

Prospering haven

Bird and butterfly monitoring helps boost reserve's biodiversity **GOING GREEN, PAGE 7**

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CHINA DAILY

中國日報

MONDAY, May 19, 2025

chinadaily.com.cn

RMB ¥2

VISIONARY PATHWAY | BUILDING BEYOND HISTORY

Preservation of Gulangyu sets high mark

Safeguarding vibrant island's cultural heritage has long been Xi's priority

By **XU WEI, ZHANG CHUNYAN** and **HU MEIDONG** in Xiamen

At the heart of the island of Gulangyu's Bagua Mansion, Ian Wakeley, a pipe organ engineer from Australia, leans over a sprawling theater organ, his hands moving with precision as he and his team work to assemble the intricate musical instrument.

Every piece, every detail, is meticulously placed as the organ takes shape — one of the 70 organs housed in the famed pipe organ museum on the island, which is located off the coast of Xiamen, a city in southeastern China's Fujian province.

For the past two decades, Wakeley has been installing and repairing organs in locations across the island, each one adding to Gulangyu's reputation as a haven for music and history.

The island, also known as Kulangsu in the local dialect, has been widely acclaimed as a living monument to the fusion of Western grandeur and Chinese heritage.

"For me, this isn't just about restoring an instrument," Wakeley said. "It's about preserving a legacy."

"I look back after 20 years since the first organ went in, and it makes me very happy to be part of that history on the island. The island's history is a fusion of the East meeting the West. It has always had a special feel — the architecture, the buildings, the people. It's all very welcoming."

Wakeley's dedication to the preservation of Gulangyu's musical legacy is part of a broader, sustained effort to protect the island's rich historical fabric. This effort, which began decades ago, has been championed by many individuals, but no one has been as instrumental as Xi Jinping, who, as Xiamen's vice-mayor in the 1980s, set the course for the island's preservation.

In the 1980s, when Bagua Mansion, a cornerstone of Gulangyu's appeal, was in a state of disrepair, and the city was looking to refurbish the red-domed building and turn it into a city museum, Xi earmarked a special fund of 300,000 yuan (\$41,600) to support its renovation efforts.

Xi's leadership was instrumental in the creation of the 1985-2000 Xiamen socioeconomic development strategy, which highlighted the importance of Gulangyu as a "national treasure".

The plan, which dedicated a special chapter to Gulangyu, called for careful preservation of both the island's natural beauty and its cultural heritage.

Xu Jinmin, an official with the Administrative Committee of the

Xiamen Gulangyu-Wanshishan Scenic Area, said the strategy, compiled by a team led by Xi, elevated the importance of the island to an unprecedented height and paved the way for its wide-ranging preservation efforts.

"The strategy set the tone for the preservation and development of Gulangyu over the following decades," Xu noted.

Another important measure taken during Xi's tenure in Xiamen was the island's recognition by the State Council, China's Cabinet, as a National Scenic Area in 1988, paving the way for its enhanced conservation.

The island's inscription as a UNESCO World Heritage Site in 2017 was the culmination of years of work, much of it set in motion by Xi's vision for the site.

Following the UNESCO recognition, President Xi, who is also general secretary of the Communist Party of China Central Committee, again stressed the need to carefully safeguard the cultural heritage left by ancestors and better carry forward the nation's historical legacy.

"The application for UNESCO World Heritage status is aimed at better protection and utilization. It is essential to summarize successful experiences, draw on international concepts, and improve long-term mechanisms," he said.

Wakeley, who has made more than 30 trips to the island, praised Xi's unwavering commitment to the preservation of Gulangyu and its cultural treasures.

"For the leadership to say this is important, and (that) we must preserve and protect cultural heritage — that's very important, not just in China, but for any country," he said.

Cai Wanxia, an analyst at the Fujian Academy of Social Sciences, noted that the preservation of Gulangyu exemplifies Xi's dedication to protecting national cultural treasures. "It also serves as a vivid embodiment of his thoughts on cultural heritage protection," she said.

"Walking into Gulangyu, while we appreciate its precious historical and cultural heritage, we can also genuinely feel the vibrant atmosphere of this historic international settlement," Cai said. "This fully demonstrates the foresight and long-term vision of President Xi in protecting cultural heritage."

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Xi extends congratulations to 34th Arab League Summit

President Xi Jinping sent a message on Saturday to Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid, the rotating chairperson of the Council of Heads of the League of Arab States, extending his congratulations on the convening of the 34th Arab League Summit in Baghdad, Iraq.

Xi noted that since its establishment 80 years ago, the League of Arab States has always been committed to promoting the unity and self-strengthening of the Arab world, voicing actively the shared

concerns of Arab states and promoting peace, stability and prosperity in the Middle East.

He said the world is undergoing rapid changes unseen in a century, and the situation in the Middle East is evolving in a complex way.

The Arab countries' adherence to independence and autonomy, promotion of development and rejuvenation, and safeguarding of fairness and justice have all played an active role in advancing the influence of the Global South, Xi said.

He noted that the vigorous development of relations between China

and Arab states in recent years has set an example of unity and cooperation among developing countries.

Xi said that he and Arab leaders agreed to engage in building a China-Arab community with a shared future for the new era at the initial China-Arab States Summit held in December 2022, and he believes that the second summit, which will be held in China in 2026, will mark another significant milestone in the history of China-Arab ties.

Noting that China and Arab countries have consistently viewed their relationships from a strategic and

long-term perspective, Xi said that looking ahead, China will remain a trustworthy friend and partner for them, standing firmly on the side of the just cause of Arab states.

China is willing to work with Arab states to deepen political mutual trust, push mutually beneficial cooperation, increase people-to-people and cultural exchanges, join hands on their respective paths toward modernization, and build a higher-level China-Arab community with a shared future, he added.

XINHUA

Countdown to Tourism Day



Performers from various ethnic groups participate in a parade on Sunday in Guiyang, Guizhou province, to mark the countdown to China Tourism Day, which falls on Monday. Along the 2.3-kilometer route of the parade, nearly 3,600 participants showcased diverse ethnic cultures, vibrant intangible cultural heritage and immersive cultural tourism experiences. PROVIDED TO CHINA DAILY **Comment, page 9**

PRESSURE OF GAOKAO SUCCESS LOOMS OVER STUDENTS' NEW WEEKEND FREEDOM

Policy to enforce two-day break sees mixed response of anxiety, relief

By **ZOU SHUO**

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The recent enforcement of a two-day weekend break policy for high school students in China has sparked widespread debate, and a mix of reactions including relief, anxiety and resistance among students, teachers and parents.

Some argue it is a much-needed opportunity for stressed students to recharge their batteries, while others fear it will only hinder academic progress in regions with fewer education resources.

In the past, it was common for high school students to take classes during the weekend in preparation for the all-important national college entrance exam, or *gaokao*. However,



after the new semester began in early spring, students in multiple provinces including Zhejiang, Jiangsu, Hunan and Guangdong can now enjoy two-day weekends.

Since April 11, the Ministry of

Education has publicly punished a number of high schools in Hebei, Jiangsu and Henan provinces for having classes during weekends. The punishments follow a 2022 guideline issued by the ministry reiterating that high schools should not organize classes or tutoring sessions during weekends.

See **Weekend**, page 2

Ancient silk manuscript at long last back in China

By **ZHAO HUANXIN** in Washington and **XU LIN** in Beijing

Remnants of an ancient Chinese silk manuscript, lost long ago, finally touched down at Beijing Capital International Airport on Sunday, ending nearly 80 years of overseas wandering.

The flight to Beijing followed a handover ceremony in the United States on Friday at the Chinese embassy in Washington, DC.

The Smithsonian's National Museum of Asian Art returned the remnants of the Zidanku Silk Manuscript, estimated to be more than 2,300 years old, from its collection and formally transferred them to China's National Cultural Heritage Administration.

As the earliest Chinese silk texts discovered to date, and the only known ones from the Warring States

Period (475-221 BC) unearthed in China, the manuscript was named after the Zidanku area of Changsha, Hunan province, from where it was stolen by grave robbers in 1942. It was then illegally taken to the US in 1946.

The parts of the three-volume manuscript that have been returned to China are *Wuxing Ling* and *Gongshou Zhan*, known by scholars as Volumes II and III, respectively. They are about taboos and auspicious practices in rituals and military actions.

Volume I of the manuscript has yet to be returned to China. The Smithsonian said that this volume is privately owned, but the National Cultural Heritage Administration said it will continue to work for its return.

"With more than 900 characters and rich in myth and numerology, the manuscript reflects the depth and



Workers unpack a box containing the remnants of an ancient Chinese silk manuscript at Beijing Capital International Airport on Sunday before delivering them to the National Administration of Cultural Heritage.

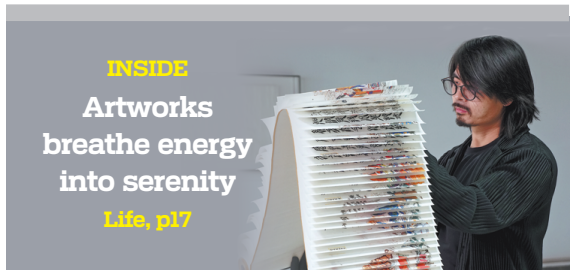
FU TIAN / CHINA NEWS SERVICE

endurance of Chinese civilization, having great significance in studying ancient Chinese characters, literature and thinking," said Xie Feng, the Chinese ambassador to the US, during the transfer ceremony at the embassy.

Xie added that the two volumes'

return "is a cultural milestone and a testament to China-US cooperation in heritage preservation, bringing new vitality to people-to-people exchange and friendship".

See **Relics**, page 3



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Artworks
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国内统一连续出版物号: CN 11-0091 国际标准连续出版物号: ISSN 0253-9543 代号: 1-3



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Vol. 45 — No. 14040

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