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BRIGHT LANTERNS, BRIGHT FUTURE

Springing into the bloom of holiday consumption

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Cover Photo: Two little girls play with lanterns at a picturesque location decorated for the Spring Festival in Linyi, Shandong Province, on January 31 (XINHUA)

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Spring Spending

This year's Spring Festival, which fell on January 29, was the first one since the celebration's inscription on the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization's (UNESCO) Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity in December 2024.

The related eight-day holiday ran from January 28 to February 4. The box office revenue of movies during the holiday was 9.51 billion yuan (\$1.3 billion), and the number of moviegoers totaled 187 million—both figures surpassing previous records, according to the China Film Administration.

Consumption in areas such as clothing, home decoration, food and beverages, and tourism was more robust during this year's holiday than it has been in the past five years.

The Spring Festival, also known as Chinese New Year, is the most important holiday in Chinese culture and traditionally sees the highest levels of spending. Through their consumption activities, people contribute to an energetic, festive atmosphere. This year, following UNESCO's recognition, the "spring spirit" was even more animated than usual.

Festival consumption not only encompasses economic activities but also

carries cultural and social importance, showing people's commitment to traditional holidays and the strengthening of family and community ties. Established customs, such as family gatherings and visiting relatives and friends, in turn enhance the gift market.

The latest official data indicate that young consumers are increasingly driving festival spending, with young families emerging as a dominant force in sectors such as high-end gifts, e-commerce, tourism, transportation and entertainment.

Data from previous years indicate that China has consistently met market demand.

Supermarkets are well-stocked with both domestic products and imported goods, including French wine, U.S. nuts and Chilean cherries. According to the Ministry of Commerce, the supply of daily necessities nationwide remains sufficient throughout the Spring Festival, with prices generally stable.

People's consumption patterns during this grandest of annual celebrations in China reveal a sense of exuberance with an international hint. This festive period not only fulfills material needs but also satisfies cultural desires and fosters hope for a brighter future. **BR**



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GAMES ON!

The launch ceremony of the 2025 Asian Winter Games Torch Relay is underway in Harbin, capital of Heilongjiang Province in northeast China, on February 3.

The games, taking place from February 7 to 14, feature six sports, 11 disciplines and 64 events. The ice events are held in Harbin, while the snow events are hosted in Yabuli, which is 193 km from Harbin.



A Futuristic Fiesta

Robots perform for visitors at the 2025 Haidian Spring Festival-themed Sci-Tech Temple Fair in Beijing on January 30.

Mangrove Forest Expansion

Mangrove forests in China have expanded since the start of this century, making the country one of the few in the world to have seen a net increase in mangrove coverage, official data showed on February 2, World Wetlands Day.

The total area of China's mangrove forests has reached 30,300 hectares, up approximately 8,300 hectares from the beginning of this century, according to the National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

The progress came as a result of China's intensified efforts to protect and restore its mangroves, which are evergreen trees

or shrubs that grow in intertidal zones on tropical or subtropical coasts. Sometimes referred to as "coast guards," they play a vital role in purifying seawater, mitigating the impacts of wind and waves, and maintaining biodiversity.

Over the past five years, China has planted over 8,800 hectares of mangroves and rehabilitated an additional 8,200, according to an administration official.

Cyclone Forecast

Chinese scientists have developed a new artificial intelligence (AI) method to forecast the rapid intensification of a tropical cyclone, shedding new light on improving global disaster

preparedness.

Recently, researchers from the Institute of Oceanology at the Chinese Academy of Sciences published this study in the journal *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

The rapid intensification of a tropical cyclone remains one of the most challenging weather phenomena to forecast because of its unpredictable and destructive nature.

According to the study, traditional forecasting methods, such as numerical weather prediction and statistical approaches, often fail to consider the complex environmental and structural factors driving rapid intensification. While AI has been explored to improve rapid intensification

prediction, most AI techniques have struggled with high false alarm rates and limited reliability.

To address this issue, the researchers have developed a new AI model that combines satellite, atmospheric and oceanic data. When tested on data from the tropical cyclone periods in the Northwest Pacific Ocean between 2020 and 2021, the new method achieved an accuracy rate of 92.3 percent and reduced false alarms to 8.9 percent.

Chang'e-7 Lunar Probe

China's *Chang'e-7* lunar probe, scheduled for launch in 2026, will target the moon's south pole to search for water ice and test cutting-edge technologies pivotal for sustainable human activities on the moon, China Media Group reported on February 3.

The mission, using an innovative hopper spacecraft equipped with a water molecule analyzer, aims to confirm the presence and distribution of water ice in permanently shadowed craters, the report said.

The *Chang'e-3* and *Chang'e-5* missions successfully landed on the moon's near side, while *Chang'e-4* and *Chang'e-6* achieved historic touchdowns on the far side. Therefore, *Chang'e-7*'s planned landing at the lunar south pole will test the capability of China's lunar probe to reach any region of the moon, Tang Yuhua, Deputy Chief Designer of the *Chang'e-7* mission, said in an interview.

If lunar water ice is successfully located, it could significantly reduce the cost and time required to transport water from Earth, facilitating the establishment of a human base for long-term activities on the moon

and enabling further exploration of Mars or deep space, Tang said.

Prosthetic Hand

A research team from the University of Science and Technology of China has unveiled a groundbreaking biomimetic prosthetic hand with high dexterity, which can comb hair, operate a smartphone and even perform intricate sign language signs.

The lightweight prosthetic device, which replicates the functionality of a human hand, highlights a considerable advancement in prosthetics and humanoid robots.

The human hand, with its 23 degrees of freedom (DOFs)—the number of independent movements it can perform—is a marvel of natural engineering, contributing to 54 percent of the body's overall functional movements despite weighing only about one 150th of the body's weight.

Traditional prosthetic hands, often powered by motors, struggle to balance weight and functionality. Most weigh more than 0.4 kg, causing discomfort while offering fewer than 10 DOFs. This limitation confines their ability to perform complex tasks, leading nearly half of

users to abandon their prosthetic hands.

The prosthetic hand developed by the team weighs just 0.37 kg, lighter than the average human hand, yet capable of 19 active DOFs.

The study was published in scientific journal *Nature Communications*.

Patent Review Time

The average review time for invention patents in China has been reduced to 15.5 months, according to the China National Intellectual Property Administration (CNIPA).

The CNIPA also noted that the average review time for trademark registrations remains stable at four months.

The country currently has 124 national intellectual property protection centers and rapid service centers, covering 29 provinces, autonomous regions and municipalities.

The average processing time for intellectual property rights protection cases remains within two weeks. According to the CNIPA, the average mediation time for intellectual property disputes under its guidance is within 28 days.



Spring Awakens

A ritual celebrates Lichun (meaning “Beginning of Spring”), the first solar term of the year on the traditional Chinese lunisolar calendar, at the Beijing Ancient Observatory on February 3.

Xinjiang Earthquake

No casualties have been reported so far after a 5.0-magnitude earthquake jolted Xinjiang Uygur Autonomous Region in northwest China on February 5, local authorities said.

The earthquake hit Kuqa City in Aksu Prefecture of Xinjiang at 7:42 a.m. (Beijing Time). The epicenter was at 41.23 degrees

north latitude and 83.74 degrees east longitude. The quake struck at a depth of 10 km, according to the China Earthquake Networks Center.

While there are no townships or villages within 10 km from the epicenter, tremors were felt in several nearby cities. Rescue workers and emergency response personnel have been sent to areas potentially affected by the quake.



Back to Work

A worker inspects a production line at a workshop of Zhongfu Carbon Fiber Core Cable Technology Co. Ltd. in Lianyungang City, Jiangsu Province, on February 5. This year's Spring Festival holiday concluded the previous day.

Trade in Services

China's services import and export value amounted to a record 7.5 trillion yuan (\$1.05 trillion) in 2024, expanding 14.4 percent year on year, according to the latest data from the Ministry of Commerce (MOFCOM). It was the first time the figure had exceeded the \$1-trillion threshold, demonstrating potential for further growth.

Exports grew 18.2 percent year on year and imports grew 11.8 percent, according to the MOFCOM.

Driven by the global trends of digitization, smart technology advancement and green development, China's trade in services grew in scale, its structure was optimized and its international competitiveness was enhanced in 2024, said Li Jun, a researcher at the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation under the MOFCOM.

Renewable Energy

The newly installed capacity of renewable energy in 2024 accounted for 86 percent of

China's total newly installed power capacity, while the cumulative installed capacity of renewable energy made up a record 56 percent of the nation's total, data from the National Energy Administration (NEA) showed.

China's renewable energy sector added a new installed capacity of 373 million kilowatts (kw) in 2024, a year-on-year increase of 23 percent. Hydropower and wind power contributed 13.78 million kw and 79.82 million kw, respectively, while solar power and biomass power increased by 278 million kw and 1.85 million kw.

As of late 2024, the cumulative installed capacity of the country's renewable energy had reached 1.889 billion kw, a 25-percent increase from the previous year. Hydropower accounted for 436 million kw, wind power for 521 million kw, solar power for 887 million kw and biomass power for 46 million kw.

As of late 2023, renewable

energy power generation capacity in China had surpassed half of the total installed capacity for the first time.

Meanwhile, China's renewable energy generation also reached 3.46 trillion kilowatt-hours (kwh) in 2024, with a year-on-year rise of 19 percent, accounting for about 35 percent of the total electricity generated.

Industrial Profits

The combined profit of major industrial enterprises in China exceeded 7.43 trillion yuan (\$1.04 trillion) in 2024, down 3.3 percent year on year, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said.

The NBS data showed that in December last year, profits went up 11 percent year on year.

NBS statistician Yu Weining attributed the improvement to the implementation of incremental measures. Industrial profits in December rebounded from a 7.3-percent decrease in the previous month, and the decline in corporate earnings in the fourth quarter eased markedly from the

third quarter of last year.

Hi-tech manufacturing became an important growth driver in 2024, with profits growing 4.5 percent from 2023. High-end, intelligent and green manufacturing in particular recorded faster profit growth, Yu said.

The equipment manufacturing sector continued to be the cornerstone last year, with five of its eight industries posting year-on-year profit increases.

In addition, last year's profits in the consumer goods manufacturing sector improved by 3.4 percent year on year thanks to supportive policy measures to promote consumption, according to Yu.

Stock Investment Pilot

China's financial regulatory authority has approved the launch of the second batch of pilot programs for long-term stock investments, with a scale of 52 billion yuan (\$7.25 billion).

NUMBERS



The National Financial Regulatory Administration has authorized China Pacific Life Insurance Co. Ltd., Taikang Life Insurance Co. Ltd., Sunshine Life Insurance Co. Ltd. and related insurance asset management firms to participate in the pilot program through contractual funds, engaging in long-term stock investments to leverage long-term capital and patient capital, thereby supporting the capital market's stable operation.

On January 22, financial authorities unveiled a plan outlining measures to encourage medium- and long-term funds to move into the capital market to further stabilize stock performance.

Wu Qing, Chairman of the China Securities Regulatory Commission, said public offering funds will increase their A-share holdings of circulating market capitalization by at least 10 percent annually over the next three years.

A-shares are the stocks

of incorporated companies based on the Chinese mainland and listed on mainland stock exchanges.

Efforts are being made to ensure large state-owned insurance companies allocate 30 percent of their newly added annual premium incomes to invest in A-shares starting in 2025, which is expected to inject hundreds of billions of yuan (equivalent to tens of billions of U.S. dollars) in long-term capital into the A-share market each year, he said.

The second batch of pilot programs for long-term stock market investment from insurance funds will be implemented in the first half of 2025, with a minimum scale of 100 billion yuan (\$13.9 billion), gradually expanding thereafter, Wu added.

In March 2024, China Life Insurance and Xinhua Insurance jointly launched the country's first private equity securities investment fund established by insurance companies to enter

the stock market, with an investment scale of 50 billion yuan (6.95 billion). This is one of the first pilot projects for the long-term stock investment reform of insurance funds.

Online Retail Sales

China has been the world's largest online retail market for 12 consecutive years, with online retail sales reaching 15.5 trillion yuan (\$2.16 trillion) in 2024, the MOFCOM said.

The country's wholesale and retail industries have made steady progress driven by several policies, providing strong support for expanding domestic demand and forging a new development paradigm, Vice Minister of Commerce Sheng Qiuping told a press conference on January 24.

Sheng added that the added value of the wholesale and retail industries had reached 13.8 trillion yuan (\$1.9 trillion) in 2024, accounting for 10.2 percent of GDP, and playing a vital role in facilitating

circulation, creating jobs, and reducing logistics costs.

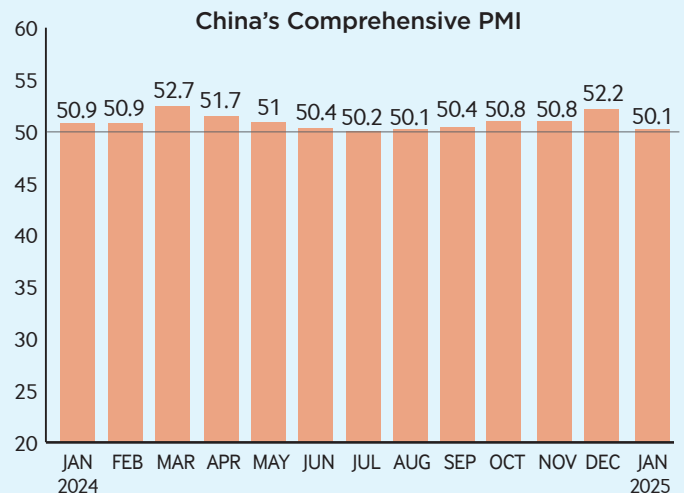
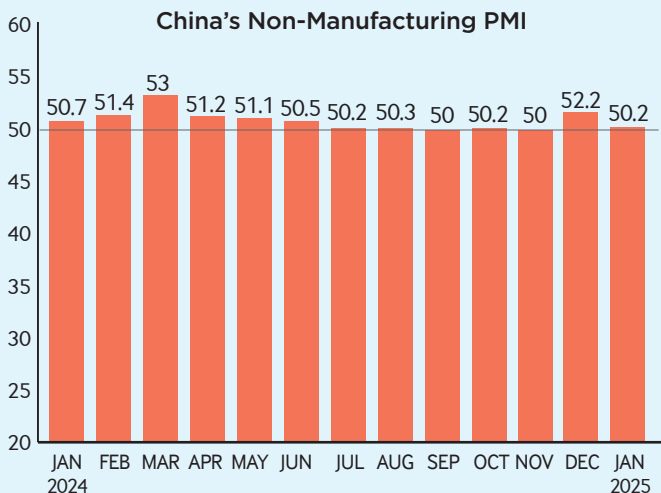
Gold Reserves

The People's Bank of China, the country's central bank, expanded its gold reserves by 44.17 tons in 2024, bringing the total to an all-time high of 2,279.57 tons and making it the sixth largest in the world.

In 2024, China's gold output was 377.24 tons, up 0.56 percent year on year, while gold consumption was 985.31 tons, down 9.58 percent year on year, data from the China Gold Association showed.

In addition, gold production from imported raw materials was 156.864 tons in 2024, an increase of 8.83 percent year on year. Including this proportion of gold output, total gold production nationwide amounted to 534.106 tons, up 2.85 percent year on year.

China's leading gold groups' overseas mines produced 71.937 tons of gold in 2024, up 19.14 percent year on year.



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

THIS WEEK **WORLD**



UNITED STATES

Investigators process the scene after a small plane crashed in Philadelphia on February 1. The crash claimed the lives of seven people and injured another 19



ISRAEL

A military helicopter carrying released hostage Keith Siegel, an American held by Hamas, arrives at a medical center in Tel Aviv on February 1



THE PHILIPPINES

Workers carry sacks of rice inside the National Food Authority warehouse in Valenzuela City on February 4. The country declared a food security emergency regarding rice to stabilize the "extraordinary" rice prices





UNITED KINGDOM

Lion dancers perform in Trafalgar Square to celebrate the Chinese New Year, which fell on January 29 this year, in London on February 2



DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF THE CONGO

Health workers transfer victims' bodies in Goma on February 5, after March 23 Movement rebels claimed control of the city on January 26. As of February 6, over 2,000 bodies had been collected following intense clashes between rebel forces and government troops



INDIA

People gather on a footbridge after a stampede at the 2025 Maha Kumbh Mela festival, one of the world's biggest religious gatherings, drawing millions of Hindu pilgrims, in Prayagraj, Uttar Pradesh, on January 29. At least 30 people died and a further 60 got injured

THIS WEEK PEOPLE & POINTS

↓ HARBIN ASIAN WINTER GAMES FLAGBEARERS

Winter sports aces **Ning Zhongyan** and **Liu Mengting** on February 7 led the Chinese delegation into the opening ceremony of the 2025 Harbin Asian Winter Games as flagbearers.

Ning, 25, is a star speed skater who has won multiple International Skating Union World Cup medals since 2019.

Liu, 20, claimed her first International Ski and Snowboard Federation Freeski World Cup victory in the women's big air event in Klagenfurt, Austria, in January.

The 2025 Asian Winter Games takes place in Harbin, Heilongjiang Province, from February 7 to 14 under the theme "Dream of Winter, Love Among Asia." The Games feature 64 events in 11 disciplines across six sports—biathlon, curling, ice hockey, skating, skiing and ski mountaineering.

It is the second time for Harbin to host the Games, following the first one in 1996.



Scan for Safe Meds

Workers' Daily
January 21

The National Healthcare Security Administration has launched a smartphone app with which consumers can track the source of their medications by scanning a barcode printed on the packaging. If, after scanning the code, multiple sales records appear, it indicates that the drug may be counterfeit or recycled, for which consumers can seek compensation from designated medical institutions.

The country's healthcare system has long been plagued by the illegal reselling of medications, with scammers often

using other people's healthcare insurance credentials to purchase drugs at low prices and then reselling them at incredibly high markups back to hospitals.

Worse still, these medicines are frequently stored without temperature or humidity controls, which oftentimes result in compromised quality and efficacy. Sometimes scammers even swap the original drugs for fake or expired medicines.

With the medication tracking service, it is possible to identify these resold drugs and more effectively crack down on this kind of drug scalping. This newly introduced feature is essential for ensuring drug safety and safeguarding public health.

The Journey From 'I' To 'We'

Lifeweek
February 3

Over the past few years, the capacity for self-love has become recognized in China as the most important criteria for a healthy romantic relationship. According to a report co-released in August 2024 by Chinese dating app Soul and a research team at Shanghai University, the primary reason why young Chinese women get married nowadays is no longer companionship, but self-improvement and mutual support.

"The Spring Festival serves as a valuable opportunity for people from different cultural backgrounds and all walks of life to get to know China."

Minnie Ang, a Singaporean living in Suzhou, Jiangsu Province, in a recent interview with Xinhua News Agency

"From Volkswagen to Tesla, and Toyota's new project, the continued investment by leading automakers underscores the appeal of China's high-level openness and the robust strength of its manufacturing industry."

Bai Ming, a researcher with the Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation, under the Ministry of Commerce, on Japanese automaker Toyota's February 5 announcement of a new wholly-owned electric vehicle manufacturing plant in Shanghai

However, the same research team also discovered that this new emphasis on self-worth and self-fulfillment has brought about a new form of society, one that is loosely tied through superficial relationships. Young Chinese no longer believe they can make friends with their co-workers; the rise of social media has fostered a widespread sense of shallow connectedness; and amid changing social dynamics and rapid urbanization, Chinese youngsters are distancing themselves from family ties in pursuit of more personal space.

Though the quality and depth of relationships seem to be deteriorating in the digital age, today's youth still long for intimate and meaningful relationships. According to another report released by Soul in January, a key term that encapsulates how social interactions have changed is "soft-boiled egg," a half-cooked type of relationship where individuals strive for both independence and deep connections with others.

Experts have pointed out that China is in a transitional phase where traditional values are slowly losing their hold over its younger generations. With time, they believe, a new belief system founded upon both the desire for self-discovery and a yearning for meaningful human ties will eventually take form.

Cracking Open the Door

Ce.cn
January 26

Recently, a slew of Chinese companies jolted the tech world with their new artificial intelligence (AI) models. On January 20 alone, four Chinese companies launched their latest AI offerings: DeepSeek debuted DeepSeek-R1, and Moonshot released the Kimi k1.5 model, both positioning themselves as direct competitors to OpenAI's flagship chatbot, the o1 model. ByteDance and MiniMax also added voice modes to their flagship AI models, which now support real-time voice interaction.

Since the launch of OpenAI's GPT-3.0 model in November 2022, the AI race has

been a frenzied game of scale where bigger models meant better outcomes. This approach has naturally led to mounting energy consumption and colossal training costs.

A small league of Chinese companies, however, chose to pursue another path by slimming down their AI models. DeepSeek-R1, for instance, was 30 times cheaper to build than OpenAI's o1 but offers almost equal performance. Slimming down means lesser dependence on high-performing chips, lower energy costs and wider application of AI tools.

Yet challenges remain. Companies must carefully balance cost and performance to ensure their AI initiatives are both scalable and sustainable. For now, the global race for cost-effective AI technologies continues.

BOX OFFICE RECORD

Fantasy animation *Ne Zha 2*, directed by **Yang Yu**, popularly known as "Jiaozi," has become China's top-grossing film of all time, earning over 5.75 billion yuan (\$789 million) within just nine days of its January 29 premiere, according to data from ticketing app Beacon.

Yang gained fame with the first *Ne Zha* film in 2019, which grossed nearly 5.04 billion yuan (\$692 million).

The franchise is based on a character from the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) novel *The Investiture of the Gods* (*Fengshen Yanyi*) and is also featured in the Chinese classic *Journey to the West*.

Ne Zha 2 is scheduled to be screened in the U.S., Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, Egypt, Singapore, Japan, the Republic of Korea and other countries.



"Seeing our homeland from space fills me with excitement, pride and longing."

Wang Haoze, China's first female engineer to work on the *Tiangong* space station, as she and her *Shenzhou-19* mission colleagues Cai Xuzhe and Song Lingdong shared details of life and work on the station, 400 km above Earth, at the half-way point of the mission

"To increase the dialogue, to increase the understanding of China, Chinese history and Chinese culture in the West, it is a very important thing that more people actually travel to China, to see China with their own eyes."

Illugi Gunnarsson, a former Minister of Education, Science and Culture of Iceland, in a recent interview with *China Daily* newspaper



COVER STORY

A FESTIVE FRENZY

New consumption trends as seen during Chinese New Year holiday

By Yuan Yuan

For 30-year-old Lin Yan, a Beijing-based professional, the Spring Festival has long been a time to escape the icy grip of winter and head to sun-soaked retreats like Sanya, the tropical paradise in China's southern Hainan Province. But this year, she and her husband traded palm trees and ocean breezes

for something entirely different: a journey to Yuxian County in Zhangjiakou, Hebei Province, just a short drive from the capital. What drew them in was the county's rich intangible cultural heritage (ICH) and its strong historical charm.

Yuxian County, once an important military garrison during the Ming Dynasty (1368-1644), is widely regarded as the birthplace of *datiehua*, or striking iron flowers. Recognized as a national-level form of intangible cultural heritage in May 2021, this spectacular art form, evolving from the daily

practices of blacksmiths, involves splashing molten iron into the air to create dazzling, flower-like patterns of sparks. It is performed during festivals to ward off evil spirits and bring good fortune.

Datiehua was just one highlight of Lin's trip. The couple also explored the county's well-preserved ancient architecture and historical relics and sampled local