" ON PAGE 6



The Goddess of the Luo River comes alive in a video titled *Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess*. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



Grandparents and children relax at a pavilion in Tianjin. China's average household size is below the "three-person-family" benchmark. LI RAN / XINHUA

Downsized families now new normal

Falling fertility rate and migration contribute to number declining below long-established benchmark. **Li Lei** reports

China's household size is at a record low and dipped below a key benchmark, the seventh national census data showed, as the country navigates a fast-shifting demography.

According to the census there are 2.62 members per family, compared with 3.1 a decade ago.

The figure has dipped below the "three-person-family" benchmark — which the government had promoted between 1980 and 2015 when the family planning policy was in place.

Experts said a rising number of childless, single-parent and one-person families have weighed down the number, but said there is no need to overreact.

"I was a bit surprised by the new figure," said Zhuang Yaer, a researcher with the China Population and Development Research Centre, who tracks family size data.

"It is well below three and rather close to the level in developed economies."

The figure had fluctuated slightly above three over the past decade, except in 2014 when it briefly fell to 2.97 only to return above three the following year.

Authorities started tracking the figure since the first national census, conducted four years after the People's Republic of China was founded in 1949.

The 1953 survey found that average size of a household was 4.33 in the then largely rural country.

The number fluctuated between four and 4.5 for



A family of three in their home. WANG FEI / XINHUA

decades, until it sank below four in the 1990 census — 10 years after the family planning policy was adopted — and fell in all ensuing surveys.

China's family size is small by global standards, said Zhang Jing, a researcher of family development.

A mixture of factors is behind this, ranging from policymaking to economic growth to more migrants, she said.

The United Nations says family sizes generally range from two to nine persons globally. Smaller families are commonly found in wealthier regions such as Europe and North America.

Shortly after census figures were published in May, Ning Jizhe, director of the National Bureau of Statistics, which helped carry out the census late last year, offered an explanation.

Increased migration and more available new homes are among major contributors, he said.

"The young move out when married," he said, adding that the flagging fer-

tility rate and more divorces have also advanced the "miniaturisation" of Chinese families.

The figures showed the per capita residential area for urban residents reached 39 square metres in 2018, compared with 32 sq m in 1978, and for rural residents 47 sq m compared with 39 sq m in 1978.

Yang Yifan, deputy head of the National Interdisciplinary Institute on Aging at Southwest Jiaotong University in Chengdu, Sichuan province, said China's recent economic boom, its digital infrastructure and its unique parent-child bonding have together made moving out a preferred choice, and increasingly a social norm.

On the one hand, better educated Chinese seek independence by living apart from older generations due to diverging habits and values, and on the other, they have maintained rather close ties through frequent video calls or mutual visits made possible by the sprawling high-speed railway network, he said.

The shrinking family size has dovetailed with slowing population growth. China's population grew by an annual average of 0.53% over the past decade, down from 0.57% in the previous 10-year period, the National Bureau of Statistics said.

To shore up the number of newborns, authorities started to allow for a second child for all couples in 2016, and a third in May.

However, Zhuang of the China Population and Development Research Centre said the figures are susceptible to a wide range of factors other than birth rate. Some, such as migration, are signs of greater economic vibrancy.

The latest census showed that about 376 million, or one in every four, people in the Chinese mainland are classified as migrants living outside their native prefecture-level hometown, 70% more than 10 years ago.

Xiang Yufang, 24, a tutor in Chongqing, is among many college-educated migrants who have chosen to buy a home in the city, even when single.

Xiang, whose hometown is about a four-hour bullet train trip from Chongqing, said many out-of-town graduates she knew of did the same, giving rise to the so-called one-person families.

"I just think I need a home of my own," she said, adding that people of her age no longer treat buying homes as part of preparations for marriage.

Sun Fengyi and Xu Xiaowen contributed to this story.

News Digest

Chinese astronauts reach space station

Three Chinese astronauts entered the core module of China's permanent space station on June 17 to embark on their three-month mission, becoming the module's first occupants. They are tasked with testing and verifying plans, technologies and equipment for crucial elements of the station's construction and operation, such as astronauts' long-term mission arrangements, life-support system, in-orbit resupply, extravehicular activity and spacecraft maintenance and repair.

Express deliveries surge

The number of parcels handled in 2023 is expected to reach 200 billion, according to a recent report on the global development of the express delivery industry published by the State Post Bureau's Development and Research Centre. Last year 150 billion parcels were delivered globally, with 69% handled in the Asia-Pacific region, the report said. China handled 83.4 billion parcels, about 55% of the global market last year.

Negative list to be shorter

China's top economic planner says China will further shorten the negative list for foreign investment this year, as part of efforts to continuously open its vast domestic market to global investors. The country will support the implementation of major

foreign investment projects, especially in sectors such as advanced manufacturing and high-tech, and will encourage foreign investors to take part in the country's high-quality development of manufacturing, new infrastructure construction and innovation-driven growth, said Meng Wei, a spokeswoman for the National Development and Reform Commission.

Public-private high-speed railway line ready

China's first high-speed railway controlled by private capital has been built to connect several cities in East China's Zhejiang province. The tracks were completed for the Hangzhou-Shaoxing-Taizhou intercity railway on June 22. The 266.9 km rail line has been designed with eight stops and a speed of 350 km per hour.

Glorious glaze on display

An exhibition was opened on June 12 through the official website of the Palace Museum to display the colours of imperial architecture after three years of research on glazed decorations in the compound. The research has been jointly done by the museum and Southeast University in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, to unveil the artistic, historical and architectural values of the glaze, which decorates the doors, roofs and walls.

CHINA DAILY



Muddy harvest

A farmer harvests lotus roots in Huaihong village in Liuzhou, Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, on June 20. Farmers are also busy planting new lotus roots. LI HANCHI / FOR CHINA DAILY

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Country's advances unfolded before his eyes

Correspondent pays tribute to Party's leadership and resilience. **Prime Sarmiento** reports

Jaime FlorCruz, who worked as a foreign correspondent in China for about 40 years, had a front-row view of major events and developments in the country, giving him a special perspective of its social and economic progress.

Starting his reporting career in the early 1980s, shortly after China embarked on the path of economic reforms and opening up to the outside world, he is amazed at how far the country has advanced in just a few decades in terms of economic prosperity and improving people's lives.

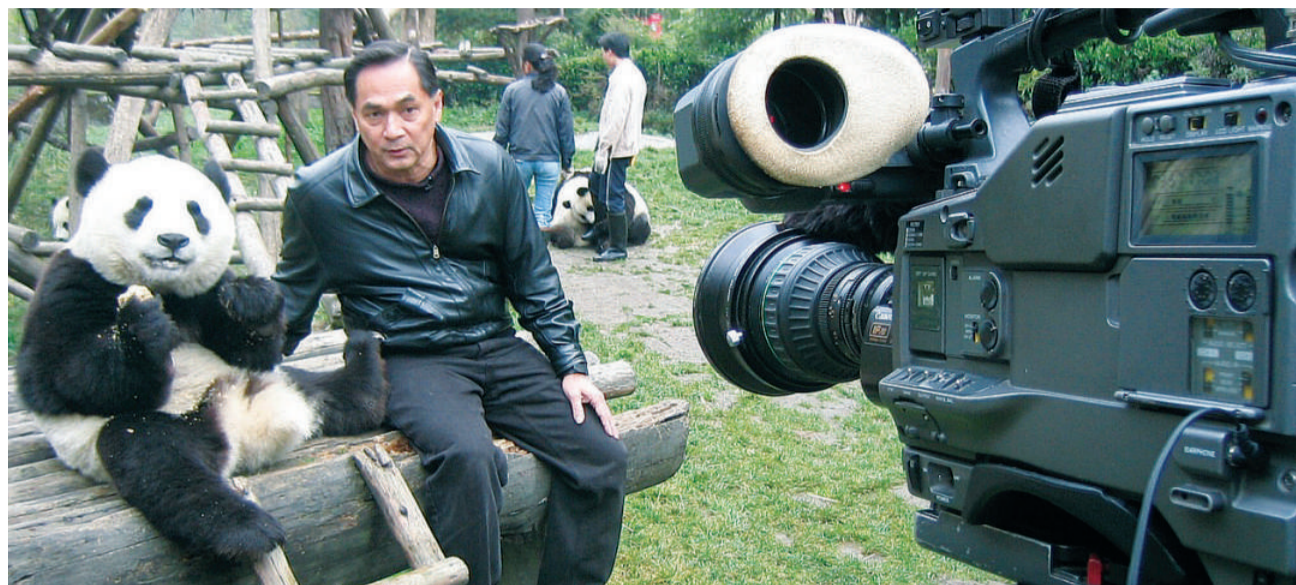
Much of that success stems from the Communist Party of China leadership and its unswerving pursuit of goals, he said.

"What is incredible is how China has changed in such a relatively short time. This was made possible because of the CPC's strong single-minded leadership and, just as important, its resilience and its ability to adapt to changing situations."

The country allowed him to travel to China in 1971, when premier Zhou Enlai hosted a secret meeting with United States secretary of state Henry Kissinger. It was the first time in more than 20 years that a high-level US official had visited China.

"China had shifted its strategic goals by normalising ties with the US," FlorCruz said. This also signalled that China "was ready to resume normal relations with the rest of the world ... by inviting groups like ours (to visit and know more about China)".

He was referring to a group



FlorCruz reports for CNN from a panda reserve in Sichuan province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

What is incredible is how China has changed in such a relatively short time."

Jaime FlorCruz
foreign correspondent in China
for about 40 years

of Filipino student leaders, young academics and professionals invited to be part of a study tour hosted by the China Friendship Association.

FlorCruz was due to stay in China for just three weeks, but political turbulence in the Philippines forced him to opt for an "open-ended political exile".

He was 20 years old when he first arrived in China.

"We arrived in Beijing in the evening. My initial impression

while being driven from the airport to our hotel was of a two-lane road lined with willow trees, plied by few cars and buses. Along the poorly lit airport road stood courtyard houses and dormitory buildings, also poorly lit," FlorCruz said.

A week into his China trip, he learned of the political upheaval in the Philippines, so he and four other members of the group decided to stay in China for a while. The tour organiser renewed their visas to give them time to work out what to do.

Stranded, bored and penniless, FlorCruz and his group asked their hosts how they could earn their keep, which resulted in him travelling to a State farm in Hunan province in December 1971.

After a year in Hunan, FlorCruz headed east to work for a fishing company in Shandong province. At the end of the working day, while

others slept, he read widely to improve his Chinese.

Those sleepless nights paid off at the end of 1974, when he returned to Beijing to take a two-year course in Chinese at the Beijing Languages Institute.

In 1977 FlorCruz joined more than 5 million young Chinese in taking the *gaokao*, or national college entrance exam. He passed the exam and enrolled at Peking University for a four-year course in Chinese history.

Soon after China introduced reform and opening-up, in 1978, FlorCruz witnessed the country's "exciting transformative period".

In the years that he worked as reporter and bureau chief for Time magazine and later as Beijing correspondent and bureau chief for CNN, he reported on, and was impressed by, how the country managed to lift millions of people out of poverty.

In the following years, China posted double-digit GDP growth and had taken 770 million people out of poverty in the past four decades.

In the early years of reform and opening-up there was an influx of imported goods and services.

FlorCruz remembers bottles of Coca-Cola first being sold in China and how consumers initially rejected the drink, saying it tasted like herbal medicine.

He visited villages in northern and southern China to report on the country's grassroots elections and covered several CPC meetings in Beijing, including the 13th through 18th CPC National Congresses.

The 13th Congress in 1987 was memorable for FlorCruz because it was the first time that foreign journalists were allowed to cover the event.

"For years, Party Congresses were always top-secret

affairs," he said. "Since the 13th Congress the meetings have gradually become relatively open to the media, at least in terms of holding news conferences featuring ministers and local party cadres."

In 1999 he took a year-long sabbatical from journalism when he was named an Edward R. Murrow Press Fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations in New York. Towards the end of this period CNN offered him a job as Beijing correspondent and bureau chief.

"I was happy to accept, because China was a familiar beat, and reporting for television offered a new challenge."

Over the next 13 years one of the stories that stood out for him was sports diplomacy — the way in which sports have played a distinct role in building bridges to link China with the rest of the world.

FlorCruz covered the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and interviewed basketball star Yao Ming live on television after the Houston Rockets selected the giant athlete as the first overall pick in the 2002 NBA draft.

However, FlorCruz observed that the road to reform was not always smooth.

Challenges remain for the Party, such as dealing with corruption, environmental pollution and the wealth gap. FlorCruz said these are the "unintended consequence" of reform and opening-up.

Despite this, he is optimistic about China's future, but said it needs "to remain resilient and pragmatic to cope with new challenges and attain harmony at home and with the rest of the world".

Path: Ideas that guide the way

FROM PAGE 1

He said the CPC has been localised in China, and sinicisation means it has become integrated with the Chinese revolution and traditional culture, transforming the traditional ideals of eliminating wealth gaps and grand unity under heaven into today's building of a society with all-around moderate prosperity and realising all-around modernisation.

The CPC has always had an open attitude in its development, and China has learned a lot from Western civilisation, he said.

The CPC's openness drives the openness of China, he said, as well as making a contribution to

the world. For instance, China's high-quality reform and opening-up since the late 1970s has boosted the country's economic development and injected vitality into the global economy. The CPC's exchanges with parties in other countries also contribute to innovation and development of humanity's political civilisation.

"The CPC is people-centric and has vowed to serve the people and make a contribution to the world; thus, being open, to keep learning and innovating itself are always its merits."

Ronnie Lins, director of the China-Brazil Centre for Research and Business, said he quickly fell in love with China and its people on his

first visit many years ago. Since then, every time he has returned to the country, he has been proud of the great development promoted by the CPC and the Chinese government, in both urban and rural areas.

The CPC has the important feature of being open, which has helped it to be victorious in the past 100 years, he said.

"Its leaders have always had a great vision of the future, they prioritised the well-being of people, and with the processes of openness they have worked to fulfill the dreams and desires of the population."

Staying open and being willing to absorb the achievements of human civilisation have always been funda-



Foreign students show paper-cutting works with the theme of the Year of the Ox in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province, in February.

SHI YUCHENG / FOR CHINA DAILY

mental in the CPC's century, though the dimension and context of different times have helped fine-tune the characteristics of openness, he said.

In Lins' opinion, CPC leaders have made fundamental decisions for China's opening and economic development process, which has transformed a poor country

into one of the world's most significant commercial powers.

For instance, since the start of reform, China has taken a series of measures to open up to the outside world. This has included creating special economic zones, which allowed openings that attracted substantial foreign investment and technological knowledge, and significantly boosted China's economic and social development.

Moreover, under the leadership of the CPC, China has become more open in recent years, including as a firm believer in multilateralism, passing on its expertise in poverty eradication to the rest of the world, and holding various global events such as the China International Import Expo to strengthen exchanges worldwide.

"China has shown great willingness through the Party and the government to strengthen the country's opening-up process," Lins said.

"We have seen how the Party has always known how to open up according to the country's development needs throughout history. Its grades and specifications are set according to the needs of the time."

Maria Gustava, Mozambique's ambassador to China, said the CPC has managed to adjust itself to the different stages of development and realities, based on the fundamental principles and objectives of creating favourable conditions for prosperity and better lives for the Chinese people as well as promoting ties of friendship, collaboration and solidarity with the whole world.



A smart robot, supported by 5G, inspects a power plant in Henan province. LI JIANAN / XINHUA

Economy and nation in change

In the 1990s a typical photograph of a successful Chinese business person would include a brick-type, clunky mobile phone somewhere in the frame. Such mobile phones were bigger than the palm and were good for only making and receiving calls. Yet at the time a mobile phone was deemed a luxury product.

It took decades of development for those phones to evolve into nifty and versatile super smartphones of today that can accomplish a wide range of tasks, from buying movie tickets to booking medical appointments to 1 GB movie downloads within seconds.

Xiang Ligang, director-general of the Information Consumption Alliance, a telecommunications industry association, and a keen observer of the sector for nearly 20 years, said: "Chinese telecommunications companies have made big strides in their innovation capabilities through their consistent and heavy input into research and development. They are really keen to pioneer cutting-edge applications."

"These companies are thriving in the global arena not just as competitors but as pioneers in experimenting with new technologies."

China, for instance, is among the first batch of countries to commercialise 5G services. As early as June 2019, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, the industry regulator, granted licenses to three major telecommunications operators for 5G commercial services.

Now, within just two years, China has built the world's largest 5G network on a preliminary basis, with 280 million 5G mobile connections, accounting for more

than 80% of global 5G connections, said Liu Liehong, vice-minister of industry and information technology.



Students wearing virtual-reality headsets take virtual lessons delivered via a 5G network in Chengdu, Sichuan province, in April. LI XIANGYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

LI XIANGYU / FOR CHINA DAILY

As consumers become more willing to upgrade their handsets, 5G smartphones are expected to account for more than 80% of overall smartphone shipments in China in the second half of this year, Liu said.

The country has built 819,000 5G base stations, accounting for about 70% of the world's total, he said.

Chinese companies are exploring how to use the technology to promote industrial upgrading and digital transformation in traditional sectors.

Zhao Houlin, secretary-general of the International Telecommunication Union, said earlier that China has built the largest commercial 5G network, and the country's consumer internet and industrial internet have entered the fast lane, putting China among the leaders in global innovation and development.

The industrial internet refers to the convergence of

industrial systems with the power of advanced computing, analytics, sensing and new levels of connectivity.

It used to be jargon known only to telecom industry insiders, but now the term has wider resonance with people from a wide range of sectors, with front-line workers who particularly benefit from the technology.

Liu Jiwen, in charge of Hunan Valin Xiangtan Iron and Steel's 5-metre-wide thick plate production facility, said he has a clear sense of what the integration of 5G and the industrial internet can deliver.

In a control room of the company's steel plant in Xiangtan, Hunan province, four technicians operate joysticks to remotely control bridge cranes in a neighbouring high-temperature plant. Via a big screen that displays real-time video of the plant, the employees monitor the processes and all the equipment, and move everything about in an orderly fashion.

"Previously, the control centre had to be placed within a steel plant to allow it

to control the process without a time delay," Liu said. "We had to work in an environment with high temperatures, noise and dust. But all of this has changed because of the 5G network."

Liu also said that 5G's low latency and big bandwidth allow the control centre to be located in a comfortable workspace outside the mill and just one employee can remotely operate multiple bridge cranes simultaneously, thus significantly boosting efficiency.

This is in stark contrast to the often seen image of steelworkers toiling away at mills amid difficult conditions. The typical labour-intensive iron and steel industry is undergoing transformation, thanks to the commercialisation of 5G and other technologies.

On top of stepping up the push to unleash the full potential of the most advanced communications technology so far, Chinese companies are intensifying efforts in R&D and making more contributions to global technical standards.

Jason Ding, head of the intellectual property department at Huawei Technologies Co, said the company has become one of the world's largest patent holders through investment in innovation. At the end of last year it held more than 100,000 active patents worldwide.

Si Han Bo Chen, China head of the Global System for Mobile Communications Association, said 5G is shaping the future, and China will continue to be at the forefront of this change.

"Every sector is undergoing deep transformation, and connected progress will stimulate global recovery and help the world overcome the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic," she said.

How e-tail shook up the world of shopping

By HE WEI

When Covid-19 forced most of China to be locked down early last year, fitness enthusiasts such as Shen Lei were forced to exercise in their apartments instead of going to gyms.

Shen would access workout sessions online via Xiaohongshu, a Shanghai-based social media site akin to Instagram.

But the livestreamed training courses were only part of the deal: Shen managed to buy groceries and food ingredients needed for a healthy salad bowl with a few taps on the phone, and the parcels would appear on her doorstep within half an hour.

E-commerce was a term largely unheard of 20 years ago, but today it is one of the pillars of the Chinese economy. According to estimates from the consultancy GlobalData, the Chinese e-commerce market is forecast to enjoy compounded annual growth of 12.4% between 2021 and 2024 to reach US\$3tril (RM12.45tril).

Jonathan Cheng, a partner and retail practice lead in China at the consultancy Bain & Co, said that in the decade of 2001 to 2010 retail was transformed from traditional mom-and-pop stores to hypermarket chains, whereas the massive digitalisation leapfrog from 2011 to 2020 was "characterised by merchants and brands flocking to establish virtual stores".

Mention e-commerce and you cannot go past Alibaba Group Holding Ltd, whose innovative strategies are rewriting China's, and even the world's, retail playbook.

Alibaba's Taobao started out as an obscure site in 2003, aiming to facilitate cross-border trade among bulk merchants. Its aim was to connect a horde of individual business owners with the vast number of Chinese customers looking for cost-effective deals.

With Taobao up and running, five years later Alibaba introduced a sister site called Taobao Mall (later rebranded as Tmall in 2012) to lure more established sellers (compared with smaller-scale

vendors gathering in Taobao).

Over the years more companies have flocked to the scene. JD, China's second-largest e-commerce platform by gross merchandise volume, was founded in 1998. It is characterised by a unique strength in selling computers, communication devices and consumer electronics.

Pinduoduo, established in 2015, adopts a mobile-based group-purchase model and peddles cost-effective agricultural produce.

For a long time, e-commerce acted as a supplement to brick-and-mortar business, until a promotional event called Singles Day turbocharged its stellar rise.

Called the "Double Eleven" — Nov 11 or 11-11 — festival, it celebrates singlehood. The Singles Day shopping extravaganza initiated by Alibaba in 2009 has morphed into the world's biggest online shopping event.

The gala initially featured discount items, luring bargain hunters to splash on everything from clothing to hair-dryers. Sales figures were also eye-catching: participating e-commerce sites have been breaking their own sales records of each year.

For instance, during last year's event, the value of sales from across Alibaba's shopping platforms was RMB498.2bil (RM319.5bil), 26% more than in 2019.

If 11-11 was a smashing success from the word go, June 18, or 618, founded by JD, has been shaping up as a worthy challenger, becoming the mid-year e-shopping carnival in which brands slash prices.

However, the story is not just about growth in transaction volume or the number of participants. As online shopping festivals grow, shoppers have used them as an opportunity to try out new items rather than simply to bag a bargain, said Matthew Crabbe, Asia-Pacific research director at the consultancy Mintel.

"That changing sentiment (towards the likes of Singles Day) also aligns with China's shifting focus from quantity to quality growth," Crabbe said.



Viya (left), one of China's top e-commerce livestreamers, and her assistants promote products via livestreaming platforms in Hangzhou, Zhejiang province. CHEN ZHONGQIU / FOR CHINA DAILY

Instruments of change

Trees slow desertification and help locals tune into a more prosperous life. **Chen Meiling** reports

Paulownia trees in Lankao county of Henan province stand as stoic reminders of dedication and the ability to survive in harsh environments.

In the 1960s, when locals suffered at the hands of strong winds and sandstorms, the late Party secretary Jiao Yulu proposed planting paulownia trees across the county as part of the fight to stave off desertification, improve the natural environment and change the lives of future generations.

It's also a testament to surviving poverty. As a plant it is hard to deform or crack, and with its porous wood, capable of a full resonance and stentorian sound, paulownia is suitable for making musical instruments. In recent decades many residents have carved out a better life and escaped poverty by doing just that.

Now, rows of tall paulownia trees stand straight along the streets of Lankao, with

their leaves whispering in the wind, as if telling legendary stories of the county while symbolising a decades-long friendship between humans and nature.

The yard of Xu Yachong, 28, in Xuchang village of Lankao, is permeated with the aroma of paulownia as a woman whittles away at a piece of wood, with dozens of completed *guqin*, a zither-like seven-stringed plucked instrument, hanging behind her.

In the exhibition and sales room, a man plays a *guqin* to lure visitors. Xu, together with his pregnant wife, broadcasts a melodious ensemble via livestream.

Like many villagers, Xu has developed a whole, family-based, industrial chain for paulownia — production, sales, marketing and giving *guqin* lessons — through which they turned wood into gold.

“The musical instrument business has greatly improved our lives and of



A villager plays the *guzheng* in Xuchang village, Lankao county, Henan province. PHOTOS BY ZHU XINGXIN / CHINA DAILY

many other families in the village,” Xu says, adding that his homemade *guqin* can sell from RMB50,000 (RM32,100) to RMB180,000, and that, on average, he sells about 300 *guqin* a year. About 10% of Xu's instruments are exported to countries such as Germany and Malaysia.

Walking through the village, there is music everywhere. Since the industry took off in the 1980s, about 90 out of Xuchang's 105 families produce up to 20 kinds of folk instruments, including zithers such as the *guqin* and *guzheng* and as well as the *pipa*, a Chinese lute, and *yangqin*, a Chinese hammered dulcimer, alongside related products like stands, stools and other accessories.

Xu initially had no interest in *guqin*, even though his father was in the business. That changed after he watched the opening ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics, when the beauty of traditional cultural elements such as writing brushes, ink sticks, paper and ink stones, accompanied by music played on *guqin*,

impressed him. After that he developed a hobby based on what he regards “an elegant musical instrument that expresses Chinese culture”.

When he was 16 he began learning how to play the *guqin*, and he has since travelled across China — from Yangzhou in Jiangsu province, Kaifeng in Henan province to Beijing and Shanghai — in an effort to understand the whole production method and learn different playing techniques.

“When I was young, sales of the *guqin* were not good because few manufacturers knew how to actually play, and it was hard to promote,” he says. “The older generation used to carry the *guqin* to Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou to try to sell them, or would go to railway stations asking if anybody wanted one.”

These days many of the manufacturers of the instrument can play it as well because it is important to know how to tune it, he says, adding that the production method has also become standardised. Couriers

are more frequently seen, now, as well, he says, because of e-commerce sales. There are also schools for children and adults.

Xu Yongshun, director of Xuchang village, told media that in 2014

Xuchang was a poor village, and only two or three families made musical instruments. The village reduced poverty by developing the industry, and products from the village are now sold worldwide, with output total value of RMB120mil.

“Per capita income reached RMB50,000 annu-

ally,” he told Henan TV. Let's say we have set a foot on the path to moderate prosperity.”

Once a poor county suffering from sandstorms, floods and unproductive saline soil, Lankao, empowered by the spirit of survival, is now one of the three major folk musical instrument production centres in China, alongside Dunhuang, Gansu province, and Yangzhou, Jiangsu province.

The county, with about 6 million paulownia trees, produces more than 90% of China's paulownia wood soundboards. Its 268 factories produce about 700,000 musical instruments and 5 million related accessories a year. Commanding about 30% of China's folk musical instrument market, its products are sold to more than 10 countries and regions, and annual production value in the county has reached RMB2bil.

Xu Yachong says his future dream is to help make *guqin* a landmark of Lankao and develop the business into a large-scale industry. He also plans to open a school.



Xu Yachong plays the *guqin* in Xuchang village.

Rural renewal spells economic transformation

By **CHEN JIA**

In Shaanxi province, Northwest China, famous for its rich coal resources, Miaowan, a township in Tongchuan city, is now better known as “Shiitake Mushroom Town” because the edible fungus business has transformed lives and society.

Such transformations are not limited to people. Even landscapes in the province are witness to enormous change. Where dust and exposed mines were a common sight, green mountains and verdant valleys are ubiquitous today.

Wang Mingmei, a Miaowan farmer, epitomises the

change. Three years ago she was mired in poverty. Today she appears enthusiastic and content while arranging shiitake mushrooms in neat stacks of rows at a greenhouse.

More than 500 such greenhouses dot the hillside that, not very long ago, was home to coal mines. Such has been the momentum of China's rural revitalisation programme.

Where the national poverty alleviation programme ended successfully, rural revitalisation began in earnest, bringing not just smiles and energy to people such as Wang but real prosperity and purpose to life.

Today Wang's job of pick-

ing mushrooms brings her an annual income of about RMB40,000 (RM25,660).

Supported by the local government, ecological farming, which reduces the impact of humans on nature, has become a key industry here.

Wang said she is aware ecological farming is a good thing because it protects soil, water and climate, promotes biodiversity and does not contaminate the environment with chemicals.

She has Sun Xiaoshan, a local coal mine owner, to thank for such knowledge. About three years ago Sun found that some households in a neighbouring town called Liulin started planting

shiitake mushrooms. They bought breeding sticks for edible fungus and grew shiitake mushrooms at home. The high-frequency harvests brought higher incomes to farmers who hitherto planted grain in the mountains.

So Sun started Tongchuan Dexiang Industrial Co Ltd in September 2017 by investing more than RMB70mil, after receiving RMB40mil from a government-run fund. Over the past three years, the start-up, which employs Wang among others, set up bases to grow shiitake mushrooms in Miaowan. The startup's annual income is now nearly RMB2.4mil.

Wei Zhaofeng, Miaowan's



Wang Mingmei, a farmer in Miaowan township, Shaanxi province, gathers shiitake mushrooms at a greenhouse. CHEN JIA / CHINA DAILY

government chief, said local authorities have integrated and co-ordinated the use of fiscal funds to build new bases to grow mushrooms. Their ownership belongs to village collectives that entrust management to private companies and collect contract fees from individual business owners.

With financial support

from the local government, the number of bases in Shiitake Mushroom Town will grow this year. More villagers can rent greenhouses in Miaowan and its neighbourhood and invest in the emerging niche business.

“This will be the leading business segment for local residents to increase their income,” said Wei.



Great Wall's secrets brought to light

Conservation work produces rich rewards for archaeologists. **Wang Kaihao** reports



Time has taken its toll on the Jiankou section of the Great Wall in Beijing, which was built after emperors in the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) issued orders for their land to be defended against nomadic people to the north.

The structure once towered over cliffs in what is now the city's Huairou district, but over the centuries its fortified watchtowers were eroded by the weather. Water seepage and heavy vegetation also damaged the wall.

Known for its rugged beauty, Jiankou, meaning arrow's notch, the end of an arrow that rests against the bowstring, has a reputation for being the toughest section of the Great Wall in Beijing to climb.

In 2018 a conservation project was launched in Jiankou to prevent loose parts of the wall from collapsing. For Zhang Jianwei, an archaeology professor at Peking University, this was a precious opportunity to view the structure at close quarters and delve into its history.

Over the past three years Zhang's team has carried out archaeological investigations on an 800-metre-long section of the wall in Jiankou, including four watchtowers.

The team divided this section into 25-square-metre excavation units and has conducted research in each one. Bricks and stones that have fallen from the wall are cleaned and scrutinised before being returned to the structure after restoration work.

"Cultural heritage has its own life," Zhang said. "Each



Above: The remains of a tower erected on the Great Wall during the Ming Dynasty unearthed in Yanqing district, Beijing, in 2018. Top left: A roof decoration excavated from the Qingpingbu site in Shaanxi province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY
Top right: A statue excavated from the Qingpingbu site. XINHUA

renovation project over the years has been an intervention in the wall's life, providing crucial information.

"As we have had to intervene in its life again through this project, it's essential to first decode the information through our work as archaeologists. We can then understand how the wall's original appearance has changed and gain an insight into its present condition. This will greatly help with conservation work.

"We've basically figured out how the watchtowers were built, used and became damaged. This has provided key clues for our architectural studies."

The conservation project has also been helped by a new digital survey platform that analyses aerial photographs of the site.

The material used to build the wall has been retained as much as possible, and a principle of minimum intervention was adopted for the project, Zhang said.

Shang Heng, a researcher at the Beijing Archaeological Research Institute, said the

520-kilometre-long section of the Great Wall in Beijing passes through six districts along the Yan mountains. A small part of the structure dates back to the 6th century, but most of it was built during the Ming Dynasty.

The watchtowers and lower stones were put in place in the 14th and 15th centuries, particularly during the reign of Emperor Yongle, who moved the national capital from Nanjing, in what is now Jiangsu province, to Beijing.

The structure's defenses were further strengthened during the reign of Emperor Wanli (1573-1620), when the Jiankou section was built.

Zhang Zhonghua, deputy director of the Beijing Institute of Archaeology, said: "Studying archaeology on the Great Wall is an interdisciplinary programme that also involves studies of ancient architecture and the surrounding environment.

"These studies enable us to figure out the type of risks that threaten the stability and safety of the wall, helping us draft plans to prevent potential threats."

Construction of the Great Wall took more than 2,000 years, from the Qin (221-206 BC) to Han (206 BC to AD 220) dynasties and in the Ming Dynasty.

The wall is 21,196 km long and passes through 15 provinces, administrative regions and municipalities, the National Cultural Heritage Administration says. About 8,850 km of the wall was built during the Ming Dynasty.

In July 2019, a national plan to establish Great Wall cultural parks was published. Since then the National Cultural Heritage Administration has listed 83 key sections of the structure as candidates for these parks, and about 20 projects for such venues have been approved this year.

Archaeologists are particularly interested in a 10-km section of the wall built during the Ming Dynasty in Jingbian county, northern Shaanxi province. The section is home to the Qingpingbu site, a castle ruin buried in sand.

Numerous porcelain pieces unearthed at the site are evidence that the castle was situated on a regular trade route.

Yu Chunlei, a researcher at the Shaanxi Institute for the Preservation of Cultural Heritage and Archaeology, said: "As a result of booming trade, there was frequent communication among different cultures and ethnic groups in this area. The Great Wall thus became a crossroads where agrarian culture to the south and nomadic culture to the north mixed, forming a shared community of Chinese civilisation."



Workers clear the surface of the Jiankou section of the Great Wall in Beijing to prepare for archaeological studies. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

Water: A mermaid who pushes the limits

FROM PAGE 1

"It took the team about 20 seconds to fix my long robes in the water, which are made of silky cloth. The longest piece of cloth is about six metres. Then I danced in the water and held my breath for another 20 to 40 seconds. We repeated that process many times."

She cannot remember how many times she returned to the water, she said.

"We spent about eight hours in the water during the production."

He, 30, born and raised in Guangzhou, Guangdong province, learned to swim when she was 6 and began training to become a synchronised swimmer when she was 8. She has won national swimming awards and was selected

for the Guangzhou synchronised swimming team when she was 18.

Though she later decided to quit her athletic career and graduated from Guangzhou University

after studying journalism, she has never stopped pushing boundaries underwater.

She took various jobs, including mermaid performer and underwater model. In 2016 she starred in the movie *The Mermaid* of the Hong Kong director-actor Stephen Chow as the stunt double for the lead actress Lin Yun, and she gained widespread acclaim.

"It took me a long time to control my body and my facial expression while dancing underwater. It's a beautiful art form though not many people knew about it when I first started to practice."

She learned a variety of dances, she said, such as traditional Chinese, ballet and street, which she combines in her underwater performances.

Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess received positive reviews not only from viewers but also from her parents, who once had serious reservations about their daughter's career.

"They told me about the great things their friends had said and about comments they read online," He said.

It is not the first time that

Henan TV Station has gained attention with its captivating videos highlighting traditional Chinese culture.

On Feb 13 a dance piece, *A Tang Dynasty Banquet*, which is less than six minutes long, was staged during a gala the channel aired to mark Spring Festival, and is said to have been viewed more than 500 million times on social media.

The director Guo Jiyong said Henan TV Station invited his team to create an underwater video to mark the occasion of the Dragon Boat Festival, or Duanwu Festival, which fell on June 14 this year.

The festival dates back to the Warring States Period (475-221 BC), and the most widely known story of Duanwu in China is that it was started to commemorate Qu Yuan, a patriotic official who

committed suicide on the fifth day of the fifth lunar month. People rowed boats to attempt a rescue. They threw sticky rice dumplings into the river so that fish would not eat his body.

"I've watched the video of *A Tang Dynasty Banquet* and I love the way traditional

Chinese culture is presented to a contemporary audience," said Guo, who, along with his team, spent 26 hours over three days underwater filming the *Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess* video.

"With streaks of daylight piercing the deep blue water, the colours change as He Haohao dives deeper and dances like a flying fairy, which is very beautiful. Those images are stunning."

Born and brought up in Jiangsu province, Guo, 36, graduated from Nanjing Forestry University with a major in landscape design. Guo's love for street dance, formed during his time there, enabled him to have a deep sense of, and attachment to, choreography.

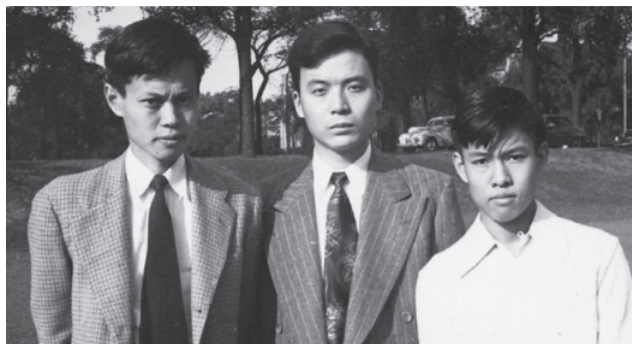
In 2011, he fell in love with diving and in 2017, Guo launched a career in underwater photography, which took him around the world.

"I realised that diving can also be a way to discover magical underwater places. I want to capture those places with my camera and share them with more people," Guo said.



The video *Rhapsody on the Luo River Goddess* has drawn widespread acclaim.

PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From left: A 1946 group photo of the faculty and students of the Chinese language department at the National Southwestern Associated University, or Lianda. A 1949 photo of C.N. Yang (left), his Lianda alumni Deng Jiaxian (centre), one of China's founding fathers in nuclear physics, and Yang's younger brother. An undated file photo of a classroom in Lianda. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

After the documentary director Xu Bei had finished interviewing Yang Yi in 2017, in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, the well-known translator took out a Walkman and proceeded to relax with some music.

The melody of a vintage English song, *One Day When We Were Young*, was from the 1938 Hollywood movie *The Great Waltz*.

"This is my little enjoyment," Yang, then 98, best known for her Chinese translation of *Wuthering Heights*, told Xu.

Xu then immediately decided to borrow the title of the song for her new documentary.

Indeed, it may take a little effort to imagine the life of a woman in her 90s as a youngster. Nevertheless, that dramatic contrast created by the flow of time is what Xu wants in the documentary, screened nationwide on May 29. Its Chinese title, *Jiulinghou* (the post-90 generation), is also a play on words, leading the audience to think it is about those born after 1990.

However, through Xu's lens, 16 interviewees of Yang's age group collectively recall a wartime miracle and perhaps one of the greatest sagas of recent Chinese history. They are all alumni of the National Southwestern Associated University, or simply known as Lianda (the associated university), in Kunming, Yunnan province. Functioning from 1938 to 1946, it became a short-lived but everlasting

name in Chinese education.

After Beijing and Tianjin fell to invading Japanese soldiers in 1937 during the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression (1931-45), teachers and students from Peking and Tsinghua universities in Beijing and Tianjin's Nankai University decided to relocate their campuses in a show of determination and disobedience.

They first moved to Changsha, Hunan province, in November that year. But as war approached once more, they continued their journey and finally arrived in Kunming in April 1938.

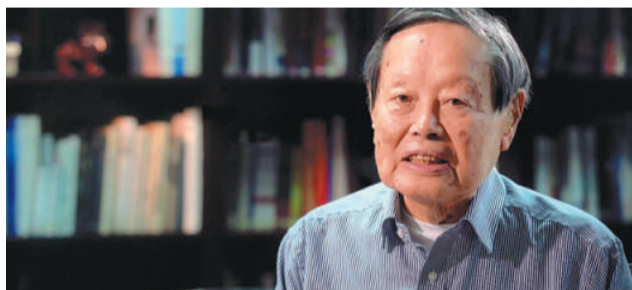
Star names shine among the interviewees in the documentary, including the globally renowned theoretical physicist C.N. Yang, the late translator Xu Yuanchong, known for his promotion of Chinese poems in the English- and French-speaking world; and Wang Xiji, designer of China's first sounding rocket and space launch vehicle. When being interviewed, their average age was 96.

"In this film, we can feel their great expectation and unstrained hearts," Xu Bei said

When we were young

In a documentary, the leading lights of a special Chinese institution of higher learning revisit their school days.

Wang Kaihao reports



The documentary *One Day When We Were Young* retraces the youth of the country's leading figures in culture and science, such as translators Yang Yi (top), Xu Yuanchong (centre), and the theoretical physicist C.N. Yang (above).

after a preview of the documentary in Beijing in May.

"Their affection and career paths can emotionally resonate with young people today. They are like our mirrors."

Their pursuit of their dreams in their youth was tough. As the interviewees recall in the documentary, living conditions in the thatched cottages were poor, and danger could come any time. They needed to watch out not only for bedbugs but also for Japanese bombs falling from the sky.

However, the difficulties did not deter Lianda to be a centre for the most brilliant minds in China at the time.

"Young people still need respect for history and care for our country's destiny," Xu Bei said. "And stories of Lianda also urge people today to pursue excellence."

For some moments the aged interviewees, no matter their renown, seem suddenly to flash back to their years as youth in college.

They talk about their academic results as though they are still students. They remember the days of hanging around with their buddies.

Some recall campus romances, while refusing to admit there is such a thing as love at first sight, which sounds like the story of *Pride and Prejudice*.

"Even when putting their patriotism aside, we see that they're interesting people, and that they're resilient," the director said. "It also tells today's young people: Don't be boring."

During the war, optimism may have played an important role in helping the students endure tough times, but, as the documentary shows, patriotism is probably still the fundamental motive for the students to work hard to try and create a brighter future for the country. More than 800 students of Lianda even joined the army to defend their homeland.

When Xu Bei and her team tried to turn these yellowing pages of history, they also felt the solemnity of life and death.

In 2018, based on some interviews of those Lianda alumni, her team put out a five-episode documentary series titled *Lianda: A Chinese University in War and Revolution*.

However, when she planned to do follow-up interviews, three of the interviewees had died, and several more were too sick to talk.

"Then I realised some of them had told their stories in front of camera for the last time in their life," the director recalled. "Their stories deserve our patience. Watching it may be like a ceremony."

The beautiful game in which all shine

By YUAN HUI
and ZHAO XINYING

While much of the football-loving world may have been focused on the machinations of the postponed Euro 2020 competition taking place across Europe, in the Ewenki Autonomous Banner of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region there is a far more important tournament on the horizon.

In the Shine River region of the banner, an annual football tournament organised by local herdsmen has been held since the 1980s. The festival of football, which is named

the Shine River Cup after the herdsmen's hometown, has been nurturing a loyal local following and a love of the beautiful game in the region for the best part of 40 years.

In 1986 some financially capable herdsmen bought televisions for their families and watched that year's FIFA World Cup in Mexico.

Inspired by the exciting on-pitch heroics, local herdsmen wanted to have a game of their own.

"We immediately put the idea into practice, although there were only two teams taking part in the game that year," said Zaan, one of the

event's founding organisers.

Although almost 35 years have passed, the 67-year-old retired physical education teacher can still recall many details about that year's game.

The trophy was bought somewhere outside the Shine River region with the help of a friend from afar, he said. However, the trophy did not arrive until long after the final whistle blew.

A vase was used as a temporary substitute, said Zaan.

After years of effort, the Shine River Cup has gradually become well-known locally, with a growing number of teams taking part. A trophy

and a logo were also created specially for the event, said Tamir, head of the Shine River Football Club.

The tournament generally lasts for up to five days in late July with eight or nine teams from 12 villages taking part.

Most of the players are local herdsmen or young men who attend college in the nearby cities of Hohhot and Baotou. There are also some junior school students, Tamir, 38, said.

"The game is held during the summer holidays because many of our college students are back home and are able to join in," he said.



The Shine River Cup tournament has grown into an annual festival in Ewenki Autonomous Banner of the Inner Mongolia autonomous region. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

The event draws many spectators, with the greatest turnout topping 2,000 people. The crowds are made up mostly of local herdsmen who bring all their family to watch the tournament, Tamir said.

Tamir, who started playing football when he was 13, said the biggest value of the game is that it involves a lot of people

and encourages them to exercise and stay healthy.

"Some already had a passion for football before coming to watch the game, and more are developing an interest in the sport as a result of watching the competition."

Xinhua contributed to this story.

At 7:26 pm on June 12, Li Zhongyun received a message via an app on his phone just after he finished work and arrived home in Yunnan province.

The message said: "A herd of wild elephants is hanging around Chengzi-I community in Mengwang village, Menghai county. Please inform villagers who are working outside to be careful."

As the herd was 270 kilometres away, Li, who lives in Longmen village, Mengla, Xishuangbanna Dai autonomous prefecture, let out a sigh of relief.

During the day, Li, a forest ranger and Asian elephant observer, patrols 33 km through dense forests along the border between China and Laos.

Xishuangbanna, which borders Laos and Myanmar, has a population of more than 1.3 million and offers protection to 756 types of wild animals and more than 5,000 kinds of higher plants. Such plants have relatively complex or advanced characteristics.

The prefecture is also home to 300 wild Asian elephants, the largest such population in China.

In 1958 a national nature reserve was established in Xishuangbanna. The area under protection at state, prefecture and county level has expanded from about 240,000 hectares in the 1980s to 415,000 hectares, accounting for more than one-fifth of the prefecture's area.

In recent years, with increased forest coverage in the reserve and fewer herbs and lianas (climbing plants hanging from trees) for the elephants to eat, the creatures have been seen feeding on farmland more frequently.

To reduce encounters between humans and wild animals, the local authorities developed an app that allows users to identify, locate and track wild elephants.

With one click on the app, users can view the location of nearby elephants and make preparations should the animals approach.

Work on the prefecture's wild elephant monitoring and early warning system began in November, 2019, said Tao Qing, deputy director of the administrative and protection bureau at Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve.

A total of 471 infrared cameras and 142 intelligent broadcasting systems have been installed in protected areas in Jinghong city and Mengla county, along with two sets of video surveillance systems at the Wild Elephant Valley scenic spot, Tao said.

"The system has greatly improved the capacity



Elephants eat food provided by locals as they pass through Xiyang Yi autonomous township in Jinning district of Kunming, Yunnan province, on June 3. PROVIDED BY YUNNAN FOREST FIRE BRIGADE

High-tech monitoring keeps track of elephants

App allows users to identify and locate animals.

Li Hongyang, Zhang Yangfei and Zhang Xiaomin report



From left: Appetising crops on a farm prove too tempting for the elephants as they move through a town on the outskirts of Kunming on June 4. XINHUA **A forest ranger and elephant observer shows an app used to monitor the animals.** WANG JING / CHINA DAILY



Herd wins global following

A herd of 15 wild Asian elephants has trekked 500 kilometres after leaving a designated protection zone in Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve in Yunnan's south.

According to experts, the trek is unlikely to have been caused by human activities because their natural habitat is a heavily protected national nature reserve.

The current odyssey began last year when 17 elephants left their natural habitat. Of the 17, two elephants gave the group's travel plans a rethink and returned to the herd's old habitat. On June 2, the herd of 15 arrived in the outskirts of the provincial capital Kunming. Then on June 6 one male elephant left the herd.

As of June 24, local authorities reported that 14 elephants of the main herd were roaming in Eshan Yi autonomous county in Yuxi. The male elephant that left the group was in Jinning district of Kunming straying about 35 kilometres from the group.

During their extraordinary march, no injuries have been reported among the herd as authorities marshalled extraordinary resources to monitor them and keep them away from residential areas. Forest fire brigade and public security departments at the provincial and township levels have sent teams to track elephants round the clock.

Photos and video clips of their

march through towns and forests have been widely posted on social media as well as images of the sympathetic approach to the elephants taken by wildlife officials and emergency workers.

"I have to say the authorities have done a commendable job," said Nilanga Jayasinghe, manager for Asian species conservation at the World Wildlife Fund.

"It demonstrates concerted interest in conservation and protecting the remaining wild elephant population in China."

Mark Rayan Darmaraj, country director of the Wildlife Conservation Society-Malaysia, said: "The authorities are doing their best to

use technology and to safeguard these elephants to the best of their ability, which is highly commendable." The challenge for authorities is working out what needs to be done next, Darmaraj said.

China can take a new approach as it comes up with its own model to deal with the elephant group, said Asian elephant expert Raman Sukumar, an honorary professor with the Centre for Ecological Sciences at the Indian Institute of Science.

With the resources it has, China can find a way to keep the elephants safe, create a new habitat for them or take them home, Sukumar said.

Yang Han

sage, and used food to distract them from entering densely populated areas.

Wang Qiaoyan, a senior engineer with the scientific research institute at Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve, said there is no evidence that the elephants' habitat has been destroyed.

"Fragmentation is a factor that causes wild elephants to frequently enter villages for food. Nature reserves are scattered in different counties and cities and not connected with each other," she said.

Wang also said recent studies have shown that their numbers are rising in Xishuangbanna, thanks to the effective management of nature reserves, increased public awareness and a lack of poaching.

Elephants are intelligent and have good memories. If they reach a location and are unable to pass through it, or there is no good feeding on the way, they may choose to return to their forest home in Xishuangbanna.

Li Zhongyuan, head of the Xishuangbanna Wildlife Conservation Station, said the prefecture has done a lot to protect wild animals and plants. It has adopted local laws and regulations to protect them and strictly enforces state and provincial laws.

In August 2015 Yangniu, one of the most popular elephants in the area, was found by villagers after being abandoned by its mother. Before being rescued by veterinarians, the animal was treated and fed by residents.

"The total number of Asian elephants has risen from about 170 in the 1980s to some 300 now. This is strong proof that people's awareness has greatly increased, and that there have been few incidents of harm being caused to wild animals in recent years," he said.

Yang Hua, deputy director of the flora and fauna department at the Yunnan forestry and grassland bureau, said wild elephants have ventured further afield as conservation efforts have been stepped up.

In the 1990s the elephants were located in three counties and 14 towns, but by the end of last year they had been reported in 12 counties and 55 townships, he said.

In 2003 the Xishuangbanna Asian Elephant Breeding and Rescue Centre was established, and the province set up a technical rescue team for wild elephants.

Xishuangbanna National Nature Reserve has collaboration agreements with three provinces in northern Laos, forming five joint protection areas covering a total of nearly 133 square kilometres to ensure the safety of cross-border elephant habitats.

and efficiency of the local response to human-elephant conflicts."

In addition, it helps provide an effective scientific basis for better protection and management measures and supplies reliable, timely, accurate and complete information support for

decision-makers, Tao said.

Warning signs have been placed in areas where elephants are active, and designated personnel are on duty to prevent people from entering such locations and ensure public safety.

Tao said the unmanned aerial vehicle monitoring

and early warning platform now has more than 200,000 users and more than 41,200 followers on the social media app WeChat.

Li Chao, 47, of Manzhuang village, Mengla, said: "With this app it's easy to track the movements of the elephants daily. In this way human and

elephant conflicts can basically be avoided."

A herd of wild elephants roaming through Yunnan has recently been making headlines worldwide.

For more than a month, authorities sent police to escort the herd, cleared roads to facilitate their pas-