



ANIMAL LIBERATION
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CHINA DAILY 中國日報



IMPERIAL GRANDEUR
DEEP DIG REVEALS
GLORIES OF PAST, P8

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Many shades of green

Kindergartners display their artwork about creating a healthy environment through actions such as sorting garbage and reducing food waste. They held their drawings aloft at a playground in Hefei, Anhui province, on April 19, before Earth Day on April 22.

ZHAO MING /
FOR CHINA DAILY



China's 'message of hope'

All interested countries invited to help form partnership for common good. **Xu Wei** reports

Chinese President Xi Jinping has outlined a new vision for the joint building of the Belt and Road Initiative, saying that China will endeavour to build a closer partnership for health collaboration, connectivity, green development, openness and inclusiveness.

In the keynote speech delivered via video link at the opening ceremony of the Boao Forum for Asia Annual Conference 2021 on April 20, Xi reiterated China's commitment to make the initiative "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. Belt and Road co-operation pursues development, aims at mutual benefits and conveys a message of hope."

It was the fifth time Xi has attended the forum held in the coastal town in southern Hainan province, also attended virtually by leaders from 14 countries and two international organisations.

Xi elaborated on China's vision for high-quality Belt and Road collaboration within the principles of extensive consultation, joint contributions and shared benefits, and championing the philosophy of

open, green and clean collaboration.

The goal is to make the collaboration high-standard, people-centred and sustainable, he said.

In building a closer partnership for connectivity, China will work with countries to boost connectivity in infrastructure, enable better alignment in rules and standards, ensure unimpeded channels for trade and investment co-operation and actively develop Silk Road e-commerce, he said.

To boost green development, Xi highlighted the need to strengthen collaboration on green infrastructure, green energy and green finance, and improve the BRI International Green Development Coalition and the Green Investment Principles for Belt and Road Development.

China stands ready to turn the initiative into a pathway to poverty alleviation and a way to grow in the spirit of openness and inclusiveness, he said, citing a World Bank report suggesting that by 2030 Belt and Road projects could help lift 7.6 million people from extreme poverty and 32 million people from moderate poverty across the world.

Xi also expounded on China's appeal for all countries in Asia and beyond to fight the pandemic through solidarity, strengthening

global governance and pursuing a community with a shared future for mankind.

He underlined openness as the key to economic recovery following the pandemic, saying it is important to promote trade and investment liberalisation and facilitation, deepen regional economic integration and enhance supply, industrial, data and human resources chains.

Experts from around the world lauded China's approach on collaboration, multilateralism and protecting the environment, among other things.

Erik Solheim, former executive director of the United Nations Environment Programme, said Xi gave an "impressive speech".

"It was a passionate call for a world of shared interests. We need to defend global co-operation in all areas and build upon win-win solutions. Together the world can fight the pandemic, poverty and environment destruction. Divided we are weak."

Henry Lim Bon Liong, president of the Federation of Filipino-Chinese Chambers of Commerce and Industry, said that the speech was "reassuring, because he reaffirmed China's unwavering commitment to reforms, openness, multilateralism, innovation, co-operation and trade globalisation".

"I believe confidence in Asian and global economic recovery is accelerating, especially with the world's No 2 biggest economy, China, sustaining decisive economic growth."

Kristalina Georgieva, managing director of the International Monetary Fund, said in a speech via video link that the importance of solidarity between countries remains constant in a world of change.

"We welcome China's commitment to reach net zero (carbon emissions) by 2060 — and other major economies are making similar pledges. The green investments needed to get there can be a quadruple win — good for people, for our planet, for growth and for jobs."

Jade Currie, regional editor for Asia at the research and publishing firm Oxford Business Group, said the resumption of the Boao Forum for Asia, after the cancellation of the event last year because of the pandemic is in itself a promising sign for the region's recovery.

"Intra-regional co-operation, knowledge-sharing and a comprehensive effort to welcome foreign investments will be key as Asia eyes a long-term economic recovery from the challenges of 2020-21."

Chen Weihua and Jan Yumol contributed to this story.

In capital, wildlife finds a sanctuary on life's journey

By XIN WEN

For the past 15 years Fang Chun has been observing migratory birds in the north-western Beijing district of Yanqing, where their numbers continue to rise.

This year Fang, 54, telescope in hand, began monitoring the birds at Wild Duck Lake National Wetland Park from the start of February. In a log recording his observations, he wrote: "On February 12, the first whooper swan of the year appeared at the lake, while on February 18, five whooper swans, two smews (diving ducks) and nine mallard ducks came. Close to 1,000 common cranes also flew around the lake."

An estimated 100,000 migratory birds rest at the lake every year before moving further north for the summer, Fang said.

"In November and March, Wild Duck Lake becomes a 'swan lake' and there are magnificent views of the birds," he said.

Fang, who used to teach physical education, turned his hobby of observing wild birds into a job by learning about avian species from books and photographs. He also sought help from experts.

He can now identify different species of migratory birds at a single glance.

Fang and three colleagues at the Wild Duck Lake monitoring station record the species and number of migratory birds. The team is also quick to rescue injured birds, treating them onsite during the migration seasons in spring and autumn.

The Wild Duck Lake bird monitoring station, set up in 2005, was originally designed for watching a range of wild-

life but has since become an observation point for migratory birds.

There are 88 wildlife monitoring stations in Beijing. Ten of them are at national level, 33 at municipal level and the remaining 45 at district level. They basically cover all key areas of water bodies, the birds' migration routes and their resting places.

Fang said that since February he and his colleagues have observed more than 650,000 birds.

To minimise human disturbance, Fang said the wetland park closes from November to March every year. However, the team still needs to patrol the lake several times a day to check birds' health.

"If it is extremely cold we bring some food for the birds to enable them to survive the tough conditions."

By last month Beijing was home to more than 500 species of terrestrial wildlife, up from 461 in 1994, the Beijing Gardening and Greening Bureau said.

Shi Yang, senior engineer and director of the Beijing Wildlife Rescue Centre's wild animal department, said that last year alone the centre treated 1,189 such animals from 140 species.

"The rare species we rescued and treated were mostly found by Beijing residents," Shi said.

Nearly every year from April the Beijing swift, a small bird, frequently appears at the rescue centre, he said.

Shi usually gives these birds food six times a day. He strokes them, waiting for them to open their mouths, before popping the food in.

SEE "NATURE" ON PAGE 7



A black crane is photographed at the Wild Duck Lake in Yanqing district, northwestern Beijing. ZHANG YAN / FOR CHINA DAILY



Village enjoys wealth delivered in a teacup

Industry adds vitality to an area that once languished in poverty.

Feng Zhiwei and Chen Meiling report

Farmers were busy picking tea leaves in Tianzhuang village, Anhua county, Hunan province, this month. Chatting and laughing, they looked small among the lush, terraced fields submerged in green.

The leaves they picked were to be processed into dark tea after close to a dozen complex procedures, including spreading, heating, kneading, fermenting and drying. While the colour of the leaves turns dark, the fresh aroma also becomes a strong, pure fragrance when it rises from a cup of glowing red tea.

The transformation from fresh leaves to ready-to-sell products generally takes five to 12 months, based on the different requirements of subcategories. Over the last 1,000 years the manufacturing process of Anhua dark tea has been passed down from generation to generation, and it was named national intangible cultural heritage in 2008.

Anhua, a major place of origin for Chinese dark tea, produced 85,000 metric tonnes last year worth RMB23bil (RM14.5bil), the county government said. Its products are sold worldwide.

In 2019 Hunan adopted a plan to construct characteristic agricultural towns by offering preferential policies in land use, finance and human resources. It wanted to drive development of rural areas under the framework of rural vitalisation. Tianzhuang was one



From top: Farmers work at a tea plantation in Anhua county, Hunan province, last month. Tourists get a taste of tea leaf picking in Anhua county. PHOTOS BY ZHOU DESHU / FOR CHINA DAILY

of 15 places selected for the programme.

It has now developed a tea-related industrial chain from production and sales, agricultural scientific research and healthcare, to tea-related culture and the ecotourism industry.

Huang Wei, a resident of Yiyang, Hunan, visited Tianzhuang during the Tomb Sweeping Day holiday earlier this month. His family enjoyed tea and experienced an idyllic life there, he said.

"I like tea, and I want to experience tea culture in nature with my family," he said. "The picturesque scenery with blooming flowers and tea trees offered a visual feast."

Anhua welcomed 26,000 tourists during the holiday, reaping revenue of RMB25.2mil, the county government said.

The booming tea businesses also benefit farmers.

Jiang Tongxing, 65, formerly a farmer in Tianzhuang, said his family's income used to be less

than RMB10,000 a year, and it relied on government subsidies. After construction of the characteristic agricultural town started, farmers were encouraged to make full use of land to plant tea and to join newly established companies there. Jiang got a job and his family's annual income has reached about RMB20,000.

More than 100,000 people from poor families in Anhua have escaped poverty by joining tea-related industries.

China pulled more than 770 million rural residents out of dire poverty after it adopted wide-ranging reforms in 1978, according to a white paper titled "Poverty Alleviation: China's Experience and Contribution", published on April 6.

The number of Chinese who escaped poverty accounted for more than 70% of the world's impoverished people in that period, measured by the poverty threshold set by the World Bank, it said.

As China has achieved success in eradicating absolute poverty, the country has embarked on vitalising its rural areas — a task that is central to the country's modernisation drive, which will continue up to midcentury.

Huang Yansong, in his 20s, returned to the village after graduating from a university in Beijing. He said contributing to the dark tea industry in his hometown is more meaningful than working in big cities.

"I visited a classmate in Beijing whose father treated me with tea he had kept for years," he said. "So imagine how surprised I was to find out the tea was from my hometown. I felt really proud."

Developing industries in rural areas based on their specific resources is an important measure in realising the country's rural vitalisation strategy, according to the central rural work conference held in Beijing in December.

To improve brand awareness, the county government innovated by producing more high value-added commodities, including tea-sourced snacks, beverages and cosmetics. Anhua county also built the country's first dark tea vocational school and dark tea research institute.

"By investing more in technology, we plan to promote large-scale planting, improve processing efficiency and innovate more new products," said Liu Yonghui, the county's leader.

News Digest

Foreign trade tipped to keep growing

China's foreign trade amounted to RMB8.47tril (RM5.33tril) in the first quarter of this year, up 29.2% year-on-year, the General Administration of Customs said. Trade with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations, the country's largest trading partner, rose 26.1% year-on-year to RMB1.24tril from January to March.

Consumer product expo largest in Asia-Pacific

The first China International Consumer Products Expo will be held in Haikou, Hainan province, from May 7 to May 10 in an area spread over 80,000 square metres. A total of 1,165 global brands from 69 countries and regions have signed up for the event. It is expected to be the largest boutique exhibition in the Asia-Pacific region, said the Hainan Provincial Bureau of International Economic Development, one of the expo organisers.

Cloud gaming sector forecast to expand

Revenue of China's cloud gaming market is expected to enjoy growth 135% from 2020 to 2023 on a compounded annual basis, an industry report said. The estimated growth will be higher than the global average of 101%, making China one of the leading potential markets for cloud games, said the report, jointly published by

the Tencent Research Institute and Newzoo, a global games and esports analytics provider.

Foreigners' Chinese skills get new gauge

A Chinese language proficiency standard has been set for international learners to evaluate their Chinese language skills. Issued by the Ministry of Education and the State Language Commission, the Standard for Chinese Proficiency in International Chinese Language Education will be implemented from July 1. The standard classifies the Chinese proficiency of international learners into three stages and nine levels, using four basic elements of the language: syllables, characters, vocabulary and grammar.

Where dinosaurs left their distinct footprint

A team of Chinese researchers has found a massive concentration of dinosaur footprints it likened to a "dinosaur dance floor" in Shanghang county, Fujian province. The excavation site measures 100 square metres, and about 200 dinosaur footprints have been identified there, said Xing Lida, a paleontologist at the China University of Geosciences. The concentration of footprints indicates that it could have been a pathway for dinosaurs roaming the area in the Late Cretaceous period, he said.

CHINA DAILY



Shuttle in the sky

A 15.4-kilometre unmanned rail shuttle line became operational in Chongqing on April 16. The maximum speed of the shuttle is 80 km per hour. CHEN CHAO / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

CONTACT US

China Daily

15 Huixin Dongjie, Chaoyang,
Beijing, China 100029
+86 (0) 10 64918366
chinawatch@chinadaily.
com.cn
Advertising:
+86 (0) 10 64918631;
ads@chinadaily.com.cn
Website:
www.chinadaily.com.cn

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China Daily Asia Pacific China Daily Hong Kong

Room 1818, Hing Wai Centre,
7 Tin Wan Praya Road,
Aberdeen, Hong Kong
+852 2518 5111
editor@chinadailyhk.com

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Qinzhou area poised to be hub for development

Industrial park in South China is well placed to tap huge potential of regional economic pact.

Alexis Hooi and **Zhang Li** report

Huang Liting, 32, prodded the intricately laced, palm-sized pod with a pen-like device.

She deftly picked out any impurities, looking out especially for flecks of feather.

In 10 minutes a glistening, translucent piece of edible bird's nest emerged from her hands.

"It is hard, meticulous work," Huang said. "When I started doing this I'd spend a whole hour on just one but now, after three months of training and preparation, I can go through up to 50 nests a day."

Huang is one of more than 30 workers at the processing plant of Sabah Bird's Nest, a company in the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region, where the raw, unprocessed nests are imported from Malaysia.

Edible bird's nests, highly valued by Chinese consumers for their nutritional and other health benefits, are made up of solidified swiftlet saliva.

Bird's nests are luxury products. Each nest built by Malaysian swiftlets can sell for more than RMB3,000 (RM1,893) per 100 grams, with whole nests usually processed, dried and packed before being cooked and served as soups or other delicacies.

The processing of bird's nests reflects the strong economic collaboration and links formed in the industrial park since it was set up nine years ago. The latest investments and development point to the coastal area's significant role in expanding ties between China and members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations through the recently signed Regional Comprehensive

Economic Partnership free trade agreement.

Bird's nests have "always been prized by ethnic Chinese everywhere", said Simon Teo Yoke Hua, a Malaysian businessman who heads Sabah Bird's Nest in the park.

"Chinese consumers are increasingly affluent. The nests shipped from Malaysia can now be checked, certified and processed here in Qinzhou for the Chinese market. It's a good fit."

The China-Malaysia industrial park is within the Qinzhou Port Area of the China (Guangxi) Pilot Free Trade Zone, one of six such zones approved by the State Council in August 2019. Qinzhou's waterfront development area, which boasts the trade, logistics and technology sectors, covers more than 260 square kilometres.

Mo Fuwen, deputy director-general of the administrative committee of the Qinzhou Port Area, said the China-Malaysia model allows both countries to work together closely at one site. The China-Malaysia industrial park in Qinzhou has its Malaysian counterpart in the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park in Pahang state.

"Since its launch in 2012, the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park has made positive contributions to promoting bilateral economic and trade co-operation and the development of the comprehensive strategic partnership between the two countries," he said.

This has further enriched China-ASEAN economic and trade collaboration "by jointly opening up a new model of international co-operation between the two countries, focusing on the strategic positioning of a flagship project of



Top: The Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park in Pahang state. Above: A worker checks bird's nests at a processing and trade centre in the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park within the China (Guangxi) Pilot Free Trade Zone. Bottom: The Qinzhou trade and port area in the south of the Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

54.64 million yuan

value of China's imports of bird's nest products going through the China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park in 2020

China-Malaysia investment co-operation, and demonstrating China-ASEAN co-operation via innovative channels to achieve remarkable results", Mo said.

Trade in speciality commodities between the two countries has increased. For example, China's imports of durian, another Malaysian product that is popular among Chinese consumers,

totalled more than 660 metric tonnes last year, with a value of about RMB32.9mil, Mo said.

Similarly, imports of bird's nest products going through the zone totalled about RMB54.64mil, and the industrial output value of the bird's nest industry was about RMB43.2mil, he said, adding that industrial chains in important sectors such as palm oil and pharmaceuticals are also being promoted.

Azlimi Zakaria, consul general of Malaysia in Nanning, the capital of Guangxi, said, "Just like its counterpart in Qinzhou, the Malaysia-China Kuantan Industrial Park has shown impressive

growth over the years."

The government of Pahang state has agreed to expand the area of the Kuantan industrial park "in order to make full use of the park as a comprehensive and internationally recognised trade and investment destination", he said.

"That aside, the Kuantan Port itself is undergoing a major upgrade to gear itself as an international and competitive port to accommodate the growth of (the Kuantan industrial park) and the growing international trade activities within the region and beyond."

Mo, the Qinzhou Port Area deputy director, said growth in Qinzhou's port area itself has also been impressive. Last year deals for at least 75 related projects with a total investment of close to RMB230bil were signed, and US\$260mil (RM1.1bil) in foreign capital was injected, accounting for 70% of the total in China (Guangxi) Pilot Free Trade Zone, he said.

The trade, logistics and economic links place Guangxi in a crucial position for the country to tap opportunities from the RCEP, which brings together China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, New Zealand and the 10 ASEAN members.

Once the RCEP takes effect, countries are set to reduce tariffs in line with the agreement, fulfill commitments to open investment in the service sector, implement the rules in all areas of the pact, and further facilitate the integration of the regional supply chain and the setting of goods-inspection standards, with industrial chains also reinforced, Commerce Ministry and Customs officials said.

Qinzhou's role in China-ASEAN collaboration arising from the RCEP will be inno-

vative and wide-ranging, Mo said. "We will build efficient and convenient logistics links, place secure and orderly information channels for connectivity, form mutually beneficial and win-win cross-border industrial chains, increase exchanges in education, science and technology and culture, and broaden communication channels and economic and trade co-operation channels."

The Malaysian consul general Azlimi said: "Malaysia-China co-operation will certainly gain more momentum after the ratification of the RCEP. The RCEP is also set to promote intraregional sourcing of raw materials, an integrated supply chain within the region, greater transparency and information sharing, recognition of international standards, as well as the protection of (intellectual property rights)."

Phua Lan Tat, president of China-Malaysia Qinzhou Industrial Park (Guangxi) Development Co, said the area's development in the past few years has been encouraging.

The joint venture was established in November 2013 to help in the overall development, construction and investment collaboration of the industrial park.

His group reported consolidated operating income of about RMB416.52mil last year, achieving total profit of RMB26.24mil.

"We were initially focused on developing the industrial park itself when we started out," Phua said. "With the subsequent free trade zone and now the RCEP, we're looking to also further leverage Malaysian businesses, integrate local e-commerce platforms, and grow cross-border trade and global logistics."



Chinese companies are accelerating their digitalisation efforts in the aftermath of the Covid-19 pandemic and embracing new ways of doing business powered by emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence, cloud computing and big data, business people and experts say.

After the huge disruptions caused by the pandemic, a growing number of companies are looking to a new way of thinking to shape a better future in the digital age, according to a report released by global professional service firm Accenture.

The report showed cloud spending in the first quarter of 2020 was nearly triple that of the previous year, and by November, 70% of companies using cloud services had plans to increase spending due to pandemic-related disruptions.

According to the report, 86% of executives agreed their organisation must train staff to think like technicians — to use and customise technological solutions at the individual level, but without highly technical skills — a key move for companies to make their employees a core part of their digital transformation efforts.

“Embracing digital transformation, companies need to transform business models, people and operations,” said Linda Zhang, partner-in-charge of Heidrick & Struggles’ Shanghai office.

“Powered by advanced digital technology solutions, it will help better analyse business data to produce innovations, have a better understanding of the market, increase productivity, improve efficiency and reduce costs.”

“After the Covid-19 outbreak, people realise that digitalisation is an irreversible trend. During the pandemic-stricken 2020, lots of companies were forced to press ahead. As most have their digital transformations underway, digitalisation is being introduced not only at the customer-facing front-end, but also at the back-office internal management.”

Zhang has found demand for IT and data talent has been increasing amid the coronavirus pandemic as a growing number of companies started building their own data teams and data centres.

China has made considerable progress in spurring the development of the digital economy.

With the booming internet, artificial intelligence, big data, cloud computing and other emerging technologies, the digital economy is gradually becoming the integral driving force for economic growth, a white paper published by the China Academy of Informa-



An engineer operates intelligent robots while performing maintenance on high-speed railway locomotives in Chengdu, Sichuan province, on Feb 2. WANG XI / XINHUA

Firms hit mark as world goes digital

Chinese enterprises embrace novel ways of doing business, shift IT systems to the cloud.

Ouyang Shijia reports



Visitors inspect automatic delivery vans at an exhibition in Beijing in November. REN CHAO / XINHUA

Embracing digital transformation, companies need to transform business models, people and operations.”

Linda Zhang
partner-in-charge of Heidrick & Struggles’ Shanghai office

tion and Communications Technology said.

The added value of China’s digital economy reached RMB35.8tril (RM22.6tril) in 2019, accounting for nearly 40% of the country’s GDP, the paper said.

The country has pledged to further speed up digitalisation to create new strengths for the digital economy, develop the digital industry, transform traditional indus-

tries with digital technologies and pursue the Digital China Initiative, according to the outline of the 14th Five-Year Plan for National Economic and Social Development and the Long-Range Objectives Through the Year 2035.

By 2025 the added value of China’s core industries in the digital economy is set to account for 10% of total GDP, compared with 7.8% last year, according to the outline.

This year, the first of the current plan period, China has said it will continue to use the internet plus model to promote integrated development of online and offline businesses in more fields and create new forms and models of business, Premier Li Keqiang said when he delivered the 2021 Government Work Report at the opening of the fourth session of the 13th National People’s Congress last month.

A greater effort will also be made to further develop the industrial internet, while

the development of 5G networks and 1000M fibre optic networks will be stepped up and their application will be extended to more settings, the report said.

Zhou Hongyi, founder and chairman of 360 Security Group, said digitalisation will play a key role in China’s post-pandemic reconstruction and economic recovery.

“After the pandemic, the digital economy will see a wide range of application scenarios. Governments and enterprises are making digitalisation a key strategy for the next five to 10 years,” Zhou said.

A report issued by the US computing company Nutanix said Chinese companies are speeding up their digitalisation efforts and shifting their IT systems to the cloud in the aftermath of Covid-19.

According to the report, 62% of Chinese respondents said they had increased their investment in hybrid clouds as a direct result of the pandemic, compared with 46% globally.

Only 11% of Chinese respondents reported using traditional non-cloud enabled data centres exclusively last year, compared with 55% in 2019. Nearly 90% agreed that an integrated mix of public and private cloud data centres is the ideal architecture for their companies.

Pandemic creates new room for study

By XIN WEN

Paid study rooms are gaining popularity in China as people take steps to adapt themselves to the changes brought by the coronavirus.

Ni Chenyang, 29, who works for a credit management company in Beijing, likes to study after work. In February, during this year’s Spring Festival holiday, Ni used a shared study room near the central business district in Beijing. Since then he has occasionally gone to similar rooms for reading and study.

“At a small desk in the dim light I found I was more focused. In a little corner I could find myself more able to deal with my sense of worry and being adrift in the metropolis.”

Ni spent most of his days since the outbreak of the pandemic in the apartment he shares with a roommate in Beijing. As soon as the pandemic situation allowed, he went out for study, exercise and eating much more often.

“In my daily life I have a lot of pressure to deal with. Work is part of it. Improving my own competitiveness comes with higher requirements now. In the hustle and bustle of the big city, the shared study space is a good choice.”

Shared study rooms are relative newcomers to the sharing economy, first appearing mainly in first-tier cities.

Last year the business boomed.

A search for paid study rooms in Beijing on the review platform Dazhong Dianping produced results for more than 160, 71 of which have opened since September.

Liu Kangcan, founder of the Studying Together Space in Shanghai, estimated that China now has about 15,000 paid study rooms nationwide.

“In 2020, a few thousand shared study rooms were added, scattered across the major cities,” Liu said. “In cities such as Shenyang, Liaoning province, and Xi’an, Shaanxi province, more than 100 paid study rooms opened

in 2020. Some second- and third-tier cities also have 50 to 60 rooms.”

Remote learning during the pandemic has contributed to the surge, business insiders said.

“Students’ learning efficiency at home is not high, and the demand for such rooms shot up in last two quarters of 2020,” Liu said.

The relatively low startup costs have also encouraged many entrepreneurs to flock to the market. The initial investment for a shared study room averages between RMB200,000 and RMB300,000 (RM126,000 to RM189,000), Liu said.

Zhao Peng, 39, a Beijing native, opened his shared study room in December in downtown Beijing, where embassies and foreign-funded enterprises are located.

After decorating the space and buying a few tables and chairs, Zhao opened it in December.

Since then, his Yuncheng Space has maintained a daily occupancy rate of around 70% to 80% on weekdays, and near full capacity most weekends.

“In just a few months, it’s almost breaking even,” Zhao said.

Li Yunqiao, co-founder of the Humble Study Room in Dongcheng district of Beijing, said the paid room he operates is essentially a shared leased space.

“We entrepreneurs rented a part of the property and cleaned it up, and then rented out the space to customers. So it’s an industry with a low entry threshold.”

Leng Chuanshi, a strategic asset allocation analyst for a public offering fund in Beijing, said the development of the business is still in its early stages in China.

“Overall, the sector has a low entry barrier. Business models that include training services and that organise activities are supposed to add value to the sector and give it a boost.”

Zhou Jiaxin contributed to this story.



People study in a shared study room in Qingzhou, Shandong province, on July 15. WANG JILIN / FOR CHINA DAILY

Foreign drug companies upbeat on China

Efforts to build comprehensive infrastructure for healthcare create new opportunities. **He Wei** reports

For multinational corporations, China has become the look-to market turbocharging global growth amid the Covid-19 pandemic. In the medical sector, such a phenomenon has shown particular momentum.

The country's market growth is highly alluring for foreign healthcare players.

Sales of the German medical technology company Siemens Healthineers grew 25% in China in the first quarter year-on-year.

"We had a very good start into the year with strong growth coming from China," said Elisabeth Staudinger, Asia-Pacific president of Siemens Healthineers.

The company recently raised growth guidance from 5%-8% to 8%-12% for this year, as China is expected to be a big driver of medical imaging equipment demand such as for X-ray machines and magnetic resonance imaging scanners.

"This is also very clearly connected to establishing fever clinics and the (country's) continued push to build a more comprehensive infrastructure for healthcare not only in big cities but in remote, provincial areas," Staudinger said.

For the medical device maker Boston Scientific, China is ready to return to high double-digit growth this

year and become the largest market in five years after its home market, the United States.

Art Butcher, the company's executive vice-president and president for Asia-Pacific, cited "broad-based recovery across all of its business units" in China, which experienced speedy economic recovery following the pandemic and the consequent bounce-back of procedural volumes.

"The strategic importance of China cannot be overstated," he said.

He expects particular growth to materialise in areas such as left atrial appendage closure devices, which are a therapy for stroke prevention, and its peripheral interventions business, with the launch of a drug-eluting stent technology.

Executives pointed to a series of plans and directives in China that point to stronger business growth.

The country has issued a plan called Healthy China 2030, charting the course for healthcare development over the coming decade.

The recently unveiled 14th Five-Year Plan (2021-25), which laid the blueprint for China's development for the next five years, includes a number of healthcare-related policy focuses such as optimising balanced quality medical resources, promot-



A training director with medical technology company Siemens Healthineers explains a surgery robot to medical staff at Boao Super Hospital in Hainan province last month. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

ing a tiered diagnosis system and the proliferation of remote medical care.

Staudinger considers healthcare to be "a very core element" of the five-year plan, which is also the "strategic infrastructure" for China and constitutes the source of optimism in the country.

"For instance, this multi-tiered healthcare system the country is pushing forward is really at the core of delivering high-quality healthcare to the people, and it's also an opportunity for us," she said, referring to the need for imaging and blood testing equipment.

"We are here to deliver

four missions — expand precision medicine, transform care delivery, improve patient experience and digitalise healthcare," said Wang Hao, president of Siemens Healthineers China.

For Boston Scientific, the common thread running the business playbook is the focus on expanding access to medical care and improving quality.

It is also looking to physician education as part of efforts to improve quality, and last year's online push through webinars and digital courses, reaching more than 500,000 healthcare providers, opened up "a whole new chapter for us," Butcher said.

Gone are the days when multinational companies regarded China only as a source of raw materials or research.

Instead, they are now flocking to enter into partnerships with Chinese peers, not just for product customisation to meet specific local needs, but also to include Chinese perspectives and expertise from the very beginning of product design.

Making global offerings relevant for key markets in China is one approach for local tie-ups for Siemens Healthineers. Between 30% and 40% of all revenue the company creates is based on products that are no older

than three years, and that is inseparable with deepened tie-ups in China. But the company is "taking things to the next level," Staudinger said.

"We will discuss with Chinese players what our global platform would be like, what the products or the basis of the works would be. We are beginning to ask here in China because we believe there are a lot of insights here that we need to capture in order to do this."

Staudinger sees China's dual circulation development paradigm, in which the domestic market is the mainstay and the domestic and foreign markets reinforce each other, as a positive note to firms operating in the country.

"I don't perceive it as something only protecting local players," she said, adding that the company sources largely 80% of products or parts in products locally.

Hubertus von Gutsche, chairman of the board of managing directors of the German pharmaceutical firm Boehringer Ingelheim, said: "I think it makes a lot of sense to strengthen the domestic circle as much as the international one, because that will be a strong combination, not only for China, but allows China to be tied in to the global value chains."

Theme parks set out their plans, so brace for a fun ride

By **WANG ZHUOQIONG**

As Universal Beijing Resort prepares to open for a trial run next month, anticipation is building up, fuelling fierce competition among international and domestic theme park operators in the country. However, it is a win for fans of Transformers, Harry Potter and Kung Fu Panda as the wait to ride on one of the world's best themed roller coasters is finally over.

UBR is the first international theme park in the capital, five years after the opening of the Shanghai Disney Resort. It is estimated that UBR will attract more than 6 million visitors in the first year.

Nationwide, international theme park operators have been eager to enter the market and expand quickly. Despite the severe impact of the pandemic on global tourism, many theme parks in China saw their businesses reopen and recover from the latter half of last year. Shang-



From left: The Decepticoaster of Universal Beijing Resort. Shanghai Disney Resort unveiled new character costumes on March 29 as the countdown continued for the resort's 5th birthday celebrations from April 8. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



hai Disney Resort reopened last May.

It is reported that Legoland Resort is due to be built in Fangshan district of Beijing and also in Sichuan province.

Merlin Entertainments, a global leader in location-based entertainment with brands including Madame Tussauds and the Dungeons, said it plans to open a

Legoland in Shanghai in 2024.

Since its entry into the market in 2018, Merlin has opened five attractions, including the world's first Peppa Pig World of Play in Shanghai and Little Big City in Beijing.

According to the TEA/AECOM 2019 Theme Index and Museum Index, attendance at the top 10 theme park groups worldwide grew 4%

from 2018 to 2019. There has been strong growth in China's leisure industry, driven by a large population with increasing incomes and desire for travel and leisure.

Chinese operators including OCT Group, Chimelong and Fantawild have dominated the market, all reporting high increases in attendance in 2019.

But it has not always been a smooth ride for investors. According to the Institute for Theme Park Studies in China, 25% of China's 339 theme parks lost money, 22% broke even, and only 53% made profit in 2019. Successful operation of theme parks not only requires long-term and massive investment, but also tremendous effort to con-

stantly tell fresh stories to audiences to generate repeat visits.

International theme park operators have also invested heavily in creating local elements to better connect with Chinese consumers.

Frank Fang, production art director for the Kung Fu Panda Land of Awesomeness at UBR, said it is the first time Universal Studios has built a Kung Fu Panda Land in its theme parks.

The challenge for them was how to make this "legendary Chinese" world with architecture, set designs, decorations and landscapes work for Chinese theme park fans.

"It's an imaginary world co-created by artists from both East and West," Fang said.

"Our goal is to stay faithful to the Kung Fu Panda IP. That's the key to creating an immersive land that is full of amazement and surprises, one that will entertain our guests beyond their imagination."

Eyes and ears that understand — with the aid of kung fu

For many people in the West, kung fu ranks as one of the most popular aspects of China. However, they may not realise that the martial art is in fact about nonviolent traditional Chinese principles and values, “about the social harmony that one develops through perseverance and training”, according to the award-winning American documentary filmmaker Laurence Brahm.

The Chinese characters spelling kung fu include those that mean dagger-axe and to stop, Brahm said.

“So it’s the art of stopping fighting or the art of nonviolence. It’s a very important principle that should be shared today.”

The traditional values behind kung fu — of perseverance, loyalty, respect for harmony, nature, the centre line and not going to extremes — should in turn be used to better understand Chinese culture, he said.

Those crucial cultural foundations help form the basis of the country’s successful development, which the Communist Party of China has led and maintained, he said.

Brahm used the kung fu analogy as he took stock of the country’s achievements amid the centennial celebrations of the CPC this year. His latest documentary, *Searching for Kung Fu*, looks at the fundamental aspects of kung fu by tracing the footsteps of its masters.

Brahm, who trained in the United States as a lawyer and economist, arrived in China 40 years ago and worked with the Chinese government on financial, banking and enterprise reform through the 1990s. He has written more than 20 books about Asia.

An award-winning filmmaker and development pioneer lauds major aspects behind China’s success.

Alexis Hooi reports



From top: Laurence Brahm practices with Shi Deyang, one of the kung fu masters at the Shaolin Temple in Henan province. Brahm works with the film crew on his latest documentary, *Searching for Kung Fu*. Brahm practices with Cheng Hejing, a master of Wing Chun, a style of Chinese martial art. PHOTOS PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

“To a great extent, the Western world doesn’t really understand the China model, but that is the mandate that’s being carried through today, and that still captures the hopes and aspirations of Chinese people,” he said.

“We have to understand, in the context of 100 years, why the CPC is able to not only maintain its momentum, but in many ways today to even have a greater momentum than ever before.”

The success is critically and continually grounded in meeting the needs of the people and providing

solutions to real problems, Brahm said.

“We have to understand that the Party, by its nature, is constantly observing conditions and people’s response. And, if a policy is not working, its leaders and members will rethink and respond with a new one quickly.”

The approach comes in large part from its adaptation to change, something that is inherent in Chinese culture, Brahm said.

“It (the Party) understands change because that is a very fundamental part of Chinese culture. Change

is part of one of the earliest philosophies that arose, the fact that the only thing that’s constant is change itself.”

Those strengths are important because the Party needs to continue tackling the challenges that come with the country’s transition in modern times, Brahm said.

For example, the country went from attracting foreign investment in the 1980s amid the initial stages of reform and opening-up, to rapid economic transformation in the decades that followed, dealing with major challenges ranging from housing to healthcare, Brahm said.

“Suddenly, everything changes and the whole of society has to change. And these are the kinds of huge transformations.

“China becomes the exporter of the world, the manufacturing centre of the world. So now there’s a new, big challenge: How do you convert fossil fuels into renewable energy systems? It’s a huge challenge which affects technology, law and finance. But there are already policy adaptations: the energy grid is in fast-track transformation away from fossil fuels towards new green energy systems. These are where we need technology. We need to harness big data in a sensible and constructive way.”

The cultural strengths of the Chinese people put them in good stead to take on those new challenges, Brahm said.

“Chinese people are reaching back to their roots, projecting that culture into the future through modern technologies, through new ways of thinking, through adaptation. Culture is always evolving. And it develops on the foundations of economic abundance that allows culture to nurture.”



The 2-7 Fitness Club has been a firm favourite with elderly residents of the western Beijing neighbourhood February 7 Locomotive Industry for 40 years. XINHUA

SENIOR FIT-IZENS

By SHI FUTIAN

A group of Beijing pensioners is proving once again that age need not be a barrier when it comes to pumping iron.

At an average age above 70, Xu Wei and his seasoned fitness-loving friends would put most young people to shame with their daily routine of lighting weights, bench-pressing and generally sweating it out in their local DIY gym.

“We have nothing to do apart from doing chores at home or picking up our grandchildren after school,” said Xu, 60, who is retired. “So as long as we have time we will be here exercising. We keep exercising for fun and healthier bodies.”

Instead of buying memberships for a gleaming, modern-day gym, Xu and his friends prefer to train at their own rather less luxurious establishment, 2-7 Fitness Club, a refurbished bicycle shed in the historic western Beijing neighbourhood February 7 Locomotive Industry.

Most regulars at the club, which was established more than 40 years ago, are retired workers of the nearby locomotive factory. The youngest members are older than 60 the oldest an 83-year-old.

The set-up at the club is certainly old-fashioned. Most of the equipment is rusty and there is no air-conditioning. There are no dazzling lights or dynamic music, the only entertainment in the room being an old radio. However, the members appear to be more motivated than the average young office worker.

“True, our fitness club looks a little bit shabby, but we have all the equipment we need,” said Xu, a regular at the gym for the past 20 years. “Every day, I first warm up and then do bench presses. I normally start with 55 kilograms and then gradually work my way to 100kg. Then I do other exercises. I work on a different part of my body each day.”

Yang Hongzeng, 83, another regular of the fitness club,

said exercise is the key to a healthy body and mind.

“I had heart issues before, and it was hard for me to even walk down stairs myself,” Yang said. “After exercising here, I have lower cholesterol and more stable blood pressure. I also walk much faster. And my neighbours say I now have the spirit of a young person. Exercising is a lifestyle for me. I had surgery on my left leg a short while ago. After I recovered from it, I’ve exercised here at least an hour a day.”

According to Xu, the fitness club was the brainchild of Zhang Wei, a PE teacher at the locomotive industry’s technical school. Zhang, also a keen long-distance runner, established the club after retiring in 1987 in the hope of attracting more people to keep fit.

The club was free at the beginning, and most of its equipment at that time was all self-made by the workers of the locomotive factory.

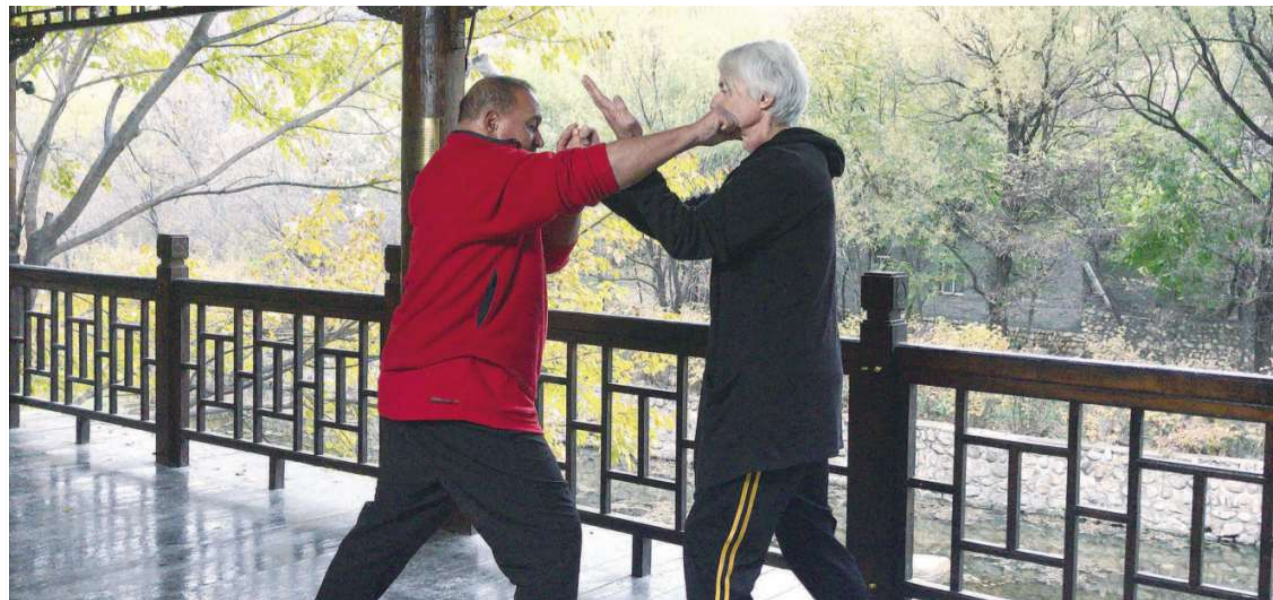
Over the years many of the workers and local residents have been encouraged by Zhang to become fitness lovers, and some became contenders in bodybuilding competitions. Xu said gym members here have won three national championships and eight municipal-level championships in Beijing.

Xu assumed management of the club after Zhang died. Each member pays just RMB100 to RMB300 (RM63 to RM189) a year to contribute to the upkeep of the club.

“Some shelves in the room are 40 years old, and that barbell is over 30 years old. We made most of the equipment ourselves,” Xu said.

“The closets here are old ones from nearby supermarkets. The massage chair is from one of our members. The decorative picture is from our old factory... We bought the integrated training machine for just several thousand yuan and have used it every day for seven or eight years now.

“Many of us have known one another 30 to 40 years. I’m just a manager here. And I’m not here to make money.”



Zookeeper who loves creature comforts

Innovative director gains widespread public support after putting wildlife conservation first. **Li Lei** reports

A zoo in Nanjing, Jiangsu province, that struggled to stay afloat during the Covid-19-induced lockdown last year has had a remarkable revival.

The man behind the U-turn is Shen Zhijun, 50, an animal welfare advocate and horticulturalist. In 2008 he became the youngest director in the history of Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo, established in the 1920s.

In August Shen took to the internet to publicise his decade-long reform — a series of campaigns that transformed the 65-hectare wildlife park located in hilly forests to Nanjing's north from a traditional zoo to one that prizes wildlife conservation.

Over 13 years Shen has transformed the park's landscape and abolished animal shows, the financial lifeblood of many zoos.

In a speech titled "A Zoo's Pursuit", Shen talked about some of the humane and successful changes introduced at his zoo.

They include a bathing pool and giant shower for elephants, a leafy playground in the orangutan valley, a jungle

environment for cassowaries — an endangered, fierce bird from northeastern Australia — to roam about and mate, and a secluded resting place for animals about to give birth.

"That (having a rest) was a basic animal right," he said at the online event hosted by Yixi.tv.

During his speech, Shen's team used 3D-printing technology to repair a monkey's tooth and restore a red-crowned crane's broken beak.

"This helps improve their quality of life and bolsters their confidence when they are among other animals," Shen said.

He recounted how zoo staff studied the breeding habits of cassowaries using oval-shaped sensors after the exotic birds began to lay eggs for the first time in a decade. He also told of how staff went to painstaking lengths to send an abandoned baby chimpanzee back to her troop.

However, as Shen started to wind up his speech he abruptly changed topic and called attention to the zoo's falling revenue. The park



Shen Zhijun watches an orangutan at Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo in Jiangsu province. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY

A modern zoo needs to educate the public more about the relationship between wildlife and their habitats and understand the importance of the environment for both human and wildlife survival."

Shen Zhijun,
a horticulturalist and director
of Nanjing Hongshan Forest Zoo in
Jiangsu province



usually generates 80% of its income from ticket sales, but visitor numbers had plummeted due to restrictions implemented last year to control Covid-19.

"Some people say there will be a 'retaliatory' surge in number of visitors to zoos after the novel coronavirus subsides, but I have not been retaliated against yet," he said. "The zoo's survival worries me."

His honest assessment of the zoo's situation quickly resonated with the public. The speech received more than 1.1 million views on the internet in the five days after it was published online.

Riding the wave of public interest, the zoo introduced a programme for internet users to "adopt" animals for a period. For example, 20 internet users can collectively adopt a leopard for a year, each paying RMB100 (RM63), twice the price of an admission ticket. In return, the donors receive regular video updates about the animals they sponsor and can visit the zoo to have an up-close experience with them.

Through the innovative fundraising measures the zoo has managed to turn around its finances.

The comfortable environment the animals live in is a far cry from that for 2,800 animals 13 years ago when Shen took charge of the zoo. A horticulturalist by training, he had no experience running a zoo, which involves dealing not only with the animals, but with hundreds of animal caretakers and hundreds of thousands of visitors every year.

Shen said he spent his first year doing nothing but observing how the zoo operated. Every morning he did routine patrols of the animal shelters, and one thing soon became apparent: the animals seemed unhappy.

The wolves seemed the most distressed, confined to a 10-square-metre cage, "helpless and hopeless," Shen said in the viral talk. In 2009 he began making changes starting with the wolf shelter and later expanded to zones housing tropical birds, lemurs and koalas.

Zoo authorities have also stepped up efforts on

conservation education. They have put up posters and signs to educate the public on dwindling natural habitats and endangered species.

"We want to explain to our visitors why they are endangered," Shen said recently. "Is it because of climate change, or industrialisation or shrinking habitats?"

He attributed the success of his speech to the fact it has helped the public learn what the "true mission" of a zoo should be. Traditional zoos have existed for many years to entertain visitors through animal performances and other means.

"A modern zoo needs to educate the public more about the relationship between wildlife and their habitats and understand the importance of the environment for both human and wildlife survival. It should let people have respect for life and nature and encourage a sustainable way of life.

"Finally, a zoo should inspire empathy in people and help translate those feelings into actions."

Nature: Volunteers care for feathered friends

FROM PAGE 1

The birds, which have thin white lines on their breasts and four short claws, epitomise Beijing's avian diversity. In April the swifts arrive in the city to breed, and move on to southern Africa in early August.

Shi said: "Beijing residents are familiar with the swift. In recent years I have received a rising number of calls from people across the capital saying they have found injured swifts and want us to treat them."

"The number of volunteers eager to treat wildlife at the rescue centre is rising, and I

sense that more people are learning about the lives of wild creatures in the city."

Wang Tian, 28, of Beijing, a co-founder of an environmental protection studio, said he became committed to safeguarding different species after a group of high school friends encouraged him to take part in wildlife exploration activities.

"Since then I have developed the habit of telling people about wild animals," he said. With the number of wildlife species in Beijing rising due to the improved urban environment, local authorities have strengthened protection efforts.

A year ago legislation was completed for the city's wild animal conservation regulation, which bans the consumption and trading of all terrestrial wildlife and certain aquatic species that are on the city's wildlife conservation list.

Dai Mingchao, deputy director of the Beijing Gardening and Greening Bureau, said that to better implement the regulations, protection of wildlife species and habitats has been strengthened.

"Our main focus is on creating a good habitat for wild animals," he said, adding that the city now has 367,000 hectares of nature reserves

and scenic spots, accounting for 22% of its land area.

This year an additional 10,667 hectares of forest and 400 hectares of urban green spaces will be provided in Beijing, under a plan announced by the gardening and greening bureau in February.

According to local ecological conservation biologists, the mountains to the north and west of Beijing provide ideal resting places for migratory birds, and ancient imperial parks and buildings offer perfect habitats for other wild creatures.

Fang, the bird watcher in Yanqing, is still thrilled when



Whooper swans in Wild Duck Lake in Yanqing district, northwestern Beijing. An estimated 100,000 migratory birds rest at the lake every year. ZHANG YAN / FOR CHINA DAILY

a new migratory bird species arrives at Wild Duck Lake for the first time.

Observing migratory birds is a lonely job, with the watchers spending most of the day

walking around the lake.

"I am really excited when I catch sight of a new species, and hope to share my enthusiasm with more people in the future," Fang said.



A PEEK BEHIND THE MASKS

Freshly unearthed treasures from a famous archaeological site will help answer questions about mysterious ancient culture.

Wang Kaihao reports



From left: A 72-centimetre-tall bronze mask unearthed at the Sanxingdui site in 1986. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY A newly found 28-centimetre-tall gold mask from No 5 pit at the site. JIANG HONGJING / XINHUA

Archaeologists dream of having the chance to excavate something like this; so for Lei Yu this is the ultimate prize.

Lei, chief archaeologist in charge of the Sanxingdui Ruins site in Guanghan, Sichuan province, dating back more than 3,200 years, thought it would have long ago offered up all of its most stunning artefacts. The accidental discovery of two "sacrificial pits" — at least, considered as such by most scholars due to the smashed and burned objects there — in 1986 was incredible.

Then, more than 1,000 artefacts were discovered from the No 1 and No 2 pits of Sanxingdui, including numerous bronze ware items with exotic markings, as well as figurines, human face masks with protruding pupils and an exquisite 3.95-metre-tall "divine tree", believed to have been worshipped as a ladder to heaven.

Sanxingdui was discovered in 1929, and the first scientific excavation was carried out in 1934. It was led by David Crockett Graham, a scholar from the United States. He was also a museum director in Chengdu. But decades of upheaval that followed interrupted work on the site, and its significance was not recognised until the discovery in the 1980s.

"Our archaeological investigations in Sanxingdui have never stopped," said Lei, also

a researcher with the Sichuan Provincial Cultural Relics and Archaeology Research Institute. "But no one really believed there could be more sacrificial pits."

Ruins of city walls, foundations and tombs have been continuously unearthed within the 12-square-kilometre area of the Sanxingdui site — the biggest prehistoric city ruins on the upper reaches of Yangtze River — which resulted in archaeologists switching their focus to look for a high-level mausoleum.

Sanxingdui, though, had more to offer.

From 2019 to 2020 six more pits (No 3 to No 8) — ranging from 3.5 square metres to 19 square metres — were found near the original pair and, since October, about 500 artefacts have been unearthed in a detailed excavation.

As soon as Lei's team announced the discovery in Chengdu, Sichuan's capital, on March 20, China's social media was abuzz with enthusiasm.

Lei's team has uncovered a long list of possible national treasures and, while the bulk of the recent findings have mainly come from pits 3, 4 and 5, the tips of some objects have begun to peek through the dirt in the other three.

A gold mask unearthed from No 5 pit, sporting similar exotic features to those of the previously unearthed bronze face masks, is one of



A 3.95-metre-tall bronze divine tree (left) and a 2.62-metre-tall bronze statue of a human figure excavated from Sanxingdui in 1986. WANG KAIHAO / CHINA DAILY



Archaeologists work in an "excavation capsule", which is equipped with advanced technology at the Sanxingdui site. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY



From left: A part of a broken ivory sculpture unearthed from No 5 sacrificial pit. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY A bird-shaped gold foil recently discovered at the site. JIANG HONGJING / XINHUA



the highlights of the newly excavated items. Bronze masks and divine trees continue to appear, along with more than 100 ivory tusks. Charred sculptures and jade may add further proof to archaeologists' speculation as to the sacrificial status of the pits.

"The quality of the bronze ware could be even better than the items found in 1986," Lei said.

But newly found types of bronze ware raise more questions. For Lei, further study is still required to explain, for example, an animal decoration with an ox's head and a dragonlike body. A 1.3-metre-tall kneeling human figurine carrying a vessel over its head is also a puzzle.

When the exotic and mysterious artefacts were first discovered in 1986, myriad theories captured the public imagination, none so compelling as that claiming extraterrestrial influence on Sanxingdui culture.

"New archaeological findings could guide the public back to a scientific approach to figuring out the origins of Sanxingdui culture," said Zhao Congcang, a professor at Northwest University in Xi'an, Shaanxi province.

"Cultures are created by people. If we can answer some questions about the people of Sanxingdui, the mysterious parts of their culture may be more easily decoded."

So who were these people?

For researchers, the closest answer may be the ancient state of Shu, which lasted for more than a millennium until it fell to the powerful Qin state during the Warring States Period (475-221 BC). Shu state left many legends but the historical recordings are insufficient.

An academic project was undertaken to gain a better and more comprehensive understanding of the ancient Shu state. If it were not for that project, the abundance of artefacts in the news today would probably still remain unknown.

Foundations were also recently found nearby, Lei said.

"That helps us to have a basic understanding of the layout of the sacrificial zone. Our next step is to unveil their ritual system."

New discoveries may connect mythology passed down for generations to more facets of a prosperous civilisation through details of the lives of the Shu people.

Due to the mountainous landscape surrounding Sichuan, in ancient times the region was often considered to be relatively isolated. In a stanza written by the great Tang Dynasty (618-907) poet Li Bai, he describes the road to Shu as "even more difficult than stepping into heaven".

Nevertheless, the findings in the Sanxingdui pits indicate that connection between the region and the outside was commonplace.

Cutting-edge technology deployed to decode relics' riddles

By WANG KAIHAO

Anyone entering the archaeological site is required to wear a protective suit. No one is allowed to directly step on the surface of the excavation site to avoid any possible disturbance to the relics.

These are the rules governing the excavation of six recently unearthed "sacrificial pits" that started in October at the Sanxingdui Ruins

site in Guanghan, Sichuan province, which dates back more than three millennia.

Even for veteran archaeologist Chen Xiandan, 66, the experience of lying on an elevator to carefully approach the surface of the excavation site from above is new.

"This excavation may be a milestone in the history of Chinese archaeology in terms of new research methods and interdisciplinary stud-

ies," Chen, who participated in the excavation of No 1 and No 2 pits of Sanxingdui in 1986, said. "It will greatly benefit our work on existing and future sites."

When recalling the excavation back then, Chen said he has regrets.

No 1 and No 2 pits were accidentally found by farmers who had dug the soil there to make bricks.

Archaeologists raced

against time to rescue the relics from the pits within two months, and many artefacts were hastily processed.

Now, 3D printing technology is being used to make protective shields for the unearthed relics in the newly found pits.

From August to October, four glass-and-iron structures covering the pits, known as "excavation capsules", which offer a suitable environment

for the unearthed relics, were set up.

No such facilities have been used in previous archaeological excavations in China.

A structure provides an extra protection for these capsules in case of bad weather.

Also, for the first time in China, laboratories have been set up at the site to enable real-time conservation of unearthed relics and

the analysis of findings.

"It's like an emergency hospital for the relics," said Wang Chong, a cultural relic conservator working on the site.

"They are comprehensively tested and we decide to which department they should go... These technologies have been used in our work for some time, but we never gathered all the facilities on the front line of archaeology before."