

VIEWS

Chen Pu and Zhang Lili

Xizang writes new chapter in development

The founding of the Xizang autonomous region in September 1965 marked the beginning of a new chapter in the region's history, as people of all ethnic groups in Xizang embarked on the path of socialist construction and development together with the rest of the country. In the six decades since then, Xizang has made remarkable economic and social achievements, creating a new era in its development journey.

In the new era, the region's economic aggregate has grown rapidly. By 2024, its GDP reached 276.49 billion yuan (\$38.49 billion), while its innovation capacity continued to rise, with increasing investment in science and technology and vigorous expansion of the high-tech digital industry. By 2024, the value added from Xizang's digital economy reached 27.5 billion yuan, accounting for more than 10 percent of its GDP. And coordinated regional development advanced steadily, with the narrowing of the urban-rural income gap to 2.57:1 in 2024.

Green development, too, has gained pace, while the proportion of days with excellent air quality has remained above 99 percent, major rivers and lakes meet or exceed class III water quality standards, and the soil condition continues to be stable and safe.

In 2024, total retail sales of consumer goods in the region and its total import-export increased by 7.2 percent and 15.4 percent, respectively. Shared development has also made headway, with notable improvement in people's livelihoods and social undertakings. While a multi-tier social security system has taken shape, per capita disposable income and per capita consumption expenditure in 2024 grew by 8.2 percent and 10.2 percent year-on-year, respectively.

Xizang has completed a large number of major projects vital to the economy and people's well-being, clearing infrastructure bottlenecks. The total length of roads open to traffic stands at 123,300 kilometers, and the number of civil aviation routes exceeds 190, with new hydro-power projects beginning to generate electricity. The large-scale projects have not only narrowed the long-standing infrastructure gaps, but also laid a solid foundation for high-quality development. In 2024, Xizang's fixed-asset investment grew by 19.6 percent, playing a key role in driving economic growth and structural adjustment.

Xizang has also developed its distinctive industries. It has fostered nine major industries that align with local conditions, creating new engines for high-quality development. Traditional industries have undergone rapid upgrading, while distinct



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sectors have grown stronger, emerging industries have expanded, and future industries are being planned, resulting in a modern industrial structure featuring a solid agricultural base, higher manufacturing capacity and a modern service sector.

Moreover, the living standards of Xizang residents have improved dramatically, with the region achieving the historic mission of eradicating poverty. As a matter of fact, in 2024, Xizang's per capita GDP reached 75,237 yuan, with per capita disposable income reaching 31,358 yuan. Rising incomes have boosted consumption, helping create a more balanced consumption structure. In actual terms, per capita consumer spending stood at 18,983 yuan in 2024.

High-quality development is key to building a modern socialist country. In the new era, Xizang must continue to pursue high-quality development by faithfully applying the new development philosophy and drawing on six decades of experience. The region should focus on optimizing the development pattern, strengthening infrastructure and factor allocation, improving institutions and leveraging resource advantages to achieve both qualitative and quantitative growth. Its goal should be to reach the national average development level.

However, given its low starting point and late take-off, Xizang still faces structural weaknesses. Over the past 60 years, the central government has provided strong policy support for Xizang. As such, the region should continue to make full use of the preferential policies, deepen reform, strengthen factor mobility and narrow the infrastructure gaps. Also, it should foster "new quality productive forces", boost demand, and advance urban-rural integration, all while improving the people's well-being.

Common prosperity is an essential requirement of socialism with Chinese characteristics. So Xizang must advance it vigorously by leveraging its institutional strengths, and properly balancing efficiency and equity. This means Xizang needs to build systems that promote both material and cultural wealth, advance urban-rural integration to enrich rural areas, and strengthen the sense of community among residents to enhance spiritual prosperity, ensuring that all ethnic groups in the region steadily move toward achieving common prosperity.

Chen Pu is director of the Economic Strategy Research Institute of the Xizang Academy of Social Sciences; and Zhang Lili is an assistant researcher at the same institute. The views don't necessarily represent those of China Daily.



Kang Bing

The author is former deputy editor-in-chief of China Daily. kangbing@chinadaily.com.cn

Rural vitalization will make green countryside more pristine

To escape the summer heat in Beijing, my wife and I have been living in a fishing village 2,000 kilometers northeast of the capital since late June. Surrounded by vast wetlands and situated on the Wusulijiang River, our village, Zhuaji, is the easternmost village of China. As a result, Zhuaji is the first place in China to receive the sun's rays every morning.

Daily temperatures in Zhuaji vary between 13 C and 27 C even at the height of summer, the air quality is excellent throughout the year, and the views of the ever-changing river and the wetlands are breathtaking. Life in the village is relaxed and convenient because Zhuaji, being a tourist destination, has quite a few restaurants and shops. Before mealtime, one just needs to go to the river dock to buy a fresh fish or a few fishtails before picking some in-season organic vegetables — eggplants, cucumbers, beans, tomatoes, spring onions — from the garden behind the house. Make some rice, stir-fry the vegetables and fish, separately or together, and a simple, healthy meal is ready.

Everything is fine except that the nearest city, Fuyuan, is 50 kilometers away. So when we needed to buy some daily necessities or beef/mutton or some other vegetables and fruits, we were frustrated by the lack of transportation.

"Why don't you try the rural bus?" A villager suggested, which prompted us to check out the "village bus stop". Yes, the village is on a regular bus route to the city, with buses passing by four times a day. We didn't know about the bus service because there are no bus stop signs there. Since the villagers know the bus timings, they wait on the "bus stop" at the right time and wave the bus to a stop before boarding it.

Yet I believe things will improve now that the central authorities have intensified the rural vitalization program.

Our bus arrived right on time at 7 am. The previous one had left an hour earlier. The 30-seat bus was similar to the ones plying in the cities, clean and well-maintained, and the driver was wearing a uniform. The fare — 15 yuan (\$2.08) per person — was reasonable for a distance of 50 kilometers. We paid by scanning a QR code.

It took us 70 minutes to get to the city center, not because of poor road conditions but because the driver had to make detours to drop off or pick up people in villages a few kilometers off the main road. At a bus stop before the final destination, a middle-aged woman boarded the bus with a basketful of vegetables. "Home-grown, too much for my family to consume ... That's why I'm carrying them to the city market to sell and earn some money," she said before paying 6 yuan for the ticket.

To bridge the development gap between urban and rural areas, China has invested trillions of yuan over the past two decades to build durable roads in rural areas. By the end of 2023, China's rural roads add up to 4.6 million kilometers with 90 percent of them being covered with cement or bitumen.

Improved rural roads have made it possible for the authorities to provide better bus services to villagers. Data show that 342,000 buses operate in rural areas, connecting 50.2 percent of the country's 600,000 administrative villages with nearby cities. Some better-off cities offer free bus rides to villagers above the age of 60 while some other places provide buses for transporting goods, making it easier for villagers to carry their farm produce to city markets.

But problems remain. For instance, Zhuaji residents complain that the buses are not frequent enough. If you miss a bus, you have to wait for hours for the next one. And if you miss the last bus back to the village, you either have to pay 150 yuan for a taxi to return home or spend the night in a hotel in the city.

Also, in many cases, most of the roads in rural areas are narrow, and thus prone to traffic snarls and accidents. On our way back to the village, we had to stop for 10 minutes at a place to allow heavily loaded trailers from the opposite side to pass by.

Yet I believe things will improve now that the central authorities have intensified the rural vitalization program.

Julien Chaisse

Intertwined economies, diverging systems

US authorities have recently adopted more covert measures to enforce semiconductor export controls, secretly embedding location-tracking devices in high-risk shipments of advanced chips to prevent their illegal diversion to China, Reuters reported. The move, revealed in late August, marks a sharper turn in Washington's tech rivalry strategy, complementing earlier licensing curbs while Beijing continues to counter with restrictions on critical mineral exports such as gallium, germanium and antimony.

Neither country is associating their respective move with a trade war. Both insist the measures have been taken to safeguard national security. Yet semiconductors, once treated as quiet workhorses of global commerce, have become a symbol of power and self-reliance.

Few technologies reveal the stakes of this major-power competition more clearly than advanced chips. These technologies drive the growth of artificial intelligence, next generation telecommunications, missile systems and even quantum research. Whoever holds the upper hand in these technologies gains, not just an economic edge, but also strategic weight.

For Washington, keeping Beijing away from top-tier chip-making is a way to check any potential military leap by China. For Beijing, the restriction on the



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export of key raw materials to Washington and investing increasing amounts of resources to promote innovation at home are aimed at avoiding a future where outside powers can hold it back.

The more important story is not who lands the sharper blow in each round. It is what this steady escalation is doing to the way technology is developed and traded around the world. Semiconductor production is sprawling — a single advanced chip might rely on US design tools, Dutch lithography machines, Japanese chemi-

cals, Taiwan's factories and minerals accumulated from across continents. Every new restriction, whether on supply of equipment or raw materials or on sharing of intellectual property rights, forces the entire network to adjust. Companies change production plans, renegotiate contracts and still have to bear higher costs.

This, however, does not mean a total break between the world's two largest economies, at least not for now. What it does mean is longer timelines, higher prices and increasing possibility of two parallel systems emerging. One will be anchored around the US, the other will depend on China. For companies caught in the middle, learning to comply with competing standards and export rules is fast becoming part of the cost of staying in business. For governments, keeping industries secure without suffocating them will need new regulations, more than money.

There is another risk that is harder to quantify. These rolling restrictions could slow down innovation which both Washington and Beijing want to accelerate. Big breakthroughs in technology usually depend on scale, open talent pools and the free exchange of ideas and components. If those connections fray seriously, innovation could slow down despite both sides continuing to invest heavily to speed it up.

The contest over chips is much more

than about trade numbers or quarterly profits. It is about deciding which economy sets the rules, which country controls the key tools and how much countries will rely on each other in the future.

Governments can build barriers, and markets tend to find ways around them. So the real question is whether the world's two strongest economic players, policy on one side and commerce on the other, can coexist without breaking the system that has powered decades of technological progress and economic growth globally.

Semiconductors are no longer unseen components powering our devices. They now stand as a measure of influence, determining which economy or economic bloc will command the supply chains, set standards and drive investment flows. The struggle is less about cutting ties than about deciding whose rules will anchor the connections that have survived decades of ups and downs.

However it unfolds, the outcome will not just define the future of technology. It will also reveal how power is organized in a world where economic and strategic interests are no longer easy to separate.

The author is professor of law at City University of Hong Kong and president of the Asia Pacific FDI Network. The views don't necessarily reflect those of China Daily.