

OPINION: UNITY IN DIVERSITY P.24 | FEATURES: THE DIGITAL AFTERLIFE P.36

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A BLOSSOMING FUTURE

Xizang embraces new horizons of opportunity

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Cover Photo: A glimpse of spring in Nyingchi, Xizang Autonomous Region (VCG)

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EDITOR'S DESK

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Free to Develop

Peach blossoms, towering snow-capped mountains and pristine forests are some of the attractions that draw visitors to southwest China's Xizang Autonomous Region in spring. In the Chinese phonetic system, the name for Tibet is romanized as Xizang.

Official figures from Xizang showed that the region recorded a historical high of 55.17 million tourist visits in 2023, generating a revenue of 65.15 billion yuan (\$9.18 billion), a year-on-year surge of 83.7 percent and 60 percent, respectively.

A booming tourism industry aside, specialty products from Xizang, such as Tibetan medicine, *thangka* paintings and barley wine, are gaining popularity both at home and abroad.

In Xizang, young people share many hobbies with their peers in other parts of the country. They, for instance, enjoy playing mobile games and posting their daily experiences and thoughts on social media platforms, and connecting with followers from other regions.

This year marks the 65th anniversary of the democratic reform getting underway in Xizang. The reform emancipated more than 1 million serfs, at long last giving them rights they had never been entitled to before.

For Xizang's youth, the harshness of serfdom today exists only in the stories passed down by their grandparents or found in history textbooks and museums. They now enjoy a life of freedom, facing the same challenges as millions of other young people nationwide.

Some scholars compare the current conditions in Xizang to those 65 years ago. But this approach may not be entirely reasonable given that much progress has been made across the country in recent decades. To better understand the situation in Xizang, a horizontal comparison with other regions is essential.

In 2023, the autonomous region registered a GDP growth of 9.5 percent, surpassing the national growth rate of 5.2 percent. Meanwhile, the region is narrowing its gap with other regions in areas such as education, science and technology, healthcare, transportation and ecosystem preservation. Moreover, certain industries, such as tourism, enjoy greater momentum in Xizang than in some other provincial-level regions.

Sixty-five years ago, the serfs in Xizang became the masters of their destiny and region. Now, Xizang has embarked on a new path of modernization alongside the rest of the nation. **BR**



WRITE TO US

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SATELLITE SOARS

A rocket carrying China's new relay satellite blasts off from the Wenchang Space Launch Site in the country's southernmost province of Hainan on March 20.

The *Queqiao-2* satellite, also known as *Magpie Bridge-2*, was launched to enhance Earth-Moon communications. It will provide crucial communication services for the *Chang'e-4* probe currently on the lunar surface, as well as for the upcoming *Chang'e-6* mission awaiting launch at the Wenchang center. Chang'e is the name of a series of lunar exploration missions conducted by the China National Space Administration.



Fruitful Finesse

Workers thin the flowers of cherry trees in a greenhouse located in a modern agriculture industrial park on the outskirts of Jiamusi, Heilongjiang Province, on March 18. The city of Jiamusi is taking advantage of greenhouses to boost agricultural production efficiency.

Medical System

China's primary-level medical institutions, including community health centers and township and village clinics, now handle 52 percent of the country's total medical visits, a National Health Commission official said on March 19.

During a press conference, Fu Wei, an official in charge of primary-level healthcare, said China has seen steady progress in building a tiered diagnosis and treatment system, with medical institutions at the county level and below serving more patients.

Fu said medical institutions in rural areas should be capable of handling common and frequently occurring diseases.

The tiered medical system aims to classify diseases according

to their priority and difficulty of treatment as a reference for medical institutions at different levels to treat different diseases, Fu added.

This year, China will further encourage patients to seek basic medical care at primary-level medical institutions and enhance these institutions' capacity to identify complex diseases and transfer patients to higher-level hospitals, Fu said.

Through these efforts, more common and frequently occurring diseases are expected to be diagnosed and treated at medical institutions at the county level or below, she added.

Twin Contracts

China's top judicial authorities have identified so-called "*yin* and *yang*" contracts as tax eva-

sion in a newly released legal document, to maintain the market order and serve high-quality social development.

The identification has been highlighted in a judicial interpretation on handling tax-related offenses, which was jointly issued by the Supreme People's Court, the country's top judicial body, and the Supreme People's Procuratorate on March 18.

"*Yin* and *yang*" contracts, also known as twin contracts, involve the creation of two documents for a single agreement. One document reflects the true intentions of the parties involved, while the other, with a reduced value to lower taxes, is submitted to tax authorities.

Judicial authorities have now officially recognized "*yin* and *yang*" contracts as a form of tax

evasion. This decision is intended to assist prosecutors and judges in resolving tax-related cases more efficiently and in applying the law with greater precision.

New Disciplines

Twenty-four new disciplines for China's higher education institutions were established in 2023, according to the Ministry of Education (MOE) on March 19.

The new disciplines encompass areas that align with the strategic priorities of the country and emphasize cutting-edge technologies, including high-power semiconductor science and engineering, biological breeding technology, electronic information materials, and intelligent visual engineering. Additionally, disciplines focused on promoting the innovative transformation and development of traditional Chinese culture, such as the Chinese literary classics, as well as those supporting the Healthy China initiative in health science and technology, have been introduced.

This initiative aims to assist institutions in developing new disciplines that address the strategic needs of the country, support regional development, and align with national priorities.

Human Trafficking

China has launched a nationwide crackdown targeting human trafficking crimes involving women and children, deploying a special operation that will run until the end of 2024.

During a meeting jointly held by the Ministry of Public Security on March 18, authorities were directed to proactively assume responsibility, meticulously plan and implement actions, and combat the trafficking of women and children in compliance with the law.

The operation requires dedicated efforts to swiftly investigate and resolve pending cases, dismantle criminal networks, and find and free abducted women and children.

Innovation Hub

Beijing Municipality will focus on transforming itself into a major international sci-tech innovation center and leverage its strategic role as the national capital to develop new quality productive forces in a drive to enhance the city's high-quality development, local authorities said on March 19.

In the context of China's economic growth model, the concept of "new quality productive forces" refers to the shift toward fostering innovation, technological advancement, and high-value-added industries to drive economic growth.

In recent years, Beijing's efforts have achieved remarkable results. The volume of technology contract transactions in Beijing exceeded 850 billion yuan (\$118 billion) in 2023, with an average of 337 technology enterprises established each day.

In the face of a new round of global technological and industrial changes, the capital will continue to make efforts to improve its sci-tech research

capabilities, deepen the reform of the sci-tech system, and strengthen the cultivation and introduction of talent, Beijing Mayor Yin Yong said at a press conference.

"We will concentrate on breaking through key core technologies and aim at the commanding heights of industrial development in more than 20 directions, such as future information, health, manufacturing, energy, materials and space," Yin added.

The metropolis has upgraded its urban management over the years, especially in the field of high-level autonomous driving. High-level autonomous driving refers to a level of vehicle automation where a vehicle can operate without human intervention under certain conditions.

Book Fair

The 2024 Wuhan International Children's Book Fair took place from March 15 to 17 in Wuhan, capital city of Hubei Province.

Nearly 200 publishers from across the country participated in the event, showcasing around 30,000 diverse children's publications spanning literature, science and education. This wide array of offerings drew crowds of children and their



Breaking the Ice

Visitors view a model of China's polar icebreaker *Xuelong 2* at the Polar Research and Climate Change exhibition held at the Hong Kong Science Museum in Hong Kong Special Administrative Region on March 19. Open to the public from March 18 to June 26, the exhibition offers insights into the scientific expeditions and research achievements of *Xuelong 2*, providing audiences with a glimpse into its groundbreaking work in polar regions.

families to the event.

During the book fair, several outcomes stemming from the implementation of standards for age-appropriate reading materials for children aged 3 to 8 were unveiled. These standards were issued by the Books and Periodicals Distribution Association of China last February.

Based on these guidelines, a

committee designed a series of educational programs for teachers to assist in guiding children's reading habits. Additionally, an online tool has been developed to evaluate children's reading abilities, all aimed at establishing a robust framework for age-appropriate reading materials for Chinese youth, as highlighted by Ai Limin, the association's president.



Streaming Success

People watch as Indonesian influencers sell Chinese products via livestreaming at the Fourth China Cross-border E-commerce Trade Fair in Fuzhou, Fujian Province, on March 18. The trade fair, which ran from March 18 to 20, attracted more than 30 cross-border e-commerce platforms worldwide and over 1,500 exhibitors from across China.

Opening Up

The General Office of the State Council, China's highest state administrative organ, has issued an action plan to steadily promote high-level opening up and make greater efforts to attract and utilize foreign investment.

To attract and utilize foreign investment more vigorously, the action plan underscores the importance to fully, accurately and comprehensively implement the new development philosophy featuring innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development, and to create a market-oriented, law-based and internationalized first-class business environment that will boost foreign investors' confidence in their ability to develop in China.

The plan proposes 24 measures across five aspects, including expanding market access, enhancing appeal to foreign investment, fostering a level playing field, facilitating the flow of innovation factors, as well as better aligning domestic rules

with high-standard international economic and trade rules.

The country will shorten its negative list of sectors and businesses that are off-limits for foreign investors reasonably, and launch pilot programs to relax foreign entry thresholds in scientific and technological innovation, according to the document.

Efforts should also focus on expanding access of foreign financial institutions to the banking and insurance sectors and broadening the business scope of foreign financial institutions participating in the domestic bond market, the plan states.

The country has further pledged to expand the Catalogue of Encouraged Industries for Foreign Investment and its list of key foreign-funded projects, aiming to provide enhanced policy support for attracting foreign investment, it adds.

It says measures will be taken to support data flow between foreign-funded enterprises and their headquarters, facilitate

international business personnel exchanges, and improve the management of work and residence permits for foreign nationals.

Retail Sales

China's retail sales of consumer goods, a major indicator of the country's consumption strength, climbed 5.5 percent year on year in the first two months of this year, official data showed.

Retail sales in urban regions rose 5.5 percent year on year during the period, while those in rural areas expanded 5.8 percent, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Online retail sales jumped 15.3 percent year on year, with online retail sales of physical goods expanding 14.4 percent and accounting for 22.4 percent of the total retail sales of consumer goods.

Retail sales of services went up 12.3 percent year on year during the January-February period, the NBS data revealed.

NBS spokesperson Liu Aihua told a press conference on

March 18 that the country's continued economic recovery and steady income growth would create favorable conditions for expanding consumer spending.

Supply Chain Expo

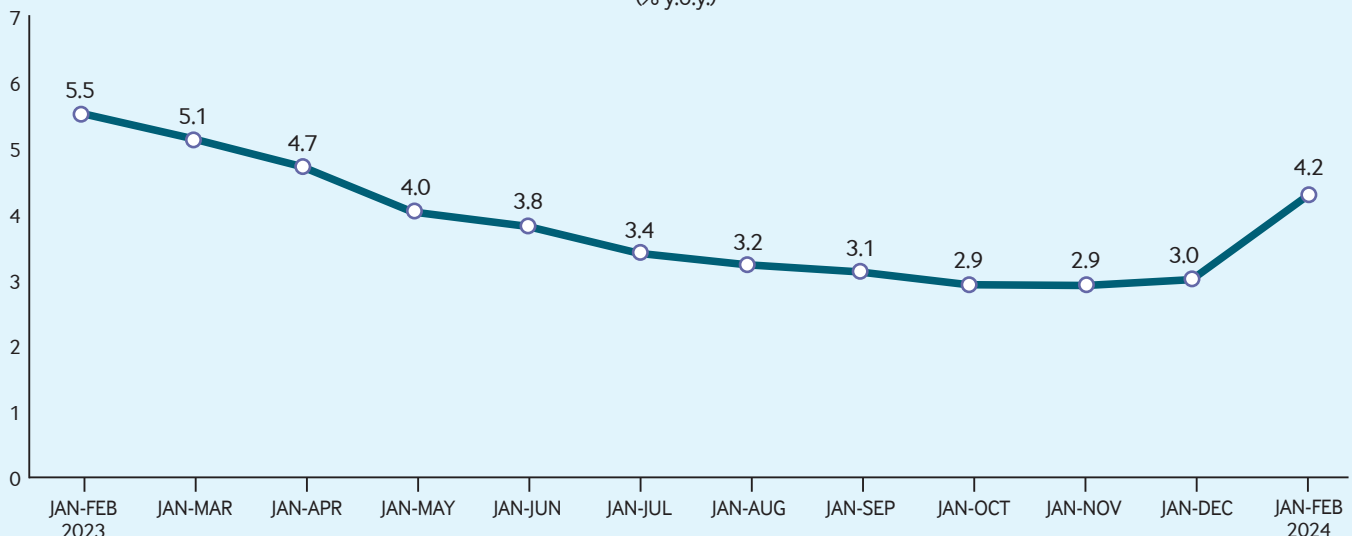
An exhibition area for advanced manufacturing will be added to the Second China International Supply Chain Expo (CISCE) in November, the organizer revealed at an introductory event on March 15.

The new exhibition area will focus on new quality productive forces from perspectives including front-end research and development and design, application of new materials, processing of key components and smart manufacturing, Ren Hongbin, head of the China Council for the Promotion of International Trade, said.

In the context of China's economic development and modernization efforts, the concept of new quality productive forces refers to the country's shift toward innovation-driven growth,

NUMBERS

Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China
(% y.o.y.)



technological advancement and high-quality development in different economic sectors.

The Second CISCE will take place from November 26 to 30, with over 160 domestic and international enterprises already confirmed as participants.

Besides the new exhibition area, the Second CISCE also features exhibition booths organized into multiple sections, including clean energy, smart vehicles, digital technology, healthy lifestyles, green agriculture and supply chain services.

Forex Settlement Surplus

China's commercial banks saw a net foreign exchange (forex) settlement surplus of 12 billion yuan (\$1.7 billion) in February, data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange showed.

In yuan terms, forex purchases by banks stood at about 1.09 trillion yuan (\$151.4 billion), while sales reached about 1.08 trillion yuan (\$150 billion).

China's forex market saw a stable performance, with a more steady flow of cross-border capital, Wang Chunying, deputy head of and spokesperson for the administration, said.

In February, the net inflow of cross-border funds under the goods trade and the securities investment categories both remained at a high level, she added.

The net increase in foreign holdings of domestic bonds stood at a higher level at \$11.1 billion in February, and foreign investment in domestic stocks turned to net gain during the period, showing a stronger willingness among foreign investors to invest in yuan-denominated assets, according to Wang.

State-Level New Areas

China will promote the high-quality development of state-level new areas, making them new highlands of reform and opening up, according to an action plan released by the National

Development and Reform Commission, the country's top economic planner, on March 15.

The country now has 19 state-level new areas, including Pudong New Area (in Shanghai Municipality), Xiongan New Area (in Hebei Province) and Binhai New Area (in Tianjin Municipality), the NDRC said.

In 2023, the GDP of the 19 regions reached 6.2 trillion yuan (\$861.2 billion), accounting for 5 percent of the total nationwide, according to the commission.

Measures will be taken to enhance the sci-tech and industrial competitiveness of the state-level new areas, including promoting cross-regional high-level coordinated innovation, as well as smart manufacturing and digital transformation, the plan states.

Efforts will also be made to introduce more investment projects to the state-level new areas in an innovative manner and cultivate new forms of consumption, it reads.

Also in the plan are measures to support the state-level new

areas to deepen reforms in key fields, including making it easier to introduce talent, improving the efficiency of land use and enhancing financial support for the regions.

New Oilfield

The China National Offshore Oil Corp. (CNOOC), a state-owned energy enterprise, announced on March 18 that it had discovered an oilfield in the Bohai Sea with a proven oil reserve of 104 million tons.

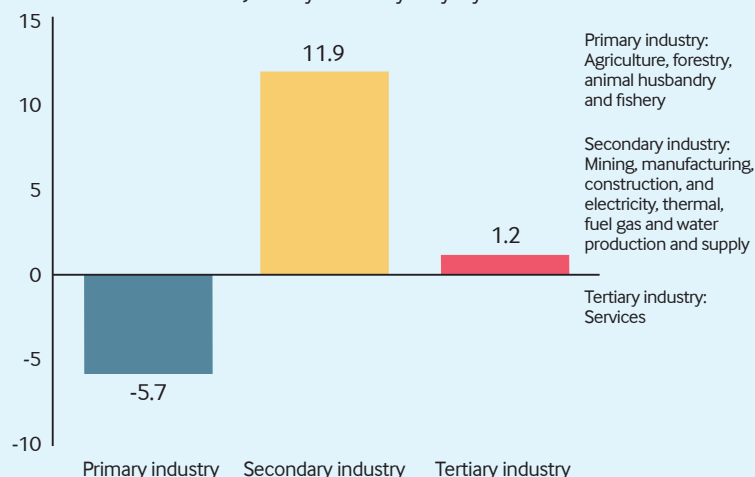
The oilfield, Qinhuangdao 27-3, is located some 200 km from Tianjin in north China. It has an average water depth of 25 meters.

The daily output of a single well is estimated to be about 110 tons of crude oil, according to the company's assessment.

Qinhuangdao 27-3 is the sixth oilfield with a reserve of over 100 million tons discovered in the Bohai Sea since 2019, which demonstrates the broad prospects of oil and gas exploration in the sea, the CNOOC said.

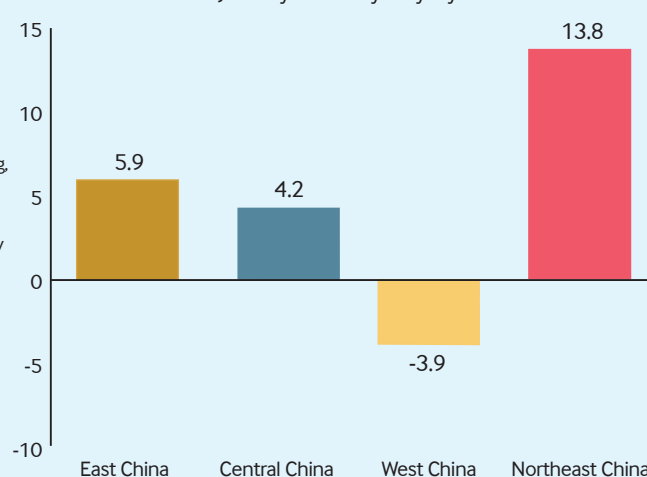
Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China by Sector

January-February (% y.o.y.)



Fixed Assets Investment Growth in China by Region

January-February (% y.o.y.)



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)



UNITED NATIONS

Voting results are displayed during a vote of the General Assembly at the UN headquarters in New York City, the U.S., on March 15. The General Assembly adopted a resolution on measures to combat Islamophobia



INDONESIA

Prabowo Subianto (center) addresses media and supporters in Jakarta on March 20. He and his running mate, vice presidential candidate Gibran Rakabuming Raka, won the 2024 presidential election that day



NEW ZEALAND

People await the hot air balloon launch at the Balloons Over Waikato Festival in Hamilton on March 20. The festival ran from March 19 to 23



THAILAND

Elephants enjoy a fruit buffet at the Nong Nooch Tropical Garden in Pattaya on March 13, Thai National Elephant Day



SOUTH AFRICA

Performers dance in a parade during the Cape Town Carnival 2024 on March 16



FRANCE

Chefs from star-winning restaurants pose with their families for a group shot at the Michelin Guide for France 2024 awards ceremony in Tours on March 18



THIS WEEK PEOPLE & POINTS

NEW SPOKESPERSON

Diplomat **Lin Jian** made his debut as spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs at the ministry's regular press briefing on March 18.

Lin, 47, is currently one of four Foreign Ministry spokespeople and the 34th to be appointed since the role was created in 1983. He worked at the ministry for 25 years after graduating from college in 1995, and is experienced in diplomacy and international communication.



Lin has served at the Chinese Embassy in Copenhagen, Denmark, and the Chinese Embassy in Warsaw, Poland. He was also a counselor in the Foreign Ministry's Department of European Affairs.

Prior to his current appointment, Lin was head of the Foreign Affairs Office of the Xinjiang Production and Construction Corps based in Urumqi, Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region.

Top Spot for Hotpot

Gmw.cn

March 18

Tianshui, Gansu Province, has become the latest hot destination on social media. The reason for the city's newfound fame: its signature spicy hotpot. Restaurants serving the dish allow customers to select their own ingredients from a wide range of proteins, vegetables and starches. The portions are then cooked and mixed with a fiery hot sauce made from locally sourced Sichuan peppercorns and red pepper oils.

Since the city's sudden rise to fame in mid-March, videos about Tianshui spicy hotpot have gained some 1 billion

views, while bookings for local hotels and tourist attractions have increased 40 percent from last year. The city has quickly seized the opportunity to promote local tourism by churning out a series of special discounts and free services. It has created bus routes that drop tourists down right in front of famous hotpot spots, started free airport shuttle services, and launched ticket packages and hotel deals.

As the latest successor to a line of travel hotspots, the city also faces the same predicament that its predecessors have encountered. The fad cannot last forever and it will have to work hard to keep up with the rapidly shifting trends in China's tourism scene.



Megaprojects for Modernization

China Newsweek

March 11

Megaprojects are complex ventures that involve many stakeholders, are transformational and impact millions of people. Over the past decade, the scope of engineering in China has remarkably expanded, which allows for a rapid increase in the number of national-level endeavors. Below are some particularly interesting recent megaprojects.

Some 2,400 meters below the Jinping Mountains in Sichuan Province,

"The [Chinese] market has entered a new phase of commercialization, driven even more by technology innovation and consumer preferences."

Timur Gul, Chief Energy Technology Officer of the International Energy Agency, in his video address to the China EV100 Forum 2024, which concluded in Beijing on March 17

"The accelerated transformation of growth drivers will boost employment growth in fields like the digital economy, the green economy and the silver economy."

Liu Aihua, a spokesperson for the National Bureau of Statistics, at a press conference on March 18, saying China's employment situation was generally stable in the first two months of 2024

the world's largest and deepest underground laboratory has been in operation since last December. It is designed for scientific research on dark matter, an invisible substance that makes up 80 percent of all mass in the universe but has never been directly detected. Buried deep beneath the ground, where the large amount of rock reduces cosmic rays and other background noise, the lab is poised to take scientists a step further toward the discovery of dark matter.

Featuring four lanes in each direction, two artificial islands and an undersea tunnel, another megaproject, the 24-km Shenzhen-Zhongshan link, is in its final stage of construction. Once it begins operating in June, the link is expected to reduce travel time between Shenzhen and Zhongshan, two cities sitting on the opposite sides of the Pearl River Delta, from more than two hours to 30 minutes.

In mid-2023, China kicked off the construction of the Pinglu Canal, a new watercourse that stretches over 134 km from the Xijin Reservoir in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region to the Beibu Gulf off the region's southern coast. Scheduled for completion in 2026, the canal will increase maritime connectivity between China and Southeast Asia.

Street Sausages Sacked Over Safety

Rednet.cn

March 18

Amid the many consumer rights abuses singled out on March 15, World Consumer Rights Day, one fraudulent practice has triggered massive online debate in China: the substitution of meat with mashed chicken bones in some sausage products. Grilled sausage skewers are one of the most beloved street foods in the country. Their popularity, however, has collapsed, as millions of netizens swear to never eat them again.

One of the side effects of the new boycott, which began among netizens, has been the hard blow it has delivered to vendors trying to make a living by selling sausage skewers. The public has been aching over a news story about an old man in Sanmenxia, Henan Province, who had to eat all of his own stall's sausages because he had absolutely no customers.

The exposure of dirty business secrets can effectively raise awareness of the importance of food safety. However, the solution to consumer rights abuses does not lie in a complete ban, but the upholding of integrity on the part of businesses, as well as a continuous effort to upgrade industry standards.

↓ ANT GROUP'S NEW PRESIDENT

Corporate executive **Han Xinyi** has been appointed president of Ant Group, a fintech firm affiliated with Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba Group, responsible for payments, connectivity and the digital finance business.

Han's appointment is part of the most significant reorganization since Ant Group's initial public offering was halted in late 2020, with the group restructuring its operations into several independently run business units.



After obtaining a master's degree in economics from Tsinghua University in 2001, Han worked at the investment banking division of the China International Capital Corp. In 2011, he began working at Alibaba as a senior director of corporate finance and joined Ant Group in 2014. Han became its chief financial officer in 2020 and executive director of the board in January 2023.

“Currently, women account for over 40 percent of the Chinese workforce, about 45.8 percent of the tech workers and about one third of operators of new business models such as digital trade, e-commerce and livestreaming.”

Huang Xiaowei, deputy head of the National Working Committee on Children and Women of the State Council, China's highest state administrative organ, at a UN Security Council open debate on March 13

“Are Washington or Brussels capable of seeing the global benefits of China's ‘overcapacity’? Probably not, as long as their egoistic interests continue to blind them.”

Zhou Xiaoming, a senior fellow at the Center for China and Globalization, in an opinion piece in the *South China Morning Post*, on March 15, commenting on U.S. and EU complaints of what they claim is China's “industrial overcapacity”



COVER STORY

March 28 is Serfs' Emancipation Day in Xizang Autonomous Region. The day commemorates the 1959 democratic reform that led to the emancipation of more than 1 million serfs, transforming the region's governance system from a feudal serfdom under a theocracy into a modern democracy. On the 65th anniversary, *Beijing Review* presents some of the latest developments in Xizang.