

# Pursuing a World with Mutual Understanding

## Dialogue

By LONG Yun & BI Weizi

Seated in his home in Brisbane, Australia, Colin Mackerras told his China stories so vividly that it was hard to believe that five years had passed since he left China. Despite the passage of time, the 85-year-old sinologist remains sharp, witty and insightful, turning the interview into a lively chat.

Initially aiming to study French and German, Mackerras's life took a different turn when his mother encouraged him to apply for a scholarship in Asian studies.

Mackerras told *Science and Technology Daily*, "She recognized the importance of China for Australia's future," which set him on a journey of exploration of the intricate Chinese civilization.

He went to Cambridge University in UK and began to research the ethnic minorities of China's Tang Dynasty, a subject that would influence his future pursuits.

**Understanding China's ethnic groups**

Mackerras's contributions to sinology are multifaceted, with a particular focus on the ethnic minorities and traditional Chinese theater.

From his professional perspective, it is important to understand China's diverse ethnic groups, despite their relatively small percentage of the population. He has been to Xinjiang Uyghur autonomous region, Xizang autonomous region and other areas in China with a significant ethnic population. "I encountered landscapes and experiences vastly different from the Western media reports. My first-hand observations inspired many books on Chinese ethnic minorities," he said.

"As a Western scholar, I believe China's policies towards ethnic minorities hold valuable references for other countries," Mackerras continued.

His passion for Chinese culture



◀ Professor Colin Mackerras visits the Li River, located in Guilin city in Guangxi Zhuang autonomous region. (COURTESY PHOTO)

▼ Professor Colin Mackerras and his late wife Alyce with their first child Stephen, who was born in China at the Old Summer Palace in 1965. (COURTESY PHOTO)



extends to the arts, particularly traditional Chinese theater. "Arts help form people's culture and individual identities, influencing our minds, spirits, behaviors, and ways of thinking," he remarked.

These studies of Chinese history and culture have given him invaluable insights into the enduring legacy of China as a great civilization. Influenced by works such as C.P. Fitzgerald's *China: A Short Cultural History*, he says it is important that China's historical significance be recognized on the world stage. "China, as a great civilization, deserves recognition and understanding."

### Fond China memories

Reflecting on his time at the Beijing Foreign Studies University (BFSU) in the 1960s, Mackerras emphasizes the transformative impact of his immersion in Chinese society.

The Australian scholar speaks fondly of his encounters with the city's rich historical and cultural heritage. In his free time, he explored hutongs or traditional alleys and forged friendships with Chinese scholars like the noted literary translator Yang Xianyi and his British wife Gladys, who was also a translator, and they

deepened his appreciation of China's vibrant culture.

Although his first teaching time at the BFSU lasted for only two years, Mackerras went back to China more than 80 times later, doing research and teaching at other universities, especially Renmin University of China. He played an active role in promoting exchanges between the BFSU and Griffith University in Australia, where he worked.

When comparing the educational landscapes of China and the West, Mackerras notes distinct differences in student attitudes and approaches to learning. He found Chinese students had a remarkable level of discipline and focus, diligently adhering to study schedules and deadlines. In contrast, Western students displayed a greater inclination towards extracurricular activities.

By nurturing positive relationships between students from diverse backgrounds, educational institutions serve as catalysts for cross-cultural dialogue and cooperation.

"Education is crucial for building bridges between nations and promoting mutual respect," Mackerras said.

### Challenging perceptions

Mackerras's exploration of Western

perceptions of China was sparked by his initial surprise at the distortions. His book *Western Images of China* aimed to dispel the misinformation. He said though the book has its imperfections, it is still a milestone in his academic journey.

"It is a shame that Westerners don't understand China very well," he said, calling for a concerted effort to bridge the divide, emphasizing the importance of objectivity, fairness, and balance in shaping perceptions.

Mackerras attaches great importance to people-to-people exchanges to address the contemporary challenge of bridging the cultural gap in the current geopolitical climate. He says they dispel stereotypes and foster empathy and mutual understanding. "I believe that fostering genuine connections and friendships are the most enduring ways to bridge cultural gaps," he said.

For young scholars embarking on cross-cultural studies, Mackerras's advice is to approach their studies with an open mind, challenging preconceived notions and embracing cultural diversity.

This article is contributed by BFSU.

## Green China

# China's Eco-protection Hailed

By BI Weizi and LONG Yun

The 2024 Beijing International Friendship Forest Tree Planting Event, held in Changping district in Beijing recently, attracted nearly 200 people, including foreign envoys to China, foreign experts and students from 47 countries.

Michael Crook, chairman of the International Committee for the Promotion of Chinese Industrial Cooperatives, was born and brought up in Beijing. He said China has played a leading role in reforestation and improving the ecological environment in recent decades, when human development has put enormous pressure on the Earth. He told *Science and Technology Daily* that when he was a child, Beijing's West Mountain was bare, but now it is covered with green plants.

"The Earth is not only something we inherit from our parents, but also something we borrow from our descendants," Zambia's Ambassador to China, Iven Zyuulu, told *Science and Technology Daily*, adding that giving back is more important than taking in order to leave a sustainable world for future generations.

He also praised China's basic national policy of conserving resources and protecting the environment to ensure sustainable development. China is taking concrete actions and implementing these policies, such as the transition to clean energy by promoting new energy vehicles (NEVs), which the world should learn from, he said.

He also lauded the "Beautiful China" initiative, which aims to create a sustainable and environmentally friendly nation, focusing on reducing pollutants, achieving carbon neutrality, promoting green development and pre-

serving the ecosystem.

"People depend on nature for their livelihood. We should contribute to sustainable development, and the Beautiful China initiative is the way to go," he said.

Andrei Povaliaev, minister counselor of the Russian Embassy in China, was planting trees for the first time and his excitement was palpable.

"Planting trees with my family today has fulfilled my life's dream, as there is a saying in Russia that a man should own a house, have a child and plant a tree in his lifetime," Povaliaev said. His son, he added, was born in Beijing in 2007.

First and foremost, planting trees helps protect the environment and promotes sustainable development of the world, he said. Besides, the sapling he planted symbolizes the friendship between China and Russia, which will grow bigger and stronger with sunshine and water in the future.



Andrei Povaliaev and his family plant trees in Changping district, Beijing on April, 14, 2024. (COURTESY PHOTO)

# Yellow Tea: Minor but Unique Delight

## Traditional Eastern Wisdom

By ZONG Shihan

Yellow tea, a lightly fermented variety, is one of the six major teas in China. Compared to other teas, its production accounts for a small proportion of the total tea output.

Nevertheless, yellow tea, with its yellow liquor and leaves, as well as its sweet and mellow taste, has gained great popularity among a section of tea enthusiasts.

Yellow tea is a unique species in China with a long history. According to historical records, it originated in the Tang (618 - 906) and Song (960 - 1279) dynasties and flourished in the Ming (1368 - 1644) and Qing (1644 - 1912) dynasties. Its unique characteristics made it highly valued by many royalties.

One example of that is the Junshan Silver Needle tea, which Tang Dynasty Princess Wencheng brought to the Tubo kingdom when she married its king Songsten Gampo in a matrimonial alliance to prevent hostility between the two kingdoms. It is a

kind of yellow tea grown on the Jun mountain.

Yellow tea is produced by fixation, rolling, heaping and drying. The process is similar to how green tea is processed, but with an additional heaping for the yellowing process before or after drying.

This process promotes partial oxidation of substances like polyphenols and chlorophyll, which is crucial for the unique characteristics of yellow tea. The main method of heaping for yellowing involves wrapping tea leaves after fixation and rolling them in paper or covering them with a wet cloth for a period ranging from several minutes to several hours.

This process utilizes high temperatures to deactivate enzymes, while the subsequent oxidation of polyphenols is caused by damp heat, resulting in the production of colored substances. A light degree of discoloration produces yellow tea, while a heavier degree leads to the formation of dark tea. Therefore yellow tea can be considered a transitional tea between green tea and dark tea.

It is beneficial for alleviating indigestion and loss of appetite, while also moisturizing the skin.



A cup of the Junshan Silver Needle tea and tea leaves. (PHOTO: VCG)

# Shanghai's First Overseas Talent Service Center Upgraded

## Service Info

By Staff Reporters

Shanghai's Hongqiao Overseas Talent One-Stop Service Center, the city's first center dedicated to serving overseas talents, welcomed an upgrade with its new location inaugurated in Changning district on April 16.

The upgraded Service Center, with

a total area of over 11,000 square meters, features self-service areas, core service zones and digital exhibition areas.

The Shanghai Hongqiao Immigration Service Center was also launched at the inauguration, along with the first batch of permanent residence IDs issued by the new center.

To enhance the service experience for overseas talents, Changning has pioneered a Foreign-related Social Workstation, providing language support, business guidance, policy consultation and

other services for overseas talents. On the day of the inauguration, the first group of foreign social workers at the workstation received their employment certificates.

"When I first came to China years ago, I received lots of help from my teachers and classmates with things like mobile payments, hotel bookings and travel arrangements. Now, as a volunteer at the service center, I'm more than happy to use my experience to help overseas friends tackle any daily life service

issues they might face here in China," said Bermet Dzhuzumkulova, a Kyrgyzstani social worker from Donghua University.

According to Zhang Wei, a district official, the service center will be upgraded to meet the increasing needs of overseas talents coming to Shanghai by optimizing its service functions and environment. It has integrated 35 government services and 30 life services to establish a comprehensive hub for serving overseas talents.

# Healthy Lifestyle Helps Brain to Scrap Its Waste

## Science Outreach

By Staff Reporters

While a healthy lifestyle, such as eating a balanced diet and exercising regularly, is known to be beneficial for the body, its effect on the mind was not clear.

However, researchers from the Nedergaard group at the University of Rochester Medical Center have discovered how a healthy lifestyle correlates with improved brain function. The findings were detailed in a 2018 study published in *Neuroscience Letters*.

Though the human brain makes up only two percent of the body's mass, its efficient operation requires 20 percent of the body's total energy. Our brain makes it possible for us to perceive our surroundings, interact with others, and recall how to work every morning, but it comes at a cost.

High energy consumption by brain cells called neurons causes them to spew forth a lot of trash, which floats around the brain and interferes with regular brain function.

This waste is mainly made up of leftover proteins, which can aggregate into brain-toxic clumps if left unchecked. The decreased cognition, memory loss and reduced general brain function of Alzheimer's patients have been specifically linked to the clumping

of the protein amyloid beta.

### A good night's sleep matters a lot

It's a known fact that we feel refreshed and clear-headed after a vigorous workout or a restful night's sleep. The glymphatic system explains why getting enough sleep improves cognition.

The Nedergaard group's research found a link between an increase in glymphatic brain clearance and healthy living actions. The findings imply that in addition to its established significance for processes like memory consolidation and formation, sleep is also essential for the removal of toxic waste from the brain, which frees up the brain to perform as efficiently as possible during the hours we are awake.

### Exercise benefits the mind

People who exercise regularly have been demonstrated to have better moods, better memories and reduced worry. A recent study from Nedergaard's lab demonstrated that exercise can also have a good impact on the glymphatic system's functionality.

These findings offer an explanation for how exercise benefits the brain. The brain may need the increased glymphatic flow that occurs after exercise in order to remove waste and perform at its peak.

So in order to improve our brain's functions during the hours we are awake and prevent neurodegenerative diseases, a good sleep and regular exercise are better lifestyle choices.