

COMMENTHK

Anti-China narratives in the West are myopic and self-defeating

Christopher Tang says a balanced perspective is needed to reduce stereotypes, mistrust and support global development

Differences between Western and Eastern civilizations have long contributed to international tensions, with historical events like the opium trade and recent trade conflicts increasing anti-China sentiment. The West should consider measures to promote global peace.

Anti-China sentiment in the West, particularly in the United States, is deeply rooted in historical events and cultural portrayals that have perpetuated stereotypes and fostered mistrust.

This narrative began with the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which was the first significant law restricting immigration into the US based on ethnicity. The act reflected widespread xenophobia and economic anxiety, culminating in violent episodes such as the 1871 Los Angeles Chinese massacre, when a mob killed 18 Chinese immigrants.

Such events laid the foundation for a persistent anti-China narrative that continues to influence Western perceptions.

Throughout the 20th century, Chinese individuals were often depicted in Western media through a lens of exoticism and inferiority. Chinese women were sexualized, while Chinese men were portrayed as weak or untrustworthy. Hollywood films reinforced these stereotypes, contributing to a cultural milieu that marginalized Chinese identity and reinforced Western superiority. Such portrayals had lasting effects on public perception and policy, shaping attitudes that hindered constructive engagement with China.

The economic reform and opening-up of China that started in the late 1970s marked a turning point in Sino-Western relations. Initially, the US and other Western nations embraced trade with China, leveraging its low-cost labor for offshoring operations.

For decades, China was viewed as a manufacturing hub with limited capacity for innovation. However, this perception has been thoroughly debunked by China's innovations in various fields. It has demonstrated remarkable innovation capabilities, challenging the notion that developing nations are mere copycats at best.

Historically, China was a global leader in innovation, pioneering transformative technologies such as papermaking, gunpowder, and advanced agricultural practices, not to mention traditional



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Chinese medicine, whose efficacy is only just now starting to be appreciated by advanced Western medical schools. Despite the resurgence of Chinese innovation in the 21st century in robotics, drones, electric vehicles, and artificial intelligence, Western narratives often continue to dismiss China's capacity for original thought, technological advancement and scientific breakthroughs.

The emergence of Chinese EV makers highlights this transformation. Elon Musk once dismissed BYD as a minor rival to Tesla, but now recognizes it as a strong competitor, illustrating China's increasing strength in advanced technology sectors. However, the Biden administration banned almost all Chinese cars and trucks from entering the US market, undermining free market principles. But nowadays, consumer consumption patterns are validating the superiority of Chinese high-value consumer goods.

Also, skepticism surrounded China's DeepSeek AI project, which achieved impressive results despite limited resources and restrictions on high-end chips from Nvidia.

China-initiated Belt and Road Initiative, aimed at fostering development and connectivity across Asia, Africa and Europe, has been portrayed in the West as a "debt trap." This characterization overlooks the developmental benefits and strategic partnerships fostered through the BRI. These examples showed up the age-old Western disbelief and dismissal of Chinese excellence.

Besides innovation and global development initiatives, the treatment of Chinese scholars in the US reveals another dimension of the current anti-China wave in American academia.

During the Cold War, physicist Qian Xuesen was accused of espionage and deported, despite his significant contributions to American science. The China Initiative, launched under the Trump administration, continued this blatant persecution, targeting Chinese academics and creating a suspicious environment for research and col-

laboration. Such policies not only undermine academic freedom but also deter talented individuals from contributing to scientific advancement.

Corporate America has also perpetuated barriers to Chinese American advancement through the "bamboo ceiling." Despite the success of individuals like Jensen Huang and Lisa Su, few Chinese Americans ascend to executive leadership positions. This disparity reflects systemic biases and limits the potential contributions of a diverse and talented workforce.

The implications of these narratives and practices are profound. They stifle innovation by excluding valuable perspectives and talents, reduce productivity through discriminatory practices, and hinder economic development by fostering mistrust and limiting collaboration.

In today's globalized environment, such perspectives hinder progress. The interdependence of contemporary economies requires collaborative efforts and reciprocal respect. For instance, the reduction in China's scientific research partnerships with Western academics limits both the breadth and quality of scholarly investigation.

The portrayal of China as an adversary fosters geopolitical tensions that disrupt trade and investment. These outcomes are detrimental not only to China but also to the West. A more balanced approach, one that acknowledges China's contributions and potential, could lead to increased trade, investment and economic growth for all parties involved.

A comprehensive strategy is needed to address these narratives. Education should provide a balanced view of China's history and ensure Asian American history is part of school curriculums.

Media representations must evolve to reflect the complexity and diversity of Chinese and other Asian identities. Policy reforms should prioritize inclusion and collaboration over suspicion and exclusion. Corporate practices must address systemic biases and create pathways for advancement based on merit.

Anti-China narratives in the West undermine values like openness and innovation. They reinforce stereotypes, create mistrust and hinder opportunities for cooperation and growth. A balanced perspective is needed to support global development.

The views do not necessarily reflect those of China Daily.



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Invigorating city's pet economy through comprehensive change

The 2025 Policy Address proposes a trial program to allow pet dogs to enter selected eateries, which marks a welcome and long-overdue shift in attitudes. It's recognition of a significant transformation in Hong Kong's social fabric. Yet, while this move is positive, it is reactive rather than proactive; a concession, not a strategy. If Hong Kong aims to fully harness the economic potential of its growing pet-owning population, it must take a few steps forward from sporadic permissions to a comprehensive, cross-departmental policy agenda aimed at unlocking the untapped spending power of pet owners. This is a "latent market" waiting to be served, and the time to act is now.

Amid declining birth rates and an aging population, pets have become more than companions; they are family members. This "humanization" of pets has propelled a booming industry that spans premium food, advanced veterinary care, grooming, insurance, and even technology. The key to success lies not merely in high rates of pet ownership but in societal integration: Pets are welcomed across a wide spectrum of daily life, from public transport to recreational spaces. This cultural embrace enables these markets to thrive. In Hong Kong, it is becoming increasingly common to see pet owners labelling themselves as the "parents" of their beloved charges.

Hong Kong is uniquely positioned to capitalize on the growing pet economy. While official statistics are unavailable, it is estimated that the city is home to around 430,000 dogs, with their owners representing a significant and affluent consumer demographic. Despite their strong willingness to spend, Hong Kong offers few opportunities for these owners to enjoy quality time with their pets outside the home. Singapore, for example, boasts larger and more numerous off-leash parks, while Shenzhen plans to designate 11 parks as pet-friendly zones. In contrast, Hong Kong's pet owners contend with limited green spaces, strict leash laws, and a scarcity of accessible venues, particularly for those without private transport. The problem lies not in a lack of demand but in the absence of adequate infrastructure and inclusivity.

The numbers tell a compelling story. The local pet economy is expected to reach HK\$6.2 billion (\$800 million) this year, driven by two key groups — younger adults, particularly those born after the 1990s, who are navigating economic and social pressures, and seniors seeking companionship. Yet, Hong Kong still lags behind more developed pet economies. Japan's pet industry, valued at 1.9 trillion yen (\$12.5 billion), excels in areas such as senior pet care, while Singapore's \$111.9 million pet economy has diversified into services like pet tourism. Hong Kong, despite evident demand, lacks the ecosystem to fully cultivate the pet economy's potential.

This can be illustrated by the trial program that aims to allow pets in restaurants, according to the Policy Address. A pet owner's journey to enjoy a simple meal out is fraught with logistical obstacles. First, they must find a licensed pet-friendly restaurant. If they lack a car, their transportation options are limited to expensive services like Uber Pet, as public transport remains largely off-limits. Pet-friendly malls, such as K11 Musea or The Mills, are few and not conveniently located for the many owners who live in the New Territories. Once they arrive, they face different mall bylaws, such as mandatory pet strollers, and restaurant-specific rules on timing and seating. This arduous journey underscores a fundamental truth: Hong Kong has yet to embrace true inclusivity for pets and their owners.

When shaping policies, the goal should go beyond merely accommodating the needs of dog owners to actively fostering the growth of the pet economy. This starts with housing policies: Relaxing restrictions on dog ownership in public housing for responsible pet owners could pave the way for the development of pet-friendly communities. Urban planning must also adapt, prioritizing the creation of high-quality pet parks and introducing "pet-friendly hours" in public spaces, while addressing the concerns of non-pet owners through clear regulations and public education initiatives. While such changes may take time to implement, the Civil Service Bureau, as the largest employer in the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region, could take the lead by introducing a "bring-your-dog-to-work day" in government offices. This would send a strong and symbolic message about the government's commitment to building a truly pet-friendly city.

Transportation is another key area for improvement. Many European cities allow dogs on subways without restrictions, while closer to home, Taipei has introduced pet-friendly carriages on specific metro lines during off-peak hours, making travel with pets both convenient and affordable. This model could serve as a reference for the MTR Corp when it considers further relaxing its pet-friendly policies. Additionally, enhancing infrastructure, such as modernizing quarantine facilities and upgrading veterinary services to international standards, would not only make the city more appealing to pet owners but also position Hong Kong as a leading hub for high-quality, pet-related health services.

These initiatives have the potential to do far more than improve the lives of pet owners; they could unlock significant economic opportunities. By fostering a more inclusive city, we can drive domestic spending and encourage landlords and food and beverage business operators to invest in pet-friendly renovations. However, implementing change should go beyond merely revising the Food Business Regulation. Efforts should aim to address the full spectrum of challenges faced by pet owners, from dining out to transportation and public access, ensuring solutions are both comprehensive and thoughtful. It's time to move past viewing pets as a logistical challenge and start embracing them as valuable contributors to a more vibrant, inclusive and prosperous Hong Kong.

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Hong Kong should channel 'Lion Rock Spirit' and 'cha chaan teng' synergy to propel renewal

Chief Executive John Lee Ka-chiu's fourth Policy Address laid out an ambitious road map for the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's future. The blueprint, one of the most comprehensive in recent years, reflects the administration's intent and determination to tackle long-standing problems while embracing new opportunities.

The blueprint, which emerged from 40 consultation sessions, both online and offline, engaging a wide cross-section of society, puts forward a series of institutional reforms and strategic initiatives aimed at enhancing governance, boosting Hong Kong's international competitiveness, and improving the quality of life of residents.

Among the most notable proposals is the formation of new committees and task forces, including the Northern Metropolis Development Committee and its subgroups focused on operational models, university town planning, and project implementation. Other units — such as the Task Force on Supporting Mainland Enterprises in Going Global, the Task Force on Study in Hong Kong, the AI Efficacy Enhancement Team, and the Working Group on Ageing Society Strategies — signal a methodical, data-driven approach to policy execution.

As a member of the Chief Executive's Policy Unit Expert Group, the author contributed ideas on long-term socioeconomic planning, digital integration, new urban renewal paradigms, and cross-boundary development strategies, including the "Twin-City Special Zone" concept integrating Hong Kong and Shenzhen.

While the report has drawn praise for its breadth, some critics argue that it lacks depth in certain areas. Yet policymaking is inherently pragmatic, requiring trade-offs between ambition and feasibility. "There is no best, only relatively better," the author writes, underscoring the government's balancing act between technical judgment and political reality, given the severe resource constraints.

'Lion Rock Spirit': A cultural compass

The "Lion Rock Spirit", which reflects the "can-do" attitude of Hong Kong people and their



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collective determination to improve their lives in the face of difficulties, remains a potent symbol of Hong Kong's resilience and unity. Rooted in the city's postwar transformation, it embodies values such as diligence, perseverance, adaptability, and solidarity. Popularized by the 1970s RTHK drama *Below the Lion Rock*, its theme song continues to resonate with generations of Hong Kong residents. Lyrics like "Let go of divisions, pursue ideals together" and "Write immortal lines for Hong Kong with hard work" serve as timely reminders of the collective strength needed to overcome adversity.

This spirit is not merely nostalgic — it is a living ethos that can guide the city through its current challenges. Whether in economic recovery, social cohesion, or innovation, the Lion Rock Spirit offers a cultural compass for renewal.

'Cha chaan teng' synergy: A social microcosm

The *cha chaan teng*, Hong Kong's iconic local diner, is more than a culinary institution — it is a metaphor for the city's social fabric. On a recent visit, the author observed the tightly packed tables, diverse orders, and seamless coordination between staff and patrons. Despite the apparent chaos, there was order. The waiter, without pen or paper, memorized multiple orders and relayed them flawlessly to the kitchen.

This unspoken synergy — between diners and staff, among strangers sharing cramped spaces — reflects a deeper social contract. It is a testament to Hong Kong people's ability to

coexist, cooperate, and thrive under pressure. Such everyday interactions mirror the city's broader ethos of mutual respect, efficiency, and adaptability.

Despite Hong Kong's strong performance in various global rankings — talent competitiveness, innovation, higher education, and financial center status — many residents continue to struggle with livelihood issues. The disconnect between financial-market recovery and real-economy benefits has left many small and medium-sized enterprises and grassroots communities behind. Traditional industries face mounting pressure from regional integration and rising costs.

Mental health challenges are also on the rise. The author proposes a "333 Emergency Hotline" to provide immediate support for those in crisis. To be operated by the SAR government and linked to nongovernmental organizations, the hotline would offer professional assistance from social workers and medical teams.

Five pillars of future development

The 2025 Policy Address outlines five strategic directions: accelerating the Northern Metropolis development, advancing artificial intelligence industries, building an international education hub, fostering an inclusive society, and strengthening governance. These blueprints remain open to public input and refinement.

The author further suggests that local broadcasters produce a television drama inspired by the "Lion Rock Spirit" and "cha chaan teng synergy". Such a series could galvanize civic pride and showcase Hong Kong's unique values — respect for people, teamwork, diligence, creativity, and compassion — to a global audience.

In closing, the author calls for unity and perseverance: "Let us, with the Lion Rock Spirit and *cha chaan teng* synergy, continue to strive, adapt, and forge ahead — writing a new chapter of brilliance for Hong Kong."

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