TOP NEWS

Trees: Trails present a 'living exhibition'

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The objective is to offer a slower way of exploring a city better known for its fast pace of life.

According to the Beijing Municipal Forestry and Parks Bureau, the city boasts more than 42,000 trees that are over 100 years old. The oldest tree is a cypress in Miyun district. It is called "Jiulou Shibacha", which translates as "nine hugs and 18 branches". The tree is estimated to be 3,500 years old.

"Beijing is a city with many ancient trees," said Cang Er, the program's content and visual planner. "For residents and visitors, it is like walking through a huge exhibition of ancient trees."

The routes, which wind their way from downtown to the suburbs, can be covered on a bicycle, in a car, or on foot. The program's digital features help participants share what they discover.

At the Wuta Temple, which is home to the Beijing Stone Carving Art Museum, the leaves of two Ming Dynasty (1368-1644) ginkgo trees are beginning to turn yellow.

"In another week or two, there will be visitors everywhere taking photos of these old ginkgo trees, and the ground will be covered with golden leaves," said Su Tao, a volunteer guide who has worked at the museum since 2017.

Su has watched the once little-known museum become a crowd magnet, with its ancient trees becoming an attraction in their own right. "A museum preserves history behind glass. An ancient tree carries history in its trunk, branches and roots," he said.

At Ditan Park, three ancient cypress trees have earned the sobriquet "Three Generals", and they offer a glimpse into how trees can acquire personalities in the imagination of a city.

All three are classified as first-grade ancient trees. The "Old General" has the appearance of a seasoned soldier who has withstood the test of time. The "Great General" rises tall and lush. And the "One-Armed General" has survived the vagaries of nature. Beside the "One-Armed General", one of Cang's short reflections reads: "A tree allows its scars to exist. You don't have to be a perfect example."

By drawing attention to how trees grow, adapt and survive, Cang hopes that people can find a more personal connection with them. "To look at trees is to look at our own selves," she said.

That connection is also becoming part of a broader effort to protect trees for future generations. Recently, the Office of the Beijing Greening Commission issued an action plan for the development of ancient and notable tree protection in the city from 2026 to 2030.

Under the plan, Beijing aims to carry out rescue restoration and preventive protection for more than 3,000 ancient and notable trees over the next five years, while collecting and preserving genetic resources from 100 rare and endangered trees.

Beijing plans to create 100 ancient-tree habitat gardens and tree-centered villages, while boosting protection for clusters of ancient trees in areas including Zhongshan Park and Fragrant Hills Park.

Qu Dongyu, director-general of the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization, awards Yin Yuzhen (right) in Rome, Italy, on Thursday. Ronald Sakolsky (center), who supported Yin's efforts in combating desertification in the late 1990s, was invited as a special guest. ZHANG ZHOUXIANG / CHINA DAILY

Chinese desert fighter honored by FAO

By ZHANG ZHOUXIANG in Rome
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Three Chinese women, including Yin Yuzhen, who has devoted more than four decades to combating desertification in northern China, were among 100 women heroes in agrifood systems and rural development honored by the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations in Rome, Italy, on Thursday.

"This prize doesn't belong to me alone," said Yin upon receiving the award from Qu Dongyu, director-general of the FAO. Yin added that the award also honored the "efforts of countless brothers and sisters that supported us".

Over the past four decades, about 46 square kilometers of sandy land around Yin's home in Uxin Banner of Ordos in the Inner Mongolia autonomous region has been rehabilitated, with over eight million trees planted through efforts involving Yin, her family, local communities and government support, according to China's National Forestry and Grassland Administration.

The other two Chinese honorees were Dong Minfang from Hunan province, who promotes mechanized farming and supports rural women through agricultural cooperatives, and Yu Jinxiu from Hubei province, who has trained over 30,000 practitioners of moxibustion therapy, helping to preserve traditional skills and create rural jobs.

In May 2024, the UN General Assembly designated 2026 as the International Year of the Woman Farmer, aiming to recognize women's contributions to agrifood systems and to address persistent inequalities in access to land, finance, technology and decision-making. As part of the initiative, the FAO launched a program to honor women whose work has made a difference in agriculture, environmental protection and rural communities.

A special guest at the Rome ceremony was Ronald Sakolsky, a retired history teacher from the United States who was moved by Yin's efforts and raised $5,000 to support her tree-planting efforts in the late 1990s, thus beginning a friendship that has endured for about 27 years.

"Everything she gets, Ms Yin, she deserves," Sakolsky told China Daily. "She has worked very, very hard to take care of Mother Earth and to prove that the impossible is possible."

Their friendship attracted international attention after President Xi Jinping recounted their story during his remarks at a state dinner hosted by US President Donald Trump at the White House in Washington, DC, on Sept 24.

Xi said their story touches the hearts of many Chinese people and stands as a shining example of the friendly exchanges between the two peoples.

Sakolsky also said that their friendship demonstrated the potential for closer people-to-people ties between the two countries.

"Ms Yin and I are showing the world that Chinese and Americans can get along, but we are only two people and I hope other people want to be like us," he said.

"We live on one Earth. It is not a Chinese Earth or an American Earth. It is only one Earth ... so for the sake of mankind, we must find a way to get along. We don't have to be best friends. We just need to be friends."

Congress: Research provides solid insights

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"The year 1994 saw renewed study after China's archaeological system had matured, with a focus on understanding the local cultural sequence," Zheng said.

"The latest excavation, conducted from last year to this year, represents a new exploration in an era that emphasizes science-based archaeology and the tracing of Chinese civilization's origins," she said.

"By gathering information on the settlement, subsistence and social structure of Xiyin society, we have deepened our understanding of the origins of Chinese civilization," she added.

Zheng noted that the site has witnessed the development of China's archaeology, from introducing Western methodologies to establishing an indigenous disciplinary system, then moving toward multidisciplinary research, and now toward a public cultural undertaking to serve the public's spiritual needs.

"The past century of research on the Xiyin site is the epitome of the growth of China's archaeology, and is about generations of scholars who have continued to study the same site. From interpreting objects to reconstructing society, and from reading stratigraphic layers to comprehending civilization, such sustained research sheds light on Chinese civilization with solid evidence," she said.

Shi Jinsong, director of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences' Institute of Archaeology, said the century-long journey of Chinese archaeology offers an opportunity to reflect on the future of the discipline and even human society.

"We can see from our experience that archaeology contributes to civilizational studies mainly through two approaches: tracing the origins of Chinese civilization and promoting mutual learning among civilizations," he said.

Looking inward, archaeologists trace the origins, development paths and distinctive features of Chinese civilization, giving it a clearer presence among world civilizations. Looking outward, in-depth and broad comparative studies with other countries and civilizations reveal the similarities and differences between civilizations, providing a richer and more comprehensive understanding of global civilizations.

"Both point to the same goals — to understand the lineage of civilizational development from ancient remains and to unveil the details of historical progress and the drivers of civilizational development. On that basis, we can reflect on the development direction of human society," Shi said.

The congress this year includes 28 professional committees, which will together give more than 570 reports in 28 parallel sessions focusing on different historical periods and different fields of archaeological studies, such as underwater archaeology, zooarchaeology, which is the study of animal remains from archaeological sites, and archaeometry, the use of scientific techniques in dating archaeological remains.

Beyond the academic sessions, the congress will also reach out to the public. As part of the event, 22 public lectures are being organized in Yuncheng and other cities of Shanxi.

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Relations: To build harmony with differences is our choice

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This analogy partly explains why being seen as "Number 1" matters so much to some nations. But their "Number 1" status seems to exclude the existence of "Number 2" or "Number 3". In a race, the fastest runner finishes first, a slower runner ends up second, someone still slower finishes third, and so on. All runners share the quality of "speed" and the difference is only one of degree. This is precisely what can get overlooked when international relations are viewed primarily in terms of mutually exclusive binary oppositions.

Some are convinced that their political, economic and social arrangements are not just the best but the only viable options, dismissing alternatives. This reminds one of an old joke: "What is the definition of a Puritan? Someone who cannot stand the thought of someone, somewhere, having fun." A modern version of the joke would be: "What is the definition of a certain type of Western public figure? Someone who cannot stand the thought of someone, somewhere, having an alternative."

But, alternatives do exist. Writing from Qufu, Shandong province, the birthplace of Confucius, I reflected on his teachings at this year's Nishan Forum on World Civilizations. What might Confucius have said about the implications of civilizational differences? Do they inevitably mean conflict, as Huntington would have us believe? Difference is a necessary, though not sufficient, condition for conflict; Confucius, however, believed that it is also a precondition for harmony. His concept from the *Analects* — of "being harmonious but not uniform" — suggests that harmony can emerge from the coexistence of different entities, resolving tensions without erasing their fundamental differences.

A beautiful melody must consist of different notes. Their collapse into a single note would destroy the very beauty that harmony engenders. Similarly, different civilizations could make the planet harmonious by remaining different.

Is this an unrealistic ideal? Perhaps. Conflict, as noted above, requires difference. However, the existence of differences should not by itself cause conflict. Some politicians love to shout: "Choose a side!" The choice before us is whether to use our civilizational differences to build harmony or to abuse them as excuses for conflict.

The author is a Sinologist, chair scholar at the Macedonian Academy of Sciences and Arts. The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.

Moderating shift in US views still underway

Improved public opinion on China among Americans seen as offering hope for ties

By YANG RAN in Beijing
and **YIFAN XU** in Washington

A shift in public sentiment in the United States toward China, particularly among younger people, could open more room for a less confrontational approach to bilateral relations, experts said, while cautioning that US public opinion is still evolving and its ultimate impact on policy remains to be seen.

Recent surveys document a growing desire for cooperation and engagement with China among the US public. The report on the recent Chicago Council Survey, for instance, said that Americans rated China at an average of 39 on a zero-to-100 scale, up from 26 in 2024. A majority of respondents in the survey, which was conducted from July 10 to 21 by the nonpartisan, nonprofit Chicago Council on Global Affairs, advocated "friendly cooperation and engagement".

"There does appear to be a mood shift underway in the US toward China," said Ryan Hass, director of the John L. Thornton China Center at the Brookings Institution, a nonprofit public policy organization based in Washington, DC, during an online event on Tuesday. Hass noted that this change appears to cut across party lines and is likely driven by multiple factors.

One potential driver, according to Hass, is the evolving political landscape in Washington. While US policy toward China for much of the past decade was organized around great-power competition, President Donald Trump's emphasis since returning to office is on his personal relationship with President Xi Jinping and on keeping US-China rivalry within manageable bounds, he said.

Yuan Sha, deputy director of the Department for Global Governance and International Organizations Studies at the China Institute of International Studies, attributes the softening of US public sentiment toward China to several key factors.

"China's rising national strength, most notably its advances in high technology such as artificial intelligence, has enhanced its international standing. In addition, against a backdrop of frequent wars and conflicts worldwide, China has positioned itself as a defender of peace and development rather than a disrupter, further improving its global reputation," she said.

Bilaterally, the "flagship effect" of China-US head-of-state diplomacy has helped stabilize relations after a period of decline, Yuan added. "At the same time, the negative effects of the US tariff war against China have become increasingly visible to ordinary Americans, leading the public to better understand the reciprocal nature of China-US economic and trade relations."

Generational differences in US public opinion on China are also notable. A January study by the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, a global think tank based in Washington, DC, found that 62 percent of Americans believed that their lives would not worsen if China surpassed the US in national strength. Among those ages 18 to 29, only 27 percent were concerned about this, dramatically lower than the 52 percent among those 65 and older. Further supporting this, a Chicago Council analysis in August indicated that only 34 percent of Gen Z respondents viewed China's rise as a critical threat, compared with 43 percent of millennials, 56 percent of Gen X, and 62 percent of baby boomers.

Hass, the John L. Thornton China Center director, said that this generational divide is driven by how younger Americans encounter China. Platforms like TikTok, the release of advanced AI models by Chinese companies like DeepSeek, visits to China by US social media influencers, and online exposure to everyday life in China offer younger audiences images and narratives beyond traditional US mainstream media, "softening perceptions and images of China", he said.

Wei Zongyou, a professor at Fudan University's Center for American Studies, said that younger generations are generally and relatively more open-minded, optimistic and less prejudiced. "Their adeptness with social media bypasses traditional US media stereotypes, providing them with a more authentic, multifaceted and comprehensive view of China, leading to more positive impressions."

Hass said that any durable US strategy toward China will require support beyond Washington's policy establishment and should reflect "the national mood and the priorities of the American people". He said that if this moderating trend continues, it could become relevant in the 2028 presidential campaign, with candidates "reading the room" and calibrating their positions accordingly, although he stressed that such an outcome is "far from certain".

According to Yuan, from the China Institute of International Studies, a more moderate US public perspective could foster a better social atmosphere for "rational voices" in US-China policy debates. However, she cautioned that the bipartisan consensus on competition with China remains unchanged. "The continuation of positive interactions next year is uncertain, especially given that pre-election periods often see an increase in anti-China rhetoric from politicians."

Wei, the Fudan University professor, added that sustained positive public perceptions of China, especially among young people in the US, could constrain hawkish rhetoric toward China by hardline politicians and provide a more solid public opinion base for improved US-China relations. However, he added that such public sentiment is still transitional, and its eventual efficacy in shifting US policy remains uncertain.

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Challenging situation

Kidney patients receive dialysis treatment at al-Thawra hospital in Taiz, Yemen, on Monday. Hospitals across the country are struggling to cope with a sharp rise in war casualties, while intensified fighting along multiple front lines has cut off vital aid to around 800,000 people, humanitarian agencies said on Wednesday. EBRAHIM AL-SUHAIBI / REUTERS