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XI'S VISION | POLICY DIRECTION

Opening-up remains key to nation's growth

President Xi has used annual meetings over years to signal policy priorities

By ZHAO JIA
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In 2013, as China's trade and investment ties with the world continued to grow, Mouhamadou Bassirou Pouye, a Senegalese businessman, made a decision that would reshape his life. Instead of observing China's development from afar, he chose to build his career inside the country.

"I decided to come to China because of its rapid development, economic opportunities, cultural richness and openness to international talent," Pouye said. "Its dynamic environment and growing global influence make it an attractive destination for business, education and cultural exchange."

More than a decade later, what began as a personal journey has evolved into a professional mission. Now serving as the secretary-general of the Yiwu China and Africa Business Council in Zhejiang province,

Pouye has spent 12 years facilitating trade and entrepreneurship between China and African countries — a role that mirrors China's broader engagement with the Global South.

For him, reform and opening-up is not an abstract slogan, but a lived reality. "China's opening-up policy, launched in the late 1970s, has been a cornerstone of its economic transformation," Pouye said. "For individuals, this policy has opened doors for entrepreneurs like myself, as well as students and professionals, fostering mutual understanding and collaboration."

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Illuminate New Year



Visitors enjoy illuminated horse-themed lanterns at Guangzhou Cultural Park, a traditional highlight of the Spring Festival. The month-long celebration concludes today with the Lantern Festival, the 15th day of the first month on the traditional Chinese calendar. The week-long colorful show features 22 themed lantern sets and nearly 1,000 colorful lights. Horse motifs, symbolizing good fortune and vitality for the Year of the Horse, take center stage alongside Lingnan-style landscape installations. PARKER ZHENG / CHINA DAILY

IT'S LANTERN FESTIVAL — TIME TO HAVE A BALL

Yuanxiao or tangyuan? Whatever you call them, these chewy, flavor-filled glutinous rice dumplings are a quintessential treat

By DENG ZHANGYU
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Outside a bustling Daoxiangcun pastry shop in Beijing on Monday, a day before this year's Lantern Festival, a chef deftly shakes a bamboo sieve, transforming fillings like sesame paste, red bean, hawthorn jam — even chocolate — into snowy-white balls called *yuanxiao*. Nearby, simmering in a large pot, these glutinous dumplings gently puff up, releasing an irresistible fragrance to customers and passersby.

In Shanghai, office worker Li Meng waits in a long line outside Meixin dim sum shop, craving its famous crab roe *tangyuan*.

Whatever you call them, *yuanxiao* or *tangyuan*, the chewy, flavor-filled glutinous rice balls are a quintessential treat during Lantern Festival, also known as Yuanxiao Festival, which marks the first full moon in the first month of the Chinese calendar and the official end of

Chinese New Year celebrations.

But be warned, asking "yuanxiao or tangyuan?" is like asking "Coke or Pepsi?" in China. It's a debate that ignites passionate opinions nationwide.

So what's the difference? It's all about the process. In the north, chefs create *yuanxiao* by rolling the filling in dry glutinous rice flour, much like building a snowball. In the south, *tangyuan* are crafted by wrapping glutinous rice dough around a filling, similar to making dumplings.

Zhang Libin, a chef from Fujian province in East China who is now based in Beijing, knows both worlds well. He serves both sweet peanut and savory pork-stuffed *tangyuan* on Lantern Festival nights in one bowl, a tradition from his hometown.

"Just sweet ones can be too much. They're the same food, just different



FOOD

regional styles," he said.

Zhang noted that *yuanxiao*, typically sweet, offer a chewier texture, while *tangyuan* are softer and silkier. No matter the name, both symbolize family unity, harmony and hopes for a prosperous year.

They're more than just food; they represent reunion, said historian Luo Shuwei.

This tradition dates back to the Song Dynasty (960-1279), when they were called "floating round balls". By the Ming and Qing dynasties (1368-1911), the north-south divide was firmly established.

Flavors also vary by region. *Yuanxiao* are usually sweet and can be boiled or deep-fried. *Tangyuan* boast diverse sweet and savory options. Consider the lard-and-sesame *tangyuan*, from Ningbo in Zhejiang province, the chicken-stuffed *tangyuan* with chicken soup from Xingyi, Guizhou province, or the

ones filled with pork and shepherd's purse found in Yangzhou, Jiangsu province. Chaozhou in Guangdong province even has "duck mother dumplings" (*yamunian*) with various sweet fillings such as green bean paste, red bean paste, taro and sesame sugar.

While *yuanxiao* appear mainly around Lantern Festival, *tangyuan* are now available throughout the year, leading to wild flavor innovations like durian, snail noodles, and, as previously mentioned, even chocolate!

This year, Li Meng is ordering matcha and chocolate-filled *tangyuan* online. "Sweet or savory, these rice balls celebrate regional cultures and emotional connections," she said.

So, grab a bowl and join the delicious debate! Whether you prefer the squishy bite of *yuanxiao* or the silky embrace of *tangyuan*, you're partaking in a centuries-old tradition that embodies the warmth and unity of Lantern Festival.



Displaced people fleeing Israeli strikes in southern Lebanon sit on a pickup truck on a highway linking the southern port city of Sidon to Beirut, the capital of Lebanon, on Monday. MOHAMMED ZAATARI / AP

FM calls for joint efforts to de-escalate Mideast tensions

By ZHAO JIA
and LIU JIANQIAO in Beijing
and CUI HAIBEI in Dubai, UAE

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Foreign Minister Wang Yi held separate phone conversations on Monday with his Iranian, Omani and French counterparts, calling for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East and intensified diplomatic efforts to prevent further escalation of the situation.

Iranian Foreign Minister Seyed Abbas Araghchi briefed Wang on the latest developments in the region and said the military action initiated by the United States violated international law and crossed Iran's red line, leaving Iran with no choice but to exercise full self-defense.

Araghchi noted that China has publicly articulated a position of fairness and justice, and he expressed hope that China would continue to play a constructive role in preventing further escalation of regional tensions.

Wang reiterated China's support for Iran in safeguarding its sovereignty, security, territorial integrity and national dignity, and in defending its legitimate rights and interests.

He voiced confidence that Iran will maintain national and social stability

under the current circumstances, take seriously the legitimate concerns of neighboring countries, and ensure the safety of Chinese citizens and institutions in Iran.

During his phone conversation with Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr bin Hamad Al Busaidi, Wang commended Oman for its active mediation in facilitating Iran-US negotiations and its sustained efforts to uphold regional peace.

Wang said that China attaches importance to the legitimate concerns of Gulf countries and supports them in safeguarding their sovereignty and national security. The spillover of the conflict does not serve the fundamental and long-term interests of Gulf states, he said.

Wang expressed hope that Gulf countries will strengthen independence and self-reliance, oppose external interference, foster good-neighborly relations, enhance solidarity and cooperation, and truly hold their future and destiny in their own hands.

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AI helping to redefine entrepreneurship

By WANG SONGSONG
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Across China, the rapid rise of one-person companies, or OPCs, empowered by artificial intelligence tools and strong ecosystem support, is reshaping entrepreneurship, as innovators leverage AI as a virtual team to drive business creation and growth.

According to a recent report by the Zhongguancun Talent Association in Beijing, metropolises such as Beijing, Shanghai and Shenzhen in Guangdong province have increasingly become the top choices for OPCs, particularly in local science and technology parks. The popularization of AI technology, government support and a talent pool are among the major factors attracting one-person companies and helping them grow.

Dong Bo, president of Kr Star Innovation, operator of the ZGC AI North Latitude Hub, which is an AI development hub in Beijing's Haidian district, described the hub as an enterprise cluster

providing a supportive ecology for high-tech businesses. Its mission is to help integrate AI-driven companies, tech media, developers and tool-chain providers — entities that offer comprehensive suites of tools for building and managing AI applications.

The hub currently hosts 20 OPCs, whose entrepreneurs mainly come from domestic and foreign universities and technology enterprises.

One of the hub's members is Wu Zhen, a 44-year-old entrepreneur. He joined in January as the founder of an intelligent virtual performance platform.

Initially serving as a cross-city, cross-cultural digital performance solution during the pandemic, the platform now supports a wide range of applications, including stage-based educational courses, motion capture, AI-generated short films and AI virtual idols.

According to Wu, AI acts as a round-the-clock virtual team that plays a significant role in copywriting, content generation, visual and

video creation, and basic software and web development. AI also adapts content for cultural tourism scenarios, such as AI-generated content light shows.

"In the age of AI, what's truly scarce is judgment, aesthetic sensibility and long-term narrative vision. OPCs are not a transitional form. They may well remain a vital and dynamic organizational model for a long time," he said.

Wu himself exemplifies the rapid development of OPCs. The report also found that as of June 2025, the number of one-person limited liability companies, primarily in the digital economy and service industries, exceeded 16 million nationwide. The number of newly registered OPCs reached 2.86 million in the first half of 2025, surging 47 percent year-on-year.

As with cross-border e-commerce, the use of AI digital humans helped OPCs reduce labor costs by 70 percent and increase sales by 300 percent.

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