

OPINION: STARMER'S CHINA BET P.18 | FEATURES: 'CHINESE ERA' IS TRENDING P.36

BEIJING REVIEW

VOL.69 NO.7 FEBRUARY 12, 2026

北方周末 WWW.BJREVIEW.COM



WHAT DID CHINA WATCH?

Inside the cinematic obsessions that defined 2025, setting the scene for the future

RMB9.00
USD1.70
AUD3.00
GBP1.20
CAD2.60
CHF2.60
JPY188

ISSN 1000-9140



9 771000 914260

邮发代号2-922·国内统一连续号: CN11-1576/G2

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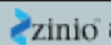
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Cover Photo: Twin towers in Chengdu, Sichuan Province, are illuminated with characters from *Ne Zha 2* during a light show on February 8, 2025 (VCG)

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A News Weekly Magazine
Published Since 1958

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Published every Thursday by
CICG Center for Americas, 24 Baiwanzhuang Lu,
Beijing 100037, China
Overseas Distributor: China International Book Trading
Corporation, P. O. BOX 399,
Beijing 100048, China
Tel: 86-10-68413849, 1-416-497-8096 (Canada)
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E-mail: fp@mail.cibtc.com.cn
Website: <http://www.cibtc.com>
General Distributor for Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan:
Peace Book Co. Ltd.
17/F, Paramount Bldg, 12 Ka Yip St, Chai Wan, HK
Tel: 852-28046687 **Fax:** 852-28046409

Beijing Review (ISSN 1000-9140 USPS 2812) is published weekly in the United States for US\$64.00 per year by Cypress Books, 360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48, South San Francisco, CA 94080
News Postage Paid at Burlingame, CA 94010-9997
POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *Beijing Review*, Cypress Books, 360 Swift Avenue, Suite 48, South San Francisco, CA 94080

A Year in Cinema

The film industry achieved spectacular growth in 2025, mainly driven by a surge in the popularity of animated films. According to the China Film Administration, total box office revenue for the year hit 51.8 billion yuan (\$7.4 billion), a year-on-year increase of 21.95 percent. Of that total, animated films contributed 25 billion yuan (\$3.6 billion).

Four animated feature films made it into last year's top 10, with Disney's *Zootopia 2* placing second and *Ne Zha 2* taking the top position. The dominance of *Ne Zha 2* and *Zootopia 2* last year not only demonstrates the enduring power of a good sequel, but also reveals the Chinese audience's massive appetite for quality storytelling, regardless of origin. Homegrown animation has been benefiting not only from advancements in animation technologies, but also from improvements in the industrial ecosystem and a nationwide multi-industry boom in cultural innovation that has seen Chinese traditional culture drive the growth of films and television, video games, toys and consumer products.

Domestic films took the lion's share of revenue in both animated and live-action categories last year, bringing in 41.29 billion yuan (\$5.92 billion). Films with patriotic themes are always well received in China,

but with 2025 being the 80th anniversary of the end of World War II and the War of Resistance Against Japanese Aggression, patriotism and defending the country were themes that resonated especially deeply with audiences.

Chinese cinema's record-breaking year was achieved in the face of strong pressure from short video platforms and the massive rise in the popularity of micro-dramas. Art films were a major casualty of the increasing demand for "short, fast and thrilling" content. Over the past few years, there have been art films that gained market recognition every year, especially those with a nostalgic style. But in 2025, this trend seemed to be shattered.

While advances in AI technology and application were among the greatest drivers of the animation boom, the progress of these intelligent technologies also presented last year's greatest challenge to the film industry as a whole. AI-generated content placed unprecedented pressure on filmmakers in 2025, not only pushing them to work faster and cheaper, but also creating competition for authentic human creativity. With AI able to create scripts, digital protagonists, background scenery and more, industry creatives need to reconsider and reconfigure the value they bring to film production. **BR**



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JAPAN.....JPY188 EUROPE.....EUR1.90
TÜRKIYE.....TRY5.00 HK.....HKD9.30 NEPAL.....RS40

主管单位：中国外文出版发行事业局

主办单位：中国外文局美洲传播中心（北京周报社）

出版单位：中国外文局美洲传播中心（北京周报社）

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印刷：北京华联印刷有限公司

北京周报 英文版2026年 第7期 ISSN 1000-9140

国内统一连续出版物号：CN11-1576/G2 邮发代号：2-922

广告许可证0171号 北京市期刊登记证733号

国内零售价：人民币9.00元



ON THE MOVE!

Passengers proceed through the entrance to board trains at Hankou Railway Station in Wuhan, Hubei Province, on February 2, the first day of the annual travel surge known as *chunyun*.

Often described as the world's largest human migration, this year's *chunyun* is expected to generate a record 9.5 billion passenger trips during the 40-day period, which runs until March 13.

This vast movement is a collective journey home for the Spring Festival, also known as the Chinese New Year, which falls on February 17 this year. Rooted in Chinese culture with many forms of celebration, the festival signals the beginning of the lunisolar calendar and symbolizes renewal and family reunion.



Steaming Into Spring

Villagers make traditional rice cakes in Mojqiao Village, a water town in Hangzhou, Zhejiang Province, on February 2. With Chinese New Year around the corner, falling on February 17 this year, the village has been hosting festive activities to recreate the traditional water town customs, building a joyful atmosphere for the upcoming holiday.

Wetland Protection

China has consistently strengthened the ecological conservation and restoration of its wetlands in recent years, with the country's total wetland area now ranking first in Asia and fourth in the world, the National Forestry and Grassland Administration said on February 2, World Wetlands Day.

As one of Earth's major ecosystems, wetlands possess irreplaceable ecological, social, economic and cultural value.

In recent years, China has bolstered its legal safeguards for wetland protection, and improved its governance system by enacting relevant laws and regulations. To date,

21 provincial-level regions have formulated or revised their local wetland protection regulations.

China has established and continues to refine a tiered wetland management system. It has designated 82 sites as wetlands of international importance and identified 80 sites as wetlands of national importance, along with 1,208 important provincial-level wetlands, according to the administration.

The country is home to 22 accredited international wetland cities, the highest number globally. Additionally, 903 national wetland parks have

been established, with approximately 90 percent offering free admission to the public, attracting around 320 million visitors annually.

Medical Insurance Fund

China's basic medical insurance fund reported steady operations in 2025, with total revenue reaching approximately 2.95 trillion yuan (\$423 billion) and expenditure standing at 2.42 trillion yuan (\$349 billion), the National Healthcare Security Administration said on January 30.

Breaking down the figures, revenue from the pooled fund

for basic medical insurance, which covers employees and includes maternity insurance, reached 1.83 trillion yuan (\$264 billion) in 2025. The expenditure totaled 1.36 trillion yuan (\$196 billion), of which maternity insurance benefits accounted for 135.97 billion yuan (\$19.6 billion), according to the administration.

As of late 2024, about 1.33 billion Chinese residents had joined the basic medical insurance schemes.

Childcare Subsidies

China has distributed childcare subsidies to more than 30 million babies to date, an official from the Ministry of Finance said on January 30.

Regarding applications approved in 2025 that have not yet been disbursed, the ministry will urge related authorities to guide local governments in accelerating the process, Liu Ying, Deputy Director of the ministry's Department of Social Security, said at a press conference.

The goal is to ensure that all outstanding subsidies are paid in full by the end of March, according to the official.

China introduced a nationwide childcare subsidy program in 2025, as part of broader efforts to support families and encourage childbirth. The program will offer families 3,600 yuan (\$516) per year for each child under the age of three.

Yangtze Finless Porpoises

The population of the Yangtze finless porpoise has increased to 1,426, an increase of 177 compared to the 2022 survey, thanks to a 10-year fishing ban for the Yangtze River that started from January 1, 2021, according to a press conference

on January 30.

The Yangtze finless porpoise is a national first-class protected wild animal, and its population status serves as a “barometer” of the Yangtze River’s ecological environment.

Over the five years since the launch of the fishing ban, positive results have been achieved under coordinated efforts, Zhang Zhili, Vice Minister of Agriculture and Rural Affairs, told the press conference.

From 2021 to 2025, 351 fish species were monitored in the Yangtze River basin, an increase of 43 species compared with the period before the fishing ban, official data showed.

Meanwhile, the annual number of artificially-bred Chinese sturgeon released into the Yangtze River has exceeded 1 million for two consecutive years. The natural population of the species in the Yangtze plummeted in the late 20th century due to intrusive human activities.

“While progress has been made, we also recognize that the restoration of aquatic biodiversity in the Yangtze River is a long and gradual process, and the protection efforts still face many challenges,” Zhang said.

Efforts will remain focused

on the 10-year fishing ban target, enhancing protection and restoration capabilities, and implementing resettlement and support policies for fishermen who stop fishing, he said.

Drug-Related Cases

China witnessed a sharp decline in its number of drug-related cases last year, following severe crackdowns and effective governance in recent years, the Supreme People’s Court (SPC) announced on February 2.

In 2025, 23,732 drug-related cases in first-instance trials were concluded in courts across China, down over 30 percent from the previous year, figures released by the SPC showed.

According to the SPC, it has consistently prioritized the stringent punishment of such crimes. From 2023 to 2025, courts across the country concluded 93,000 first-instance drug-related cases and sentenced 133,000 defendants. Among these individuals, 20 percent were given prison terms of five years or more, while the level of such jail terms for all criminal cases during the same period was much lower.

Liu Weibo, a senior SPC



Laying the Tracks of Tomorrow

Construction of the Xiong’an-Xinzhou high-speed railway underway in Baoding, Hebei Province, on February 1. The Xiong’an-Xinzhou high-speed railway is a pivotal section of the Beijing-Kunming high-speed railway.

judge, said that in recent years the number of new types of narcotics-related cases has been growing in China, reflecting a considerable structural shift in the country’s drug abuse patterns.

When adjudicating such new-type cases involving drugs like medical-use anesthetics and psychoactive substances, the

SPC not only imposes strict penalties for criminal activities, but also safeguards the legitimate medication needs of the Chinese people, the agency noted.

In addition, the SPC released information detailing six typical drug-related cases to help the public, especially the youth, better recognize and resist drugs.



Shadows of the Steed

Shadow puppets on display at an exhibition for the Chinese Zodiac Year of the Horse, which will begin on February 17, at the National Museum of China in Beijing on January 29. The exhibition features over 120 cultural relics and sets, celebrating the symbolism of the horse in traditional Chinese art and folklore.

Low-Altitude Economy

A system of standards for the low-altitude economy, defined as economic activities in airspace below 1,000 meters, is expected to be basically established by 2027, according to guidelines released by the State Administration for Market Regulation and several other central government departments on February 2.

The guidelines stated that by 2030, there will be more than 300 standards for the low-altitude economy, and a structurally optimized, advanced, reasonable and internationally compatible standards system will be basically formed, providing strong support for the sector's sound development.

The standards system will cover the entire industrial chain, including low-altitude aircraft, infrastructure, air traffic management, safety supervision and application scenarios.

China's low-altitude economy has entered a period of accelerated industrialization, forming a complete industrial ecosystem

that spans technological research and development, equipment manufacturing, operations services and infrastructure construction.

Shipbuilding Sector

China's shipbuilding industry maintained the world's largest market share in terms of three major indicators for the 16th consecutive year in 2025, according to data released by the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) on February 1.

The country's shipbuilding output reached 53.69 million deadweight tons (DWT) in 2025, up 11.4 percent year on year and accounting for 56.1 percent of the global total.

New orders reached 107.82 million DWT last year, representing a 69-percent share of the global market.

By the end of December 2025, the sector's holding orders stood at 274.42 million DWT, up 31.5 percent from the previous year. This volume accounted for 66.8 percent of the global market.

Green Electricity

Renewable energy accounted for over 60 percent of China's total installed power generation capacity in 2025 as the country's use of wind and solar power increased, official data showed on January 30.

China added more than 430 gigawatts (GW) of new wind and solar power capacity in 2025, lifting its total installed renewable capacity above 1,800 GW, the National Energy Administration said.

Electricity generation from renewable sources reached about 4 trillion kilowatt-hours (kwh) last year, exceeding the combined power consumption of the European Union's 27 member states, which stood at roughly 3.8 trillion kwh, according to the data.

China has built the world's largest renewable energy system, vowing to accelerate the green transition across the board.

Strategic Investor Mechanism

The China Securities Regulatory Commission (CSRC) announced that it has amended certain legal

interpretations in an effort to refine the strategic investor mechanism for the refinancing of listed companies.

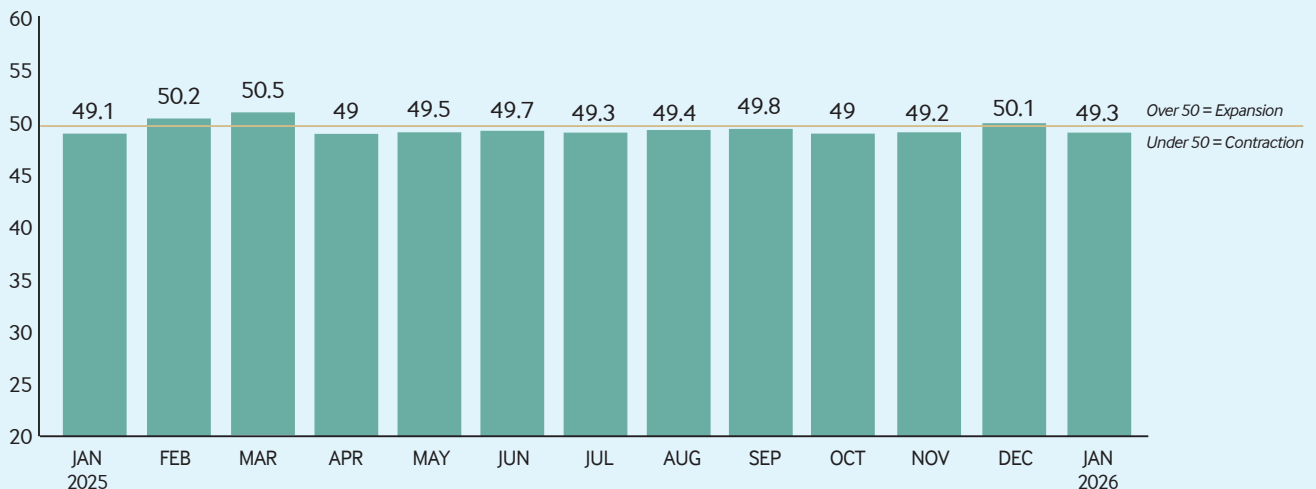
Some key amendments include expanding the category of strategic investors, clarifying their minimum shareholding ratios, defining basic requirements for capital investors, improving disclosure rules and strengthening regulatory oversight.

Regarding the expansion of the strategic investor category, the amended legal interpretation specifies that institutional investors including the national social security fund, basic pension funds, enterprise annuity funds, commercial insurance capital, public offering funds and bank wealth management may act as strategic investors that will make strategic investments in listed firms with "patient capital." Such investors are also classified as capital investors.

The interpretation sets a minimum shareholding requirement, stipulating that strategic investors should subscribe to no less than 5 percent of the shares in the current refinancing and may participate in

NUMBERS

China's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI)



corporate governance based on their shareholding ratio.

The interpretation also requires capital investors to gain an in-depth understanding of listed companies' industrial development, noting that they should be able to help introduce strategic resources, significantly improve corporate governance and internal controls, and enhance the core competitiveness of listed companies.

The CSRC said it is soliciting public feedback on the proposed amendments until March 2.

Software Industry Revenue

The software industry expanded rapidly in 2025, reporting double-digit growth in terms of revenue, according to data released by the MIIT on January 30.

Total revenue of the sector soared 13.2 percent year on year to more than 15.48 trillion yuan (\$2.2 trillion) last year, while total profit climbed 7.3 percent to more than 1.88 trillion yuan (\$271 billion).

The sub-sector of information technology services raked in 10.64

trillion yuan (\$1.5 trillion) of revenue in 2025, up 14.7 percent year on year. Specifically, the combined revenue of cloud computing and big data services rose 13.6 percent to 1.62 trillion yuan (\$233 billion).

The data also showed that revenue from products and services related to information security reached 223.5 billion yuan (\$32 billion), growing 6.7 percent year on year.

Non-Financial ODI

China's non-financial outbound direct investment (ODI) totaled \$145.66 billion in 2025, up 1.3 percent year on year, official data showed on January 30.

The data, released by the Ministry of Commerce, showed that China's outbound investment maintained steady and orderly growth last year.

The country's non-financial ODI in Africa, Europe and Asia increased 41 percent, 20.9 percent and 1.2 percent, respectively, in 2025.

In countries participating in the Belt and Road Initiative, a China-proposed initiative to boost

connectivity along and beyond the ancient Silk Road routes, China's non-financial ODI came in at \$39.67 billion in 2025, rising 17.6 percent year on year.

Turnover of contracted overseas projects by Chinese companies amounted to \$178.82 billion, up 7.7 percent year on year, while the value of newly signed contracts rose 8.2 percent year on year to \$289.22 billion, the data showed.

Cultural Sector Revenue

The cultural industry maintained steady growth in 2025, demonstrating strong resilience and vitality, according to data from the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), released on January 30.

The combined operating revenue of major cultural companies amounted to nearly 15.21 trillion yuan (\$2.18 trillion) in 2025, up 7.4 percent year on year.

Breaking it down by sector, cultural manufacturing revenue edged up 0.6 percent year on year to nearly 4.11 trillion yuan (\$592 billion), wholesale and retail grew 4

percent to 2.53 trillion yuan (\$365 billion), and services surged 12 percent to 8.58 trillion yuan (\$1.2 trillion).

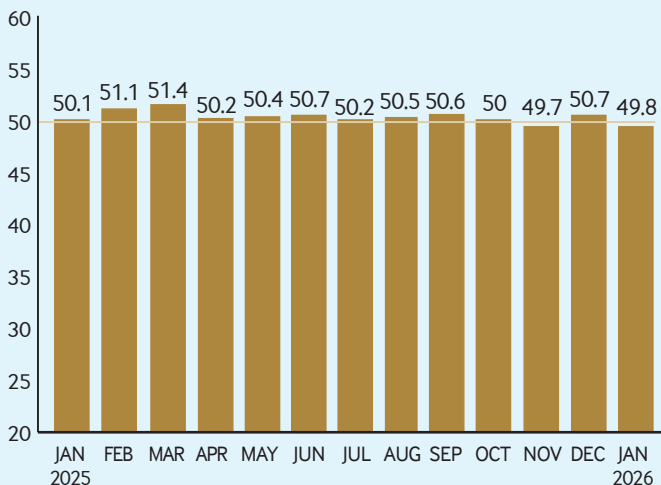
"Cultural services have played a strong supporting role," said Pan Xuhua, a statistician with the NBS, noting that cultural services firms contributed 88.3 percent of the total revenue growth of major cultural enterprises.

Sectors featuring new business forms, including digital publishing and online advertising, saw revenues increase 14.3 percent to nearly 6.83 trillion yuan (\$984 billion), 6.9 percentage points faster than the overall pace.

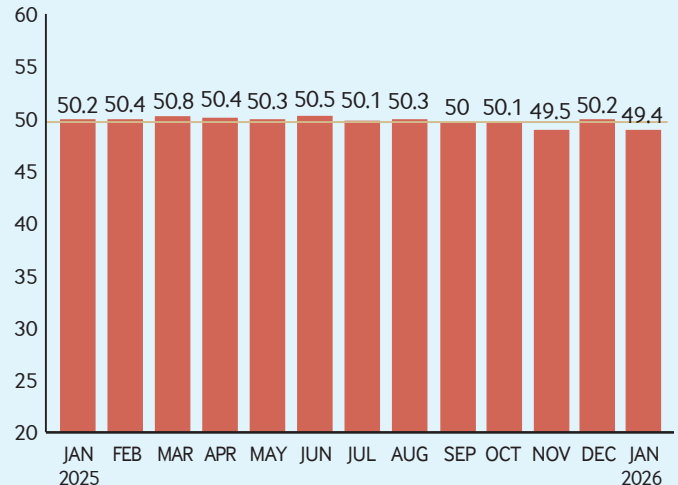
The cultural industry's profitability also improved last year, with profits of major cultural firms rising 6.5 percent year on year to 1.38 trillion yuan (\$199 billion).

These NBS data are based on a survey of cultural companies with annual revenue of 20 million yuan (\$2.9 million) or more, as well as those that meet other NBS-defined criteria.

China's Comprehensive PMI



China's Non-Manufacturing PMI



(Source: National Bureau of Statistics)

THIS WEEK WORLD



FRANCE

People watch a lion dance performance during a parade celebrating the upcoming Chinese New Year, which falls on February 17 this year, on the Champs-Élysées in Paris on February 1



DENMARK

A protester lays flowers at the gate of the U.S. Embassy in Copenhagen on January 31. Thousands of Danish citizens and veterans held a "silent march" in the Danish capital to protest recent controversial remarks made by U.S. President Donald Trump, downplaying the contributions of NATO soldiers



TÜRKIYE

Rescue workers at the site of a bus crash in Antalya Province on February 1. Eight people were killed and 26 others injured



IRAN

The aftermath of a huge fire that erupted in a market in Tehran on February 3. The fire had erupted earlier that same day



SINGAPORE

A Republic of Singapore Air Force AH-64D Apache helicopter performs during a media preview for the 10th Singapore Airshow on February 1. The airshow was held from February 3 to 8



ITALY

Revelers dressed in the theme of the Milano Cortina 2026 Olympic Winter Games in St. Mark's Square during the Venice Carnival 2026 on January 31. The carnival runs from January 31 to February 17

↓ ACTOR ACHIEVING LIVE-COMMERCE SUCCESS

Actor and philanthropist **Li Yapeng** set a livestreaming commerce (live-commerce) record in late January, with a single session generating 160 million yuan (\$23 million) in gross merchandise value, primarily from tea sales. The event took place amid public attention surrounding a rent crisis facing a Beijing-based nonprofit children's hospital that he co-founded in 2012.

The hospital owes over 20 million yuan (\$2.88 million) in rent. The debt accrued after its lease expired in 2019 and a renewal agreement with increased rent was not implemented. The financial dispute became public in 2025, when a court ruled in favor of the landlord. Many people have since donated money to help the hospital.



Li, 54, initiated the hospital, which specializes in treating cleft lip, after the birth of his daughter, Li Yan, who was born with this condition.

Glasses as Gateways

People's Daily Overseas Edition
February 4

As advances in voice interaction and visual recognition technologies accelerate, glasses are no longer just ordinary accessories, but hi-tech gadgets capable of real-time translation, automatic generation of conference notes and navigation.

AI glasses are fast becoming one of the most talked-about innovations in the tech world—and China is at the heart of the action. In recent months, momentum has picked up across the domestic market as major players race to stake their claims. Alibaba's Quark introduced a new model powered by the company's Qwen

AI assistant, while Li Auto, a new energy vehicle manufacturer, made a bold leap by launching its first smart glasses, Livis.

Yet turning glasses into digital devices is no small feat. Engineers must grapple with the delicate trade-offs between weight, battery life and computing power. Manufacturers are taking varied approaches to address this conundrum. Some focus on improving comfort by reducing weight and simplifying functions. Others target specific application scenarios like translation and note-taking. A few are betting on AI glasses' capacities for immersive entertainment through augmented reality-enhanced visuals.

If these solutions work, AI glasses may rise to become a new major gateway between the physical and virtual worlds.



Defining a 'Good Job'

Lifeweek
January 26

In China, the definition of a "good job" has shifted as the country moves through different stages of development. For older generations, it meant stable pay, a clear promotion pathway and a respectable social status. Around 2010, the most coveted employers were *Fortune* 500 multinationals and leading private firms. By about 2014, as the platform economy took off, the baton passed to China's top tech

"Chinese cuisine is a vivid carrier of Chinese culture, embodying meticulousness in food culture and the social values of family reunion and shared meals around the table."

Xing Ying, President of the World Federation of Chinese Catering Industry, speaking about a series of events being held to promote the Chinese New Year's Eve feast around the world

"This is a great example of public participation in paleontological discovery."

Xing Lida, a dinosaur specialist at China University of Geosciences (Beijing), in an interview with Xinhua News Agency about the discovery by a Beijing elementary school student of Asia's first amphibian track fossil from the middle Jurassic period while exploring a rocky slope in the suburbs in early 2025

giants such as Tencent and Alibaba Group, alongside a new wave of tech startups.

Then arrived the COVID-19 pandemic. The spread of uncertainty, coupled with pay cuts, sent many job seekers back toward government posts in search of stability. At the same time, newer industries—from livestreaming to social media content creation—pulled in those tempted by a quicker route to wealth and a greater level of autonomy.

Industry observers note that, compared with those born in the 1980s and 1990s, Chinese Gen Zs approach work with a mix of pragmatism and idealism. They tend to distrust grand organizational visions, yet place strong emphasis on personal skill-building, respect in the workplace and a healthy working environment.

Instead of doubling down on long work hours, some young people have opted to “lie flat,” which is about choosing a simple, low-pressure life over the pursuit of career success and material wealth. Paradoxically, it is often the most purpose-driven and ambitious who reach for this retreat first. Instead of urging individuals to “think positively,” some experts argue that the real fix lies upstream. The deeper problem, they suggest, is a short-term and ultimately unhealthy social script that does not allow for a slower pace of personal growth.

Click to Consult

Gmw.cn
February 3

On February 1, two hospitals in Beijing began offering online consultation services for first-time patients in three pediatric specialties: child growth and development, pediatric nutrition and pediatric dermatology. The initiative is a major step forward in China’s broader push to expand access to quality healthcare through digital services.

This move represents a departure from standard practice in the country, under which Internet-based consultations are generally limited to follow-up visits after an initial in-person appointment. And there were sound reasons for this. Initial diagnoses typically

require physical exams, lab tests and detailed assessments—things that cannot be easily completed online. What’s more, miscommunication during online consultations or a lack of hands-on evaluation may lead to delays in the treatment of urgent cases.

Yet for conditions that rely primarily on visual inspection such as skin issues, online consultations offer a safe and efficient alternative, sparing patients the time and effort of long commutes and extended waits for physical appointments.

Still, safety remains paramount. Doctors participating in first-time online consultations must be not only highly experienced but also trained in digital diagnostics. Health authorities must also enforce strict oversight to ensure accurate diagnosis and treatment.

↓ TENNIS VETERAN WINS THIRD GRAND SLAM DOUBLES TITLE

Chinese tennis player **Zhang Shuai**, 37, won her third Grand Slam women’s doubles title at the 2026 Australian Open on January 31, partnering with Belgium’s Elise Mertens. Her previous Grand Slam doubles victories came at the 2019 Australian Open and the 2021 U.S. Open, both with Australia’s Samantha Stosur.

Zhang turned professional in 2006. In 2016, facing retirement after 14 consecutive first-round losses in Grand Slam singles, Zhang broke through at the Australian Open, defeating then world No.2 Simona Halep and reaching the quarterfinals. She later endured a 24-match singles losing streak starting in 2023, which she ended by defeating American player Ashlyn Krueger at the 2024 China Open.

“These experiences have made me stronger and stronger. I believe I will get better and better,” Zhang said.



“These innovative products do more than just open up sales. They connect traditional dairy food with modern life.”

Wang Minjing, deputy head of Galutu, a town in Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region that is reinvigorating its dairy industry by creating new, modern versions of traditional products such as sugar-coated haws wrapped in traditional Mongolian milk skin, in a recent interview with Xinhua

“Recent research increasingly shows that subglacial volcanoes hidden beneath the massive ice sheet can... affect ice flow dynamics and the stability of the ice sheet.”

Cui Xiangbin, a researcher with the Polar Research Institute of China, in an interview with Xinhua about the establishment of the first comprehensive reference catalogue of the 207 known subglacial volcanoes in Antarctica by an international research team



COVER STORY

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By Peng Jiawei