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NEW LANDS OF OPPORTUNITY

Development is driving demographic shifts in China's regions

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Population Close-Up

China's total population dropped for a second consecutive year in 2023, adding fuel to an ongoing demographic debate. In this context, it is important to take a closer look by observing shifting demographics across the country's provinces.

Of the 31 provincial-level administrative regions on the Chinese mainland—22 provinces, four municipalities directly under the Central Government's administration and five autonomous regions, only 10 recorded an increase in their number of permanent residents last year, according to figures released by provincial-level authorities available to date. Permanent residents are defined as those who have lived in a place for six months or longer.

Zhejiang Province in the east saw the largest increase of 500,000. It was followed by Guangdong and Hainan provinces in the south. In terms of total population, Guangdong and Shandong ranked top two, each being home to more than 100 million people.

Population growth in a region results from natural growth and inflow of people from other regions. Analysts believe it is positively correlated with local development. Both Zhejiang and Guangdong are China's economic locomotives with flourishing digital economies creating an abundance of job opportunities. They also give priority to attracting highly skilled and

qualified personnel. Hangzhou, capital of Zhejiang, for instance, gives cash bonuses to university graduates who choose to work in the city.

The rise in Hainan's population is partly attributable to the burgeoning free trade port there, driving trade and investment liberalization and facilitation. Official data show the number of newly established foreign-funded enterprises in the tropical island province has grown at an annual rate of 65 percent since 2018.

Another highlight is northeast China, a region that has suffered from a brain drain for many years and is making a turnaround. Jilin Province experienced a net inflow of 43,400 people last year, and Liaoning Province witnessed a net inflow of 86,000 people, both putting an end to years of net population outflow. Analysts say this is a sign that revitalization of the region, which housed China's major industrial bases in the early days of the People's Republic, is gaining momentum with the rise of industries such as new energy, new materials and advanced manufacturing.

As it comes to terms with its new demographic normal, China is committed to training a more qualified workforce to meet the needs of emerging industries. Different regions are also fine-tuning their policies. Adaptation and innovation are key in times of change. **BR**



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DOCKED AND DELIVERED

This image, captured at the Beijing Aerospace Control Center on April 26, shows the *Shenzhou-17* and *Shenzhou-18* crews posing for a group photo inside China's *Tiangong* space station.

China launched the *Shenzhou-18* manned spacecraft on April 25, sending three astronauts—Ye Guangfu, Li Cong and Li Guangsu—to the space station for a six-month mission. The *Shenzhou-17* crew returned to Earth on April 30 after their half-year stay in orbit.



An Aesthetic Oasis

A view of the Bai'etan Greater Bay Area Art Center in Guangzhou, capital of Guangdong Province, on April 27. Housing the Guangdong Museum of Art, the Guangdong Intangible Cultural Heritage Exhibition Center and the Guangdong Literature Hall, the art center opened its doors to the public on May 1.

Facilitating Travel

As of 4 p.m. on April 27, the Hong Kong-Zhuhai-Macao Bridge had seen over 10 million inbound and outbound vehicles pass through its Zhuhai port since it opened to public traffic in October 2018, according to the bridge's border inspection station.

The number of inbound and outbound vehicles passing through the Zhuhai port of the bridge, the world's longest bridge-tunnel sea crossing, surged from 860,000 in 2019 to 3.26 million in 2023.

So far this year, the number of inbound and outbound vehicles to pass through the Zhuhai

port has exceeded 1.58 million.

The bridge has generated new forms of cross-border travel. Data shows that more than 45,000 mainland tour groups traveled to and from Hong Kong Special Administrative Region (SAR) and Macao SAR via the bridge in 2023. And residents of Hong Kong and Macao made almost 10 million visits to the mainland via the bridge, a record high.

The 55-km-long crossing links Hong Kong SAR, Zhuhai in Guangdong Province and Macao SAR. It has brought tremendous economic opportunities and benefits to the Guangdong-Hong Kong-Macao Greater Bay

Area, a dynamic economic zone in south China that promotes the free flow of talent, goods, capital and information, as well as innovation and entrepreneurship.

Panda Partnership

The China Wildlife Conservation Association and the San Diego Zoo in the U.S. recently signed an agreement for giant panda conservation, selecting a pair of giant pandas to be sent to the San Diego Zoo for a 10-year international conservation partnership, *China Daily* newspaper reported on April 27.

To ensure the wellbeing of the giant pandas in the U.S., experts from the China Wildlife

Conservation Association traveled there in March to engage in in-depth discussions and technical exchanges with the San Diego Zoo regarding panda care, living environment and health requirements.

In 1996, the two parties officially commenced panda cooperation, with Bai Yun and Shi Shi from the China Conservation and Research Center for the Giant Panda becoming the first pair to reside at the San Diego Zoo.

Starting Salaries

Finance-related jobs were the most sought after in the first quarter (Q1) of this year due to the attractive salaries they offer, while the services sector witnessed a jump in starting pay during the same period, *China Daily* reported on April 26.

Recruitment portal Zhaopin recently released a report that said 38 major cities in China, including Beijing, Shanghai and Guangzhou, saw the average starting salary settling around 10,323 yuan (\$1,425) per month in Q1, marking a 2.2-percent year-on-year increase.

Also, the salaries varied from sector to sector. Finance- and technology-related jobs proved most attractive for job hunters because of the high salaries they provide. The report said that job openings in the finance and investment sectors offered a monthly salary of 13,374 yuan (\$1,846) on the platform, while vacancies in the computer science, information technology and new-energy sectors had an average starting salary ranging from around 11,000 (\$1,518) to 12,000 yuan (\$1,656) per month.

The services sector proved to be the "dark horse" in Q1, both in terms of number of jobs on

offer and the increase in pay offered to new recruits. Figures from the National Bureau of Statistics show that from January to February, retail sales of services—mainly in the transport, food and beverage, and entertainment sectors—rose by 12.3 percent year on year, driving a recruitment growth for services talent with corresponding high salaries.

According to the Zhaopin report, the starting salary for jobs in the hospitality and food and beverage industries went up 10.6 percent in Q1 on the platform, maintaining the continuous growth trend observed in the previous three quarters.

Pneumoconiosis Treatment

China has opened 829 sites providing free treatment for people with pneumoconiosis, cases of which account for approximately 90 percent of all reported cases of occupational diseases in the country, an official of the National Health Commission (NHC) said on April 25.

Wang Jiandong, the NHC official in charge of occupational health, said at a press conference that these sites, which are located in 28 provincial-level regions, provided free treatment to more

than 1.2 million pneumoconiosis patients between 2021 and 2023.

The commission will introduce more policies to assist pneumoconiosis patients in the future, he added.

Loud noise, dust and toxic chemicals are the top hazards in workplaces in China, Wang said, noting that the country has monitored over 1.8 million jobs with occupational hazards since 2019.

The country has launched a campaign to control occupational hazards, focusing on industries with grave health risks, such as the mining, metallurgy and building materials sectors, he added.

Intellectual Property Rights

China indicted 44,337 individuals for crimes related to intellectual property rights (IPR) infringement from 2021 to 2023, amid intensified efforts to combat such crimes, according to a white paper released by the Supreme People's Procuratorate (SPP), the country's highest procuratorial organ, on April 15.

During the three-year period, procuratorial organs nationwide approved the arrests of 17,547 individuals involved in over 10,600 cases of IPR infringement.

The white paper revealed



Sci-Fi Spectacular

Visitors enjoy a simulated rover ride at a science fiction carnival held alongside the China Science Fiction Convention (CSFC) 2024 in Beijing on April 27. The CSFC 2024 kicked off that same day at the city's Shougang Park, featuring forums, industry promotional events and film screenings.

that trademark infringement constituted a significant portion of these violations, with noticeable increases observed in cases involving copyright infringement and the infringement of trade secrets.

In 2023, the number of copyright infringement cases increased 1.4 times from the previous year, and the number of

trade secret infringement cases surged 96.6 percent.

Regions with strong economic development, particularly the eastern coastal areas, recorded a higher prevalence of IPR infringement cases. This trend suggests a correlation between the frequency of these cases and levels of economic and social development, as indicated in the white paper.



Heartland to Far East

Students from a Muscatine High School delegation stroll along a street near the Yuyuan Garden in Shanghai on April 23. Thirty-two students and eight teachers from the high school in the U.S. state of Iowa participated in a week-long study tour to Beijing, Shanghai and Hebei Province. The delegation is part of a China-initiated program that intends to invite 50,000 American youths to China for exchange and study within five years.

Industrial Profits

Profits of China's major industrial firms increased 4.3 percent year on year in the first quarter (Q1) of this year, official data showed.

The growth reversed a 2.3-percent decline registered in 2023, extending an upward trend for three consecutive quarters, according to the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS).

Industrial firms with an annual main business revenue of at least 20 million yuan (\$2.8 million) saw their combined profits reach 1.51 trillion yuan (\$208.4 billion) during the first three months of this year.

NBS statistician Yu Weining said as the country continues to step up macroeconomic policies to boost the economy, both market demand and industrial production further improved, resulting in a sustained recovery in major industrial enterprises' profits.

Among the 41 industrial categories monitored by the bureau, 28 recorded profit growth.

The hi-tech manufacturing sector reported robust profit gains, which surged 29.1 percent year on year in Q1 of this year, reversing from a decline of 8.3 percent registered in 2023.

The profits of the equipment manufacturing sector, the largest contributor to the overall industrial profit growth, expanded 18 percent from one year earlier, with the pace of growth accelerating from the 4.1 percent recorded in 2023, according to Yu.

E-Commerce Logistics

China's e-commerce logistics index, an indicator of logistics operations in the e-commerce sector, stood at 112.5 points in March, up 1.1 points from a month earlier, industry data showed.

Specifically, the sub-index tracking total business volume in the sector went up 4.2 points month on month to 126.4 points, hitting a new high in the past two years, according to the China

Federation of Logistics and Purchasing.

The figure tracking business volume in rural areas also rose 3.4 points from the previous month to 127.7 points during the period.

Sci-Fi Industry

China's sci-fi industry reported an accelerated growth in 2023, generating a total revenue of 113.29 billion yuan (\$15.6 billion), according to a report released on April 27.

The revenue represented a year-on-year growth of 29.1 percent, read the 2024 China Science Fiction Industry Report, which was issued at the Eighth China Science Fiction Convention in Beijing.

The sci-fi reading sector pocketed 3.17 billion yuan (\$437.5 million) in 2023, up 4.3 percent from the previous year, the report said.

Sci-fi films and TV works raked in 11.59 billion yuan (\$1.6 billion) in 2023, marking a yearly increase of 38.8 percent. Last

year saw a significant rise in the number of sci-fi Web series and mini-series, as well as a notable increase in the production of short and medium-length sci-fi videos, according to the report.

Sci-fi games contributed the bulk of 65.19 billion yuan (\$9 billion) to the total revenue, representing a year-on-year growth of 15.4 percent. Sci-fi cultural tourism earned 31.06 billion yuan (\$4.3 billion), surging 106.7 percent from a year before.

The report was jointly compiled by the China Science Fiction Research Center, and the Research Center for Science and Human Imagination at Southern University of Science and Technology.

Bond Issuances

Bond issuances in China totaled nearly 7.16 trillion yuan (\$1 trillion) in March, data from the People's Bank of China (PBC), the country's central bank, showed.

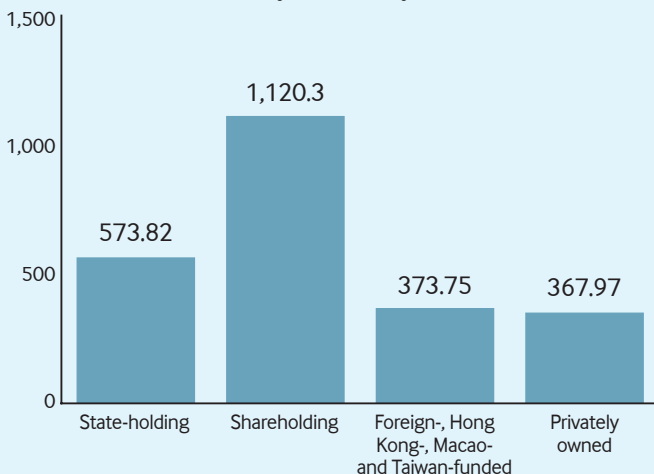
Specifically, issuances of treasury bonds came in at 920 billion yuan (\$127 billion), while

NUMBERS

(\$1=7.1 yuan as of April 29)

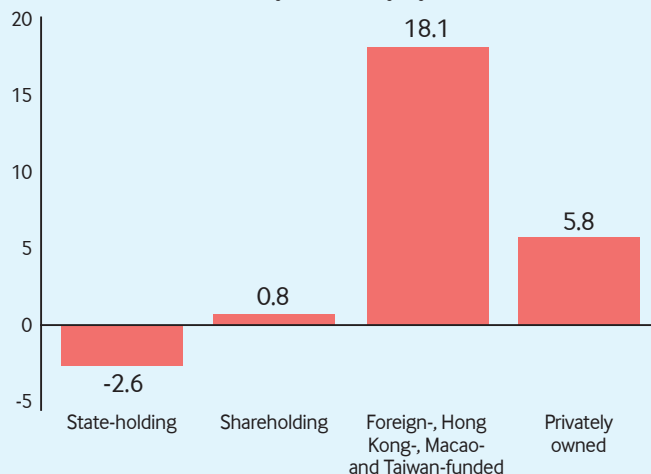
Industrial Enterprise Profit by Business Type

January-March (bln yuan)



Industrial Enterprise Growth by Business Type

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



local government bond issuances amounted to 629.45 billion yuan (\$86.9 billion), according to the PBC.

Financial bond issuances stood at 956.3 billion yuan (\$132 billion), and corporate credit bond issuances reached 1.66 trillion yuan (\$229 billion).

Outstanding bonds held in custody were at 160.8 trillion yuan (\$22.2 trillion) as of late March.

Forex Market

China's foreign exchange (forex) market recorded transactions worth 24.64 trillion yuan (\$3.4 trillion) in March, official data showed.

The transaction volume of the client market totaled 3.53 trillion yuan (\$487.1 billion) that month, and that of the interbank market came in at 21.11 trillion yuan (\$2.9 trillion), according to the State Administration of Foreign Exchange.

In terms of products, the cumulative transaction volume of the spot market, where assets

are bought and sold for immediate delivery and payment, was 7.61 trillion yuan (\$1.1 trillion), and that of the derivatives market, where financial instruments derive their value from underlying assets, was 17.03 trillion yuan (\$2.4 trillion).

The country's forex market transaction volume totaled 66.17 trillion yuan (\$9.1 trillion) in Q1 of this year, the data showed.

Gold Output and Consumption

China's gold output and consumption both saw steady growth in Q1 of 2024, industry data showed on April 26.

China produced 85.959 tons of gold in Q1 of this year, up 1.16 percent from a year earlier, according to data released by the China Gold Association (CGA).

In the first three months of this year, gold consumption in the country stood at 308.905 tons, up 5.94 percent year on year, CGA data showed.

Specifically, consumption

of gold jewelry in the Chinese market fell 3 percent compared with the same period last year to 183.922 tons, while that of gold bars and coins surged 26.77 percent year on year to 106.323 tons.

Consumption of gold for industrial and other uses gained 3.09 percent from the previous year to 18.66 tons from January to March.

Unicorn Enterprises

China boasts 369 unicorn companies, or startups valued at more than \$1 billion, according to a report released on April 28 at the 2024 Zhongguancun Forum in Beijing.

The number of unicorn companies in China amounts to over a quarter of the total number of such companies globally, the report on China's unicorn enterprise development said.

In recent years, China's overall strength in technological innovation has steadily increased. The country has fostered a large number of unicorn

companies, providing continuous momentum for nurturing new quality productive forces, experts said.

In the larger context of China's economic development, the concept of new quality productive forces refers to initiatives aimed at enhancing productivity, innovation, sustainability and quality in different sectors of the economy through technological innovation and digital transformation.

Presently, China's 369 unicorn companies span 16 sectors, with the fields of artificial intelligence and integrated circuits taking the lead.

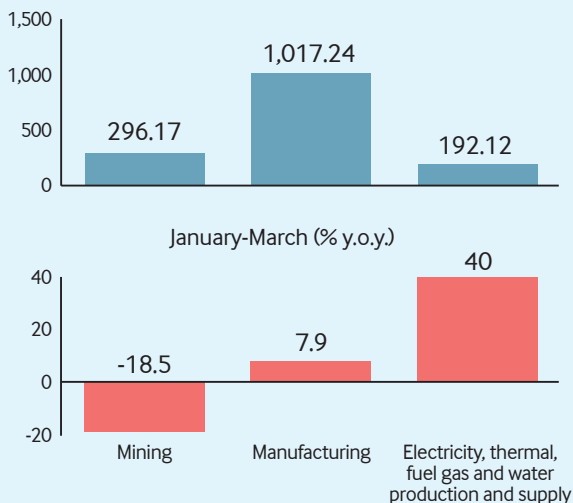
In terms of localities, these companies span 47 cities nationwide, and more than 60 percent of them are concentrated in Beijing, Shanghai, Shenzhen, Guangzhou, and Hangzhou.

Sixty-seven of them qualified for unicorn company status over the past year.

Beijing ranks first nationwide with 114 unicorn companies, the report noted.

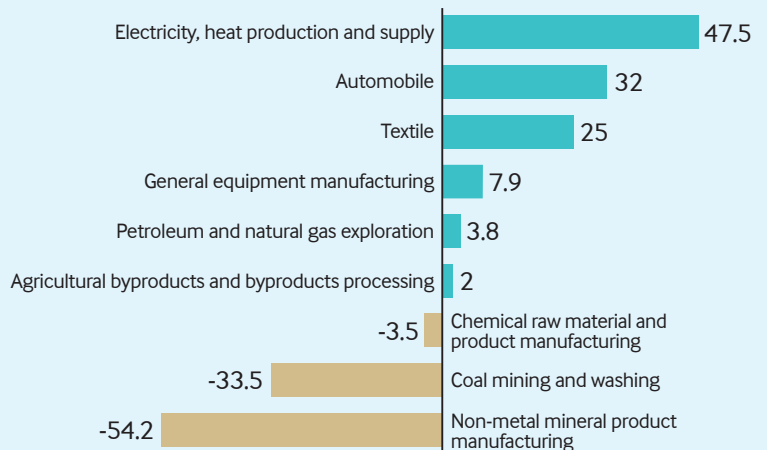
Industrial Enterprise Profit and Growth by Sector

January-March (bln yuan)



Profit Changes for Major Sectors

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



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)



SAUDI ARABIA

The World Economic Forum's Special Meeting on Global Collaboration, Growth and Energy for Development kicks off in Riyadh on April 28



SOUTH AFRICA

A woman poses for photos during a celebration commemorating Freedom Day at the Union Buildings in Pretoria on April 27



NEW ZEALAND

The Amber Quartet, one of China's most celebrated string quartets, performs with local musicians in Christchurch on April 26



TANZANIA

Buses are trapped in floodwater in Dar es Salaam on April 25. Flash floods caused by ongoing torrential rains had left 155 dead and 236 others injured as of April 29



PALESTINE

Workers carry a body found at Nasser Hospital in the southern Gaza Strip city of Khan Younis on April 23. The Palestinian death toll in the Gaza Strip due to ongoing Israeli attacks had risen to 34,183 as of April 29



ITALY

People take part in a parade to celebrate the 2777th birthday of Rome on April 21



THIS WEEK PEOPLE & POINTS

↓ BELGIAN COACH JOINS TEAM CHINA

Vital Heynen of Belgium has been named head coach of China's men's volleyball team, the China Volleyball Association announced on April 25.

Heynen, born in 1969, was formerly the captain and setter of the Belgian men's volleyball team. In his coaching career, he led Germany's men's team to fifth place at the London Olympics and the bronze medal at the 2014 World Championship.

When in charge of the Polish men's team from 2018 to 2021, he led the team to a World Championship, second place in a World Cup, and fifth place at the Tokyo Olympics.

The coaching staff of the Chinese men's volleyball team for this season is a combination of both Chinese and international coaches. Alongside Heynen, there is also a four-member Chinese coaching team.



Stolen Voices

Beijing Daily
April 24

On April 23, the Beijing Internet Court issued a landmark verdict on China's first artificial intelligence (AI)-related voice rights case, in which it ruled that unauthorized AI voice cloning constitutes an infringement of personal rights.

The plaintiff, a voice actress surnamed Yin, discovered in May 2023 that her voice was used in several online audiobooks without her consent. Investigation into the case then revealed that an AI-powered tool was used to process her voice and sell the slightly altered voice to different platforms.

Citing China's Civil Code, which prohibits any individual or entity from altering, damaging or falsifying someone's voice without his or her consent, the court ordered the defendant to pay Yin 250,000 yuan (\$34,500) in compensation for her economic losses, and write her an apology.

The case sets a great example for future disputes concerning the use of AI-generated voices. In the future, a more robust legal framework should be installed to nail down the definition of voice rights and the penalties for illegal AI voice cloning. Businesses should also pay extra attention to the importance of obtaining consent from the individual involved when using AI to process or recreate a voice.



Upgrading Gaokao

Lifeweek
April 29

With April coming to a close, high school seniors across China have officially entered the homestretch of their race toward the *gaokao*, a standardized national college entrance exam upon which college admission largely depends. This year is the 10th year of ongoing *gaokao* reforms, in which targeted policies are continuously launched to increase fairness.

The most prominent change to the exam under the reforms is that, instead of choosing to study arts or sciences alongside the mandatory Chinese, mathematics and English courses, students now select three out of six subjects to be tested on:

“6G will promote changes in lifestyle, production methods, and innovations in social governance.”

Gao Tongqing, Deputy General Manager of China Mobile Communications Group, at the 6G Innovation Development Forum on April 27, where panelists said by around 2030, 6G will be commercially available in areas where infrastructure conditions are met, which include China

“Chinese teenagers are showing a stronger interest in science fiction and there is a considerable increase in the number of young sci-fi content creators.”

He Junke, Vice Chair of the China Association for Science and Technology, as the 2024 China Science Fiction Industry Report was released on April 27

physics, chemistry, biology, history, geography and political science. In 2014, Shanghai and Zhejiang Province became the first regions in which the reform was piloted. Besides the aforementioned six subjects, Zhejiang added a seventh option, technology.

This year's exam, however, saw the reform take a new, if not about-face, turn. Starting this year, science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) programs in universities across the country will be accepting only students who have chosen both physics and chemistry as *gaokao* subjects.

This new policy was issued to address the many unwanted side effects produced by the cancellation of the arts versus sciences dichotomy. Instead of choosing subjects based on their own interests as was intended by the reformers, students tended to base their decisions on whether their chosen combination would get them into top universities as well as other strategic concerns. Many universities also discovered that some of the students they had admitted to their STEM courses over the past few years knew nothing about physics or chemistry and therefore did not match their entry requirements. Yet, the reliance on final exam scores as the dominant assessment metric persists. Future reforms are worth pursuing.

Critics-Turned-Cyberbullies

Rednet.cn

April 19

Six years after its initial release, *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*, a Chinese historical drama that chronicles the life of an empress in the Qing Dynasty (1644-1911), has found itself unexpectedly thrust into the center of a heated online debate.

Over the past few days, several influencers have posted extremely detailed video analysis of everything that the series got wrong. Much of the criticism centers on the inconsistency between the show's claim of celebrating women's empowerment and its emphasis on rivalries between women and their supposed emotional dependence on men.

Like *Ruyi's Royal Love in the Palace*,

many TV series, especially historical dramas, are imbued with misogyny, class distinction and other outdated ideologies. The fact that the audience no longer buys into these narratives suggests a growing awareness of gender and class equality. To keep up with these changing perceptions, people working in the film and television industry should embrace criticism and modernize their storytelling.

However, what started off as a sound discussion quickly deteriorated into a hateful personal attack on Zhou Xun, the show's lead actress, whose acting skills, character and past achievements have all been intensely scrutinized and condemned.

While industry insiders should embrace constructive criticism, netizens should refrain from venting their anger through online aggression.

↓ SCIENTIST WINS UNESCO PRIZE

Qiao Jie, a specialist in reproductive medicine, won the 2024 UNESCO-Equatorial Guinea International Prize for Research in the Life Sciences on April 23 for her outstanding contributions to helping couples conceive healthy babies and improving reproductive health, especially for women.

Qiao's study of genetic processes and development of innovative techniques for pre-implantation genetic diagnosis have helped improve the success rate of in vitro fertilization (IVF) and avoid the transmission of genetic diseases through IVF.



She is a member of the Chinese Academy of Engineering and executive vice president of Peking University. Awarded by UNESCO and funded by Equatorial Guinea, the award honors three scientists each year who have improved the quality of human life through scientific research.

“If you look at our order book, about 25 percent of orders are from China. That tells me that we'll be growing faster in China than elsewhere, and that's super important. And it's because of the speed and the innovation in China.”

David Slump, President and CEO of leading global automotive supplier Marelli, at the 2024 Beijing International Automotive Exhibition, which took place from April 25 to May 4

“All people-to-people exchanges are really important in education.”

Katharine Carruthers, Director of the Institute of Education, University College London, in an interview with Xinhua News Agency during an event in London, the UK, on April 25, in celebration of Chinese Language Day



The international container port of the Yangpu Economic Development Zone in Hainan Province, on October 25, 2023

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