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**PRC Support Underpins Russia's War Against Ukraine**

*by Arran Hope*



Putin visited China and met with Xi Jinping before invasion of Ukraine. (Source: [Wikipedia](#))

**Executive Summary:**

- PRC aid to Russia is multidomain and underpins much of Moscow's ability to continue to wage war in Ukraine.
- Attempts have been made to institutionalize the Sino-Russian relationship, deepening the military aspect in particular. The relationship between Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin nevertheless remains its driving force.
- Readouts from Sino-Russian and Sino-Ukrainian meetings suggest that Beijing is not wholly aligned with Moscow's, and there is clear opposition to the war within sections of the PRC elite. This may mean little if Xi Jinping cannot be persuaded to signal a change in approach.

Toward the end of March, Li Hui (李辉), Special Representative of the Government for Eurasian Affairs, held a briefing on his second round of shuttle diplomacy in Ukraine ([MFA](#), March 22). According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs readout from his meetings in Ukraine, he “held frank and friendly talks on Sino-Ukrainian relations and the Ukrainian crisis” ([MFA](#), March 8). The Ukrainian side provides more detail on the meetings, noting that they informed their interlocutor of “cases of Russia’s gross violation of the Geneva Convention Relative to the Treatment of Prisoners of War” and of their efforts to “return Ukrainian citizens illegally detained by the Russian Federation and abducted children” ([President of Ukraine](#), March 7).

Deputy Permanent Representative to the UN Geng Shuang (耿爽) announced this week that the PRC “has always maintained an objective and impartial position” on the war in Ukraine and “advocated that the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries should be respected” ([Xinhua](#), April 11). To many observers, this rhetoric appears out of step with the reality of the PRC’s position. Deputy Head of the Office of the President of Ukraine Roman Mashovets emphasized to Li that “components from third countries” are “becoming part of the weapons used against Ukrainian civilians.” Reading between the lines of the readout, Ukraine wants Beijing to do more to pressure Moscow and to restrict the ways in which it is assisting in the destruction of Ukraine, however indirectly.

### **Evidence of Support for Russia**

To date it is unclear that the PRC has provided “lethal aid”—in the form of direct transfers of weapons, munitions, and other exclusively military equipment—to Russia, despite apparent Russian claims to the contrary ([Foreign Affairs](#), February 19). However, just as PRC actions on the Second Thomas Shoal have recently stretched technical definitions of what constitutes an attack, so Beijing’s continued military collaboration with Russia, its provision of dual-use items that have advanced Russia’s defense industrial complex, and its support of the Russian economy stretches definitions about what constitutes military aid in this war ([Twitter](#), March 25). At the very least, Beijing’s actions have allowed Russia to continue with its invasion and ensured that peace remains a distant prospect. In stronger terms, David O’Sullivan, International Special Envoy for the Implementation of EU Sanctions, has estimated that up to 70 percent of high tech imports “killing Ukrainians” are reaching Russian military via the PRC ([SCMP](#), September 22, 2023).

The amount of technically “non-lethal” military aid from Beijing is substantial. Most recently, Bloomberg reported that the PRC has provided Russia with satellite imagery for military purposes, as well as microelectronics and machine tools for tanks ([Bloomberg](#), April 6). It has furnished Russia with optics, propellants for use in missiles, avionics, and fighter jet engine parts. It has also provided small amounts of nitrocellulose (a key ingredient in gunpowder) ([Foreign Affairs](#), April 9). Drones, which have had a significant impact in the war, have been supplied in large quantities, as well as drone parts ([RFE/RL](#), October 3, 2023). Russia’s finance minister stated last October that the PRC was supplying its entire drone arsenal ([Telegram](#), October 16). Trench-digging equipment has been imported by Russia at levels and at times of the year which indicate that they were only ever intended for use in the war effort. Vehicles such as tractors, which contain combustion engines, have also been shipped in unusually high numbers. Similarly, PRC exports of ball-

bearings have surged—including an annual increase of 2,492 percent to Kyrgyzstan—likely for use in tanks ([Atlantic Council](#) November 15, 2023). Often, PRC parts are now substituting for parts that previously came from other countries who have ceased providing materiel to Russia ([Reuters](#), April 14, 2023). The PRC has also exported many components made in the West to Russia ([KSE Institute](#), June 19, 2023). This includes semiconductors, where it is the main intermediary for Western chips reaching Russia, and where Hong Kong is a crucial conduit ([C4ADS](#), December 21, 2023). This belies the stance that, “as for military item exports, China has throughout adopted a prudent and responsible attitude,” as one PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson put it last year ([Reuters](#), April 14, 2023).

PRC military cooperation with Russia has boomed. [1] The People’s Liberation Army (PLA) has increased the number of joint activities it performs with the Russian military. The one area in which visits of high-ranking officials have tended to be reciprocal (rather than predominantly one-way) has been the military-security domain ([Foreign Affairs](#), April 9). The two countries are jointly developing ground-based lasers which could damage satellites, helicopters, submarines, missiles, and missile-launch early warning systems ([Bloomberg](#), January 25; [Foreign Affairs](#), March 29). At the first round of formal talks with Xi in March, more than half of Putin’s team were officials directly involved in Russia’s weapons and space programs. According to analyst Alexander Gabuev, there is “every reason to believe that Xi’s and Putin’s teams used the March meeting to come to terms on new defense agreements” ([Foreign Affairs](#), April 12, 2023).

The PRC has also assisted Russia in other ways. PRC media has frequently amplified Russian narratives and conspiracy theories, both at home and abroad ([EU Parliament](#), March). Economically, bilateral trade has leapt to historic levels in the last two years, reaching \$240 billion in 2023, 70 percent of which was settled in Renminbi. Revenues from this trade are funding Russia’s war effort. Moreover, closer PRC relations with North Korea and Iran, both of whom are directly providing lethal aid to Russia, underline Beijing’s unwillingness to halt the war ([The Wire China](#), January 28; [Foreign Affairs](#), March 29).

### **Shifting Attitudes in the PRC**

It is difficult to gauge the extent to which Beijing supports the war. Beijing has been slow and cautious to react at times—both following the initial invasion in February 2022 and following the Prigozhin coup attempt in mid-2023—but has been consistently and heavily supportive of Moscow. Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin have been in regular communication since their joint statement on February 4, 2022, where they emphasized the “indivisibility of security.” The two leaders have called at least five times over the period and have met in person three times. A fourth meeting, this time in Beijing, is apparently planned for next month ([Ukrainska Pravda](#), March 19). The two men have met over 40 times in total ([People’s Daily](#), October 15, 2023). Numerous meetings and dialogues have also been held by other senior officials. Meanwhile, Xi has held just one phone call with Volodymyr Zelenskyy—nearly a year ago—and Premier Li Qiang’s delegation in Switzerland earlier this year declined to meet with that of Ukraine ([Politico](#), January 17). Xi’s call with Zelenskyy was likely in part only to smooth over the relationship, following the PRC’s ambassador to France arguing—incorrectly—that “ex-Soviet countries don’t have an effective status in international law” ([France24](#), April 24, 2023). In a press conference this week, PRC Foreign Ministry spokesperson Mao Ning would only

say that “China will continue to promote peace talks in our own way, maintain communication with Russia, Ukraine and other parties,” in response to a question on whether the PRC leadership planned on communicating with Ukrainian counterparts ([FMPRC](#), April 8).

Sino-Russian bilateral relations are officially at the “highest historical level of comprehensive strategic partnership for a new era” ([Xinhua](#), April 9). More concerningly, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov recently mentioned discussing the “prospect of forming a new security structure in Eurasia” ([MFA Russia](#), April 9). The increase in official exchanges and relationship-building beyond the leadership level indicates an apparent attempt to depersonalize the relationship and institutionalize ties ([The China Russia Report](#), September 30, 2023). The relationship between Xi and Putin underpins to bilateral ties. Mao Ning emphasized this week that “heads-of-state diplomacy provides the fundamental underpinning for the steady and sustained growth of China-Russia relations” ([FMPRC](#), April 9). And Xi stated that “Putin and I have agreed to maintain close contact to ensure the smooth and stable development of China-Russia relations” ([Xinhua](#), April 9).

It is unclear how much further PRC support for Russia extends beyond the leadership. Increasingly, PRC experts are vocal about their opposition to the war. Some worry about the first- and second-order effects for the world. [2] Others, such as Feng Yujun (冯玉军), deputy dean of Fudan University’s Institute of International Studies, have argued that viewing the war “as a strategic opportunity for China would be wrong,” and that the PRC’s stance toward Russia “has reverted from the ‘no limits’ stance of early 2022” ([Shanghai Global Governance and Regional Studies Research Institute](#), March 13, 2022; [Economist](#), April 11). Qin Hui, recently retired from Tsinghua University, has consistently sought to demolish Russia’s justifications for the war ([Financial Times Chinese](#), February 24, 2022; [Youtube](#), February 25, 2022). Meanwhile, Sun Liping has warned against closer ties with Putin’s Russia ([Weixin](#), March 14, 2022). These are select and prominent voices among sizeable swathes of the intellectual and policy elite who are privately increasingly at odds with Xi Jinping on a number of key areas (cf. [Economist](#), April 9). But as ever, it is difficult to assess which portion of the CCP leadership these voices represent, and what power to sway the overall policy trajectory they have.

Russian statements suggest some daylight between the two countries’ public positions. Lavrov declared that the PRC had confirmed with him “the conclusion about the futility of any international efforts that do not take into account Russia’s position ... and promote an absolutely empty, ultimatum-like ‘Zelenskyy’s peace formula’” ([MFA Russia](#), April 9). His counterpart, Wang Yi, was more conciliatory, advocating for both countries to pursue “five always (五个始终)” ([Xinhua](#), April 9). These include “always adhering to the principle of ‘non-alliance, non-confrontation, and not targeting any third party,’ and ‘always pursuing inclusive and win-win cooperation.’ This is not a full-throated endorsement of the Russian position but, much like other peace initiatives the PRC has undertaken, comes across as gestural and insubstantial ([FMPRC](#), February 24, 2023).

### **Conclusion**

Xi Jinping is unlikely to be persuaded by any of the arguments presented by dissenting voices. Cracks that exist in the Sino-Russian relationship are minimal next to the overwhelming support with which the PRC buttresses the Russian war machine. Many PRC experts refer to the conflict as a “proxy war (代理人战争)” or “avatar war (分身战),” referring the US and Western support for Ukraine. But the level of PRC support for Russia suggests that the PRC is every bit as involved on the other side of the conflict. Switzerland is planning to host a peace conference, involving 80 to 100 nations, in June ([Bloomberg](#), April 8). Much of the outcome will depend on Beijing’s willingness to pressure Russia and the other countries it relies on to abide by the principles it professes to hold dear.

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### **Notes**

[1] Brands, Hal. “The Ukraine War and Global Order.” In Brands, Hal, ed. [War in Ukraine](#). Johns Hopkins University Press. 2024

[2] Lin, Bonny & Brian Hart. “Accelerating Profound Changes Unseen in a Century.” In Brands, Hal, ed. [War in Ukraine](#). Johns Hopkins University Press. 2024



**Xi Signals Firm Strategy but Flexible Tactics at China's Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference**

*by Neil Thomas*



Zhao Leji addresses the BOAO Forum on March 27 in Hainan. (Source: [World Journal](#))

**Executive Summary:**

- The readout from the Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference (CFAWC) at the end of December indicated an emerging strategy of countering US leadership by mobilizing the support of Global South countries while dividing the West on contentious global issues.
- Recent changes in official discourse and new language that now forms part Xi's messaging to visiting politicians makes clear Beijing's enhanced conviction of the need to actively shape and influence world events.
- The CFAWC meeting signaled a turn away from the more abrasive forms of "wolf warrior" diplomacy. Xi's desired shift in rhetoric does not mean that PRC diplomats will be less assertive in communicating their preferences overseas.

China hosted two international events in late March that seemed to send different messages to the world. Following the China Development Forum in Beijing, Chinese leader Xi Jinping (习近平) advised a group of US executives that “promoting world economic recovery and resolving international and regional hotspot issues require China-US coordination and cooperation” ([Xinhua](#), March 27). The next day, his number-three Zhao Leji (赵乐际) told the Boao Forum for Asia in Hainan that Asian countries themselves should “jointly maintain security” and form a “common regional market” ([MOFA](#), March 28). Does Beijing want to work with Washington or without it?

Both speeches operate within the framework of a foreign policy strategy outlined by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) at a Central Foreign Affairs Work Conference (CFAWC) that Xi held in Beijing last year ([Xinhua](#), December 28, 2023). These conferences convey to Party cadres and members the leadership’s authoritative assessments about the international achievements, external environment, and diplomatic priorities of the People’s Republic of China (PRC). This was Xi’s third CFAWC, after convenings in November 2014 and June 2018, and only the fifth such gathering in the post-Mao era, with Jiang Zemin (江泽民) and Hu Jintao (胡锦涛) respectively hosting analogous meetings in July 1991 and August 2006.

The recent CFAWC deserves more attention, given its likely significance in establishing the outlines of PRC foreign policy over the next few years (cf., [GMF](#), February 6). Three themes stand out. First, the PRC’s rising diplomatic focus on leadership of the Global South; second, Beijing’s enhanced conviction about its need to shape world events; and third, Xi’s turn away from “wolf warrior” diplomacy. Understanding these themes helps to resolve the seeming contradiction between the speeches mentioned above.

### **Rising Focus on the Global South**

The CFAWC provided what is perhaps the strongest articulation yet of the Party’s emerging strategy to counter US leadership by mobilizing the support of Global South countries and by trying to divide the West on contentious global issues like climate change, free trade, and Palestine. Most revealingly, the readout said Beijing must “firmly occupy the international moral high ground and unite and win over the world majority.” Furthermore, the growing power of the PRC and other non-Western countries means that “China’s development faces new strategic opportunities” and its diplomacy “will enter a new stage in which it can be more effective” and “elevate China’s international influence to new heights.”

The readout clarifies the importance of Xi’s concept of a “community with a shared future for mankind (人类命运共同体)” (CSFM) in this vision. **[1]** The CSFM is the “core concept” of Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy and “a Chinese solution to what kind of world we should build and how we should build it.” Moreover, the concept is said to embody the worldview of Chinese communists, reflect the laws of development of human society, and respond to the universal aspirations of people from all countries. Xi sees his ideas as important and even necessary contributions to international order-building.



What would a CSFM look like? The objective is to create a world of “sustained peace,” “universal security,” “shared prosperity,” “openness and tolerance,” and “cleanliness and beauty.” What these boilerplate phrases signify in Party discourse is a world without US military alliances, where the PRC can advance its territorial objectives and freely pursue its economic model at home and abroad, and where there is acceptance of authoritarian governments and the privileging of collective over individual rights. Put simply, a CSFM means building an international system that better reflects the Party’s interests, preferences, and values.

How will Beijing pursue a CSFM? The “path to realization” is through advancing more equitable global governance, the “universal guideline” is practicing shared human values, and the “fundamental support” is pushing for a new type of international relations. More concretely, “strategic leadership” comes from implementing Xi’s Global Development Initiative (GDI), Global Security Initiative (GSI), and Global Civilization Initiative (GCI). Furthermore, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) is a “practical platform.” Beijing does not want to conquer the world, but it does want to direct it away from thwarting the PRC and toward “collaborating on responding to challenges and realizing mutual prosperity.”

At the heart of all these policies is the Global South. Developing countries are the main audience for the Chinese pitch to reorient the international order away from the West. The GDI, GSI, and GCI should now be understood as outreach initiatives to slowly operationalize the PRC’s long-held desires to reform the international economic, military, and normative orders. The BRI, injected with new financing at the third Belt and Road Forum last October, has been revitalized as a tool of economic diplomacy ([Xinhua](#), October 18, 2023). Beijing will likely keep boosting its investments in multilateral institutions—especially PRC-heavy groupings such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization—and seek to mobilize development-first coalitions more actively on global issues such as climate change, conflict zones, and free trade.

### **New Conviction to Shape Global Trends**

The CFAWC unveiled a shift in the Party’s longstanding discourse on “world multipolarization (世界多极化)” and “economic globalization (经济全球化).” The former concept generally refers to the PRC and other developing countries becoming relatively more powerful in the international system, especially compared to US unipolarity in the 1990s and 2000s and to the bipolar Cold War order. The latter means the integration of national economies through international trade, foreign investment, and technological exchange, a process from which China has derived significant asymmetric benefits. The Party Congress report first mentioned multipolarization in 1992, following the collapse of the Soviet Union, and globalization in 1997, when free trade dominated the international agenda. [2]

Leadership statements on the course of world multipolarization and economic globalization reflect authoritative assessments about the favorability of the PRC’s external environment and Beijing’s prospects for advancing its international interests. In 2002, as the United States flexed its geopolitical muscles after 9/11, Jiang made the muted evaluation that the two trends were “developing in twists and turns (在曲折中发展)” ([People’s Net](#), November 8, 2002). Hu declared world multipolarization to be “inevitable (不可逆转)” in 2007—amid looming US economic difficulties and strategic quagmires in the Middle East—but by 2012

had returned to a more conservative view that multipolarization and globalization were “deepening in their development (深入发展)” ([People’s Net](#), October 15, 2007; [People’s Net](#), November 8, 2012). Xi maintained this view in 2017, but by the next year a perception of rising political dysfunction in the United States and Europe led to more optimistic assessments, including at the CFAWC in 2018, which said the two trends were “accelerating in their advancement (加速推进)” ([Xinhua](#), June 23, 2018).

The readout of last year’s CFAWC declared that the PRC “advocates for a world multipolarization that is equitable and orderly, and for an economic globalization that is universal and inclusive.” It elaborated that equitable means creating an international system more favorable to developing countries, while orderly refers to abiding by the UN Charter to ensure the process of multipolarization is stable. Universal economic globalization entails prioritizing the demands of developing countries to address imbalances caused by the global allocation of resources, and being inclusive requires opposing unilateralism and protectionism, promoting the liberalization and facilitation of trade and investment, and addressing structural problems that hinder the development of the world economy.

This new formulation represents a shift in emphasis from the Party *describing* trends in the international system to *advocating* for the direction that these trends should take. To be sure, Beijing has always wanted multipolarization and globalization, and Xi has encouraged some foreign leaders to help China promote these trends (e.g., [Xinhua](#), August 23, 2023). But the recent change in official discourse and the expanded detail at a CFAWC hints at more focus on influencing these phenomena. The new language is now a standard part of Xi’s message to visiting politicians.

This policy development aligns with a shift in Beijing’s assessment of the international environment. Previously, the Party believed the PRC was enjoying a “period of strategic opportunity,” whereby a favorable international environment enabled Beijing to focus on domestic development. But in Xi’s report to the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, he said that the PRC had entered a period in which “strategic opportunities co-exist with risks and challenges, and uncertain and unpredictable factors are rising.” This darker outlook coincides with unbalanced growth and governance problems at home, growing hostility and economic decoupling toward the PRC in the West, and the continuing drag of COVID-19 and regional conflicts on the global economy.

The Party appears to believe both that the US-led embrace of strategic competition and technological containment means that the PRC *must* do more to advance its preferences in international affairs and that a more powerful PRC now *can* do more to shape global trends. Beijing may gradually become more interested and willing to insert itself in global hotspots, such as the current conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, even though its current involvements remain inchoate and insubstantial.

### **Diplomatic Rhetoric Tones Down**

Beijing is toning down “wolf warrior” diplomacy, at least for now. The CFAWC implied no change in Xi’s objective to build the PRC into a country that “leads the world in comprehensive national power and

international influence” ([Xinhua](#), October 16, 2022). But the readout said Beijing should “enhance the rationality, predictability, activeness, and creativity of foreign affairs work.” This line suggests a tactical adjustment to Beijing’s diplomacy to pursue its strategic ambitions in a less abrasive manner.

The CFAWC insinuates a belated disapproval of the inflammatory “wolf warrior” tactics that many PRC diplomats adopted early in Xi’s second term, especially following his call in 2019 for cadres to “show fighting spirit” ([Xinhua](#), September 3, 2019). The following years brought a slew of aggressive diplomatic actions that offended other countries, threatened other governments, and spread conspiracy theories, all of which contributed to the PRC hitting record-high unfavourability ratings in many Western countries (e.g., [Pew Research Center](#), July 27, 2023). Xi would have heard complaints directly from Western leaders when he began to travel and receive more visitors after the end of zero-Covid policies in late 2022.

This interpretation is reinforced by a speech that Xi gave right after the CFAWC to diplomats who were gathered in Beijing for the annual Work Conference for Overseas Envoys to Foreign Countries (WKOEFC) ([Xinhua](#), December 29, 2023). That was the first time Xi had addressed this group since 2017, when he debuted the idea of “great changes unseen in a century”—although he posed for photographs at the 2019 event ([Xinhua](#), December 28, 2017; [Xinhua](#), July 17, 2019; [China Brief](#), November 21, 2023). This year he said that the envoys should “be good at widely and deeply making friends,” “do the work of winning people’s hearts and minds,” and “use internationalized language to tell China’s story.”

The importance of Xi’s recent directives is belied by the scant attention that they garnered. They resonate with the PRC’s efforts over the past couple of years to wind down its trade war against Australia and reprioritize diplomacy with the United States, European Union, and other developed democracies. They also accord with Xi’s call for the envoys to “make good use of the magic weapon of the United Front,” Beijing’s mechanisms for quietly mobilizing non-Party groups to support the Party’s preferences.

Beijing seems to have learned from its diplomatic own goals, at least to some extent. The crucial distinction here is between the short-term explosion of “wolf warrior” diplomacy, which seems to be over, and the long-term trend of “assertive” diplomacy, whereby China is progressively exerting more power in international affairs. Indeed, Xi also told his envoys that they should “dare to struggle” and “resolutely defend national sovereignty, security, and development interests.” Beijing will increasingly “assert” its interests, including in ways that exacerbate strategic competition with Washington, but a smarter approach will both enhance stability and challenge Western coordination on policy toward the PRC.

### **Conclusion**

What Xi says matters. Official articles, meetings, and speeches are how he communicates the Party’s priorities to its millions of cadres and almost 100 million members. These sources are incomplete and must be interpreted carefully, but they represent the best insights we have into Xi’s mindset and should be relied on more to adjudicate major questions about his strategic intent. China watchers often refer to PRC politics as a “black box” into which little insight can be gleaned. While that analysis usually holds true for the process by which decisions are made, the Party in fact tells us a lot about what it believes and what it wants. It is

concerning that months after the fact, so little public analysis exists on relatively significant events such as the CFAWC and the WKOEFC.

Studying such developments can help contextualize Zhao Leji's speech to the Boao Forum as part of a permanent diplomatic offensive in the Global South, and Xi's audience with US executives as a temporary rearguard action in the West to slow threats to Beijing's broader vision. Moreover, the coexistence of these two policy strands in authoritative sources shows the gap between aspiration and reality in Chinese foreign policy. For all the ambition of Xi's CSFM and the Party's desire to promote multipolarization and globalization, Beijing is a way from achieving its goals and recognizes that it faces domestic challenges and international balancing. Xi may say what he wants but that does not mean he can get what he wants.

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### **Notes**

[1] The previous formulation in English for "community with a shared future for mankind" was the "community of common destiny" (cf. [China Brief](#), February 26, 2018).

[2] Policy advisors and scholars have identified and advocated for these trends since at least the 1980s. Some argue that the intellectual roots of this discourse begin with Mao Zedong's "three worlds" theory (see: [Pillsbury](#), 2000).

**PRC Exploitation of Russian Intelligence Networks in Europe**

*by Filip Jirouš*



Allegedly FSB-linked MEP Tatjana Ždanoka (second from right) meeting Bashar al-Assad in 2016, during a trip that included a visit to a Russian airbase in Syria. Estonian MEP Yana Toom (first from left) has also attended propaganda events in China, at times with her costs covered by PRC influence organs ([Synopsis](#), August 25, 2023). (Source: [Latvian Public Broadcasting](#))

**Executive Summary:**

- Russian-cultivated circles overlap with People’s Republic of China (PRC) intelligence networks. These intersections include politicians on both extremes of Europe’s political spectrum, and across countries which include Belgium, Germany, Poland, and the Czech Republic.
- “Daniel Woo,” a PRC state security officer, is a key figure connecting many of the network’s members. Woo has successfully influence debates in the German Bundestag and paid Belgian lawmakers to disseminate propaganda.
- State security networks further overlap with observer missions, lending legitimacy to Russian-organized elections in occupied territories in Ukraine.
- The networks extend to political parties leading polls for some of this year’s European Parliament and EU member state elections.
- Some action has already been taken. The Czech government sanctioned Voice of Europe, a media organization controlled by Russia through Viktor Medvedchuk, an oligarch charged with treason in Ukraine. Subsequently, Polish authorities arrested its legal representative.



Revelations about Russian intelligence assets in Europe expose overlaps with influence operations run by spy agencies from the People's Republic of China (PRC). Western mainstream media outlets have covered the Russian cases, but the ways in which PRC intelligence has been tapping into the same networks—including operations revealed in *China Brief*—have received little attention ([The New York Times](#), March 29; [China Brief](#), December 3, 2021). These overlaps exist at the level of both individual people and organizations, and they have the potential to disrupt European democratic processes.

### **New Russian Attempts to Capture European Politics**

Two recent investigations have exposed Russian intelligence operations targeting European politics in unprecedented detail. For the first time, extensive allegations identify members of the European Parliament (MEPs) as having worked with Russian spy networks, in some cases in exchange for monetary rewards.

In January, a media consortium from the Baltic states reported that hacked emails revealed Latvian MEP Tatjana Ždanoka had cooperated with two officers from Russia's Federal Security Service (FSB; *Федеральная служба безопасности*) for more than a decade ([The Insider](#), January 29; [Eesti Päevaleht](#), January 29). The alleged cooperation involved gathering information and organizing pro-Russian events. Ždanoka has not questioned the authenticity of the correspondence, but denied knowing that her contact was an FSB officer. The Latvian authorities opened a criminal investigation into her in February ([Latvian Public Broadcasting](#), March 17).

The second case came to light days before Easter. A coordinated effort by European intelligence and spearheaded by Czech counter-intelligence agencies cracked down on a Russian influence network. On March 27, Czech authorities announced sanctions against Voice of Europe (VoE), a Prague-based media company ultimately controlled by Ukrainian pro-Kremlin oligarch Viktor Medvedchuk ([Czech Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#), accessed March 29). The next day, Polish counterintelligence arrested the company's legal representative—a former officer of Poland's Government Protection Bureau (Biuro Ochrony Rządu), roughly equivalent to the US Secret Service—under suspicion of cooperating with Russian intelligence ([ABW](#), March 28; [O2](#), March 28; [Czech Ministry of Justice](#), April 3). According to a Hungarian media report citing intelligence sources, Visegrád Post, a Budapest-based media outlet, “has the same financing” as VoE. The case is part of the international counterintelligence investigation ([HVG](#), [March 31](#); [April 8](#)). Czech “security community” sources confirmed the cases bear similarity ([Deník N](#), April 4).

VoE has published news content, conducted interviews and organized several events with politicians at the EP and in EU member states ([Le Point](#), April 5; [Deník N](#), April 9). According to media reports, VoE also paid politicians from Germany, France, Poland, Belgium, the Netherlands, and Hungary and contributed to their campaigns ([Deník N](#), March 27). In exchange, the politicians disseminated pro-Russian narratives. Media reports based on Czech cabinet sources claim that politicians who accepted money from the organization include Petr Bystrouň, an MP with Germany's far-right Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) ([Deník N](#), April 2). Maximilian Kraus, another AfD MEP and the party's top candidate for the next European Parliament elections, gave at least two interviews to VoE. He denies receiving remuneration (VoE, [September 11, 2023](#), [August 1](#),

2023; [Der Spiegel](#), March 28). But back in 2021, Krah and Bystroň both met with Medvedchuk in Ukraine ([Focus.ua](#), November 8, 2021). Filip Dewinter, a leading MP with the far-right Flemish separatist party Vlaams Belang, has also done work for VoE, interviewing a former Czech president in September 2023. He likewise denies getting paid ([Le Monde](#), March 29; [YouTube](#), September 18, 2023).



Viktor Medvedchuk (middle), the Ukrainian oligarch behind a recently uncovered Russian intelligence network with Maximilian Krah (right), an MEP for Alternative für Deutschland (AfD) and Petr Bystroň (left), an AfD MP who allegedly took Medvedchuk's money. (Source: Opozitsionnaya platforma via [Focus.ua](#))

### **PRC Intelligence Woos Europe**

Recently uncovered influence operations involving PRC intelligence attracted less media attention, although they were qualitatively similar. These were run by the Ministry of State Security (MSS), the PRC's main civilian intelligence agency, and one of its provincial analogs. In one case, the state security network overlapped with that of the China Association for International Friendly Contact (CAIFC, 中国国际友好联络会). CAIFC is a political influence front of the People's Liberation Army (PLA) Political Work Department Liaison Bureau (政治工作部联络局), a military intelligence organ ([Project 2049](#), October 14, 2013). [1]

In 2023, European media reported that an officer of the Zhejiang Province State Security Department (浙江省国家安全厅) ran a network of agents in Belgium to collect information on top politicians and access sources in the European Parliament and the European Commission ([Der Spiegel](#), December 15, 2023; [Le Monde](#), December 15, 2023). [2] Using the name Daniel Woo, he recruited Frank Creyelman, a former Vlaams Belang legislator, and paid him to gather intelligence and coordinate propaganda operations ([Der Spiegel](#), December 15, 2023). Woo boasted in a leaked message of having "brought pressure on the

German government” through an AfD parliamentary question regarding a purported “wave of Hong Kong refugees.”

Belgian security services “were aware” of Woo’s ties to Shao Changchun (邵常淳), a PRC citizen expelled from Belgium for interference in 2017 ([Nieuwsblad](#), December 15, 2023; [De Standaard](#), December 15, 2023). In 2024, media reported that Vlaams Belang parliamentarian Dewinter had been paid by the PRC for political lobbying and providing access to politicians ([Humo](#), March 25). Dewinter also invited CAIFC to visit Belgium in 2016 and called himself “an old friend” of Cheng Guoping (程国平), a vice-chair of the association ([Humo](#), March 25).

Another MSS network surrounds the Budapest-based China-CEE Institute (中国-中东欧研究院), as previously exposed in this journal ([China Brief](#), [December 3, 2021](#); [July 1, 2022](#)). The institute is ostensibly a Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS)-run think tank gathering European scholars, organizing debates, and publishing on politics ([China Brief](#), December 3, 2021). However, the institute is headed by a former vice-president of the China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations (CICIR, 中国现代国际关系研究院), which serves as MSS cover for international think tank engagement ([China-CEE Institute](#), accessed April 8). [3] The Czech member of its international academic committee was involved in a Czech network pushing PRC propaganda in the country—a network that included former Czechoslovak Communist intelligence officers ([China-CEE Institute](#), accessed April 8; [China Brief](#), December 3, 2021).

### **Overlapping Networks**

The Russian and PRC intelligence webs outlined above intersect.

Daniel Woo’s network overlapped with Russian disinformation operations. This overlap originally centered on the late Manuel Ochsenreiter, an AfD parliamentary staffer who wielded considerable influence in the party ([Der Spiegel](#), December 15, 2023). In 2018 he allegedly incited and funded a false-flag terrorist attack in Ukraine, according to a 2019 Polish court testimony ([onet](#), October 22, 2019). The attack’s three Polish perpetrators were found guilty by the court in 2020 ([Gazeta Wyborcza](#), March 23, 2020). The AfD staffer fled to Moscow in 2019, where he died two years later ([t-online](#), August 20, 2021). Since no later than 2013, he had headed the far-right German media outlet *Zuerst!*, while concurrently working for Russia Today ([Der Spiegel](#), December 15, 2023; [Manuel Ochsenreiter](#), accessed August 20, 2013). More importantly, he acted as a “middleman” between the AfD, Russia, and the PRC, according to German security sources ([Der Spiegel](#), December 15, 2023). When Woo asked Creyelman where to place pro-PRC propaganda, the Belgian suggested *Zuerst!*, but it remains unclear whether Woo had anything published in Ochsenreiter’s outlet. However, according to German media, Ochsenreiter “received several thousand euros from China” for organizing the Hong Kong refugee wave parliamentary question ([Der Spiegel](#), December 15, 2023).

The most significant intersection of PRC and Russian networks has been found in the election observation missions designed to give credibility to the illegitimate plebiscites in Russian-occupied Ukrainian territories. Creyelman and Ochsenreiter participated in these missions in the Luhansk and Donetsk republics in 2018

([EPDE](#), accessed April 8; [EPDE](#), accessed April 8). Ochsenreiter also observed the 2014 Crimean referendum alongside the Latvian MEP Ždanoka ([Anton Shekhovstov](#), March 17, 2014). Filip Dewinter observed the 2018 Russian presidential elections ([EPDE](#), January 14, 2019).

Mateusz Piskorski, a former Polish far-right MP, observed the Donbas elections in 2014 along with Ochsenreiter. The two men kept in touch and “cooperated closely,” according to *Der Spiegel* ([Anton Shekhovstov](#), November 1, 2014; *Der Spiegel*, December 15, 2023). Piskorski was arrested in 2016 and charged with espionage for both Russia and the PRC. According to *Le Monde*, it was to Daniel Woo that Piskorski provided information on the PRC side ([Prokuratura Krajowa](#), April 23, 2018; *Le Monde*, December 15, 2023). A group of European politicians and journalists signed a letter supporting Piskorski against the charges, including Ždanoka and Ochsenreiter ([Uwolnić Piskorskiego!](#), accessed April 8). Piskorski was released on bail in 2019, and continues to work with pro-Russian fringe media, for example interviewing the Russian far-right ideologue Aleksandr Dugin ([Myśl Polska](#), January 1, 2023; [YouTube](#), February 26).

Ladislav Zemánek is another Russian asset working for an MSS network. Zemánek is an alt-right scholar and politician sanctioned in Ukraine ([Office of the National Security and Defense Council of Ukraine](#), accessed April 10). In 2014, Zemánek took part in the Donbas elections observation mission alongside Ochsenreiter, Piskorski, and Creyelman ([EPDE](#), November 4, 2021; [Anton Shekhovstov](#), November 1, 2014). Zemánek writes briefings on Czech politics for the Budapest institute and continues to provide comments to PRC state media ([China Daily](#), July 10, 2023; [China Brief](#), December 3, 2021).

### **Entering the Mainstream**

Russia-cultivated networks offer opportunities for PRC intelligence. They can be used even when its members are marginal but well-connected and can provide access to major parties in Europe, especially to those already being cultivated by PRC influence organs.

The Russian networks PRC agencies are tapping into may appear at first to be on the fringes of the political spectrum and thus of limited use. For example, Piskorski, the early Woo contact, participated in Russian operations through his activism in Polish racist and neo-Nazi movements ([Krytyka Polityczna](#), May 30, 2018). [4] After his arrest, Polish media reported that Piskorski was receiving funds from an election-observer organization headed by Luc Michel, the leader of an extra-parliamentary “national Bolshevik” party in Belgium ([Rzeczpospolita](#), May 26, 2016; [PCN](#), ca. 2001). [5] However, Piskorski’s access to the Polish political mainstream shows he is not simply a fringe character. In 2022, he interpreted for Poland’s first lady in 2022 ([Wirtualna Polska](#), March 12, 2022). The opportunity reportedly came through Piskorski’s ex-wife, a politician in the president’s party who worked for companies controlled by a state cybersecurity agency ([Wirtualna Polska](#), March 16, 2022; [NASK](#), March 2022).

These networks have perhaps most clearly entered the mainstream in Belgium. Vlaams Belang is polling first for this June’s Belgian federal and Flemish elections (*Le Soir*, [March 22](#); [March 23](#)). Moreover, Filip Dewinter, the CAIFC-linked MP, is also the first deputy speaker of the Flemish parliament, one of Belgium’s sub-national legislatures. Although Frank Creyelman was no longer a legislator when assisting Woo, he



retained contacts across European politics. His brother, a sitting MP, was on a parliamentary defense procurement committee until the Woo revelations surfaced ([VRT](#), December 21, 2023).



AfD MEP Krahn interviewed by *Economic Daily* (经济日报), a state media organ, while visiting China in 2019. The photograph is credited to Guo Jian, whose name is identical to that of the assistant who accompanied Krahn on that trip. (Source: [Economic Daily](#)).

In Germany, too, the far right is no longer fringe. The AfD is currently polling second for next year's general election ([Wahlrecht](#)). Contacts with Russian AfD networks intersect with preexisting PRC ties. Ochsenreiter, the late AfD parliamentary staffer linked to Russia, was part of Woo's network ([Der Spiegel](#), December 15, 2023). In 2020, Ochsenreiter interviewed leading AfD MEP—and VoE interviewee—Maximilian Krahn, who praised China's economic achievements and urged Europe to ignore PRC aggression toward Taiwan ([Zuerst!](#), August 29, 2020). Krahn was a vice-chair of an informal EU-China friendship group at the European Parliament, which partnered with major CCP influence organs ([Sinopsis](#), November 26, 2019; [EU-China Friendship Association](#)). [6] Krahn directly interacted with one of these organs—the CCP International Liaison Department (ILD)—during a 2019 trip paid for by a PRC state-owned company and Huawei ([t-online](#), October 1, 2023). According to German media, Guo Jian (郭健), Krahn's assistant at the European Parliament, helped set up a PRC-aligned lobbying organization in Germany, and assisted Krahn on the 2019 trip (see picture above) ([t-online](#), October 1, 2023; [Zhejiang Daily](#), September 24, 2020). Guo and the lobbying group arranged a trip to the PRC around the same dates for a delegation that included Tim Lochner, a German city councilor, promoting ties with Lishui (丽水), a prefecture-level city in Zhejiang province ([t-online](#), October 1, 2023). In 2023, Lochner became the AfD's first mayor ([Der Spiegel](#), December 17, 2023).

If PRC agencies can exploit further contacts along Russian networks, the potential for political influence in European politics increases. The Czech Republic provides a good example of how this can happen. Four



years ago, the country shifted away from being one of the most PRC-aligned EU member states to embracing Taiwan ties and a more Western orientation ([China Brief](#), May 9, 2019; [Prospect Foundation](#), March 3, 2022). However, the newly exposed Russian network is linked with two parties that could form a government after next year's election ([iRozhlas](#), March 14). According to Czech media, the alt-right Freedom and Direct Democracy (SPD; *Svoboda a přímá demokracie*) facilitated interviews with politicians (including from the AfD) for VoE ([Hlídací pes](#), March 28). A top SPD MP recently attended an event in Slovakia where VoE was an official partner ([Hlídací pes](#), March 28). [7] Also present at the event was the first deputy speaker of the Czech Chamber of Deputies from the ANO party, which currently leads in the polls ([Hlídací pes](#), March 28; [ČT24](#), March 14). An MP for ANO was an observer in the 2014 Crimea referendum ([ČT24](#), March 19, 2014). The ILD, a key influence organ, has targeted both parties, with an ANO leader claiming in 2019 that they wished to “boost exchanges with the CCP,” according to an ILD readout from the meeting ([ILD](#), November 7, 2019; [Sinopsis](#), November 10, 2019; [Seznam zprávy](#), February 26, 2020). The Czech Republic's future orientation remains uncertain but could easily pivot back if these PRC-linked political parties gain power next year.

### **Conclusion**

Russian intelligence networks have proven fertile grounds for exploitation by PRC civilian and military intelligence. The cases outlined above show that parliamentary assistants and well-connected ex-legislators are ideal targets for intelligence gathering and manipulation. [8]

As the PRC and Russia continue to align, individual cooptees will more likely work for both authoritarian states. And as alt-right movements become more mainstream—and mainstream political parties become more alt-right—the risk of PRC intelligence influencing European politics through Russia-cultivated networks will continue to rise.

*The author is grateful to Jichang Lulu for discussions of earlier versions of this article and for contributing research, especially in French.*

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### **Notes**

[1] For a recent discussion of CAIFC and its external operations see work published in this journal and by a China-focused think tank Sinopsis ([China Brief](#), June 26, 2019; [Sinopsis](#), July 18, 2022).

[2] The Zhejiang bureau concentrates on Europe, according a former senior MI6 officer (Nigel Inkster, [China's Cyber Power](#), Routledge, 2016, p.50, 55). This focus could be explained by Zhejiang diaspora's

strong presence on the Old Continent. For more discussion of sub-national state security organs, see work by Alex Joske and a previous publication with this journal ([Deserepi: Studies in Chinese Communist Party external work](#), 2023; [China Brief](#), January 14, 2011).

[3] Alex Joske, *Spies and Lies: How China's Greatest Covert Operations Fooled the World*, Hardie Grant Books, 2022, p. 199.

[4] Anton Shekhovtsov, "[Russia and the European Far Right](#)", PhD dissertation, University College London, 2018, pp. 117.

[5] Michel has engaged in high-profile pro-Russian activities in Europe and Africa where, according to a 2023 BBC investigation, he advanced Russian influence on the continent through a disinformation network ([RTBF](#), February 18; [BBC](#), February 1, 2023). When asked, he denied ties to Wagner and Prigozhin, despite promoting them, but stated: "I manage the cyberwar, the media war ... and Prigozhin conducts military activities" ([BBC](#), February 1, 2023). Michel and his Observatory also supported an attempt to declare the Republic of Detroit in 2021 ([NPR](#), February 1, 2023).

[6] The European Parliament EU-China Friendship Group (EUCFG, 欧洲议会欧中友好小组) was initiated in 2010 by Gai Lin (盖琳), an EP assistant to both of its consecutive chairs. EUCFG was created "to ensure that China-friendly European politicians and former politicians continue promoting Europe-China friendship" ([Sinopsis](#), November 26, 2019; [China International Chamber of Commerce for the Private Sector](#), March 13). Gai acted as the group's secretary-general, while concurrently advising a provincial-level PRC influence organ ([Sinopsis](#), November 26, 2019). In 2021, the group was suspended after EP scrutiny over its PRC exposure ([European Parliament](#), January 25, 2021) However, Gai has continued to be described in PRC media as secretary-general of the EU-China Friendship Association (欧盟中国友好协会), a sister organization to the now suspended group ([CNS](#), April 12, 2023). Gai has taken up new leadership positions in Belgian and pan-European diaspora groups coopted by the PRC united front work system. The most prominent of these groups is the Europe Northeastern China Hometown Association and Chamber of Commerce (欧洲东北同乡会暨商会), gathering 49 members from across 21 countries ([Nouvelles d'Europe](#), April 1, 2022). For more on European coopted diaspora networks see [China Brief](#), September 16, 2020.

[7] Voice of Europe's mention has meanwhile disappeared from the official press release (The Business Soirée, March 24, accessed [March 26](#); accessed [March 28](#)).

[8] The targeting of parliamentary assistants by PRC intelligence organs has also been in evidence in the United Kingdom ([The Times](#), September 11, 2023).

**Chinese Women from the Countryside: Views on Marriage**

*by Maya Wang*



Wall poster in rural China saying “the population alarm bells are ringing all the time. It is always time to pay attention to family planning.” (Source: [NYRCW.cc](http://NYRCW.cc))

**Executive Summary:**

- Recent data from China shows a decline in fertility rates in the countryside as well as in the cities. This complicates hopes that rural women could alleviate the declining birthrate.
- Demographic decline is increasingly a concern for policymakers. The population was found to have fallen for the second consecutive year in 2023.
- Cultural and policy pressures, including the rising cost of raising children and traditional preferences for sons, contribute to rural women's reluctance to have more children.
- Mistreatment of girls and women, compounded by factors like poverty and disability, has led to an exodus of women from rural areas. Some rural women have expressed feminist sentiments and a desire to escape patriarchal constraints, leading to migration to urban areas.
- Many women are unwilling to conform to state-driven reproductive policies, likely including a recently announced policy to strengthen reproductive support in rural villages. Taken together, these programs constitute a shift from the punitive “One Child” policy.

In their first policy document of the year, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee and the State Council announced that they would “strengthen reproductive support in rural villages (加强农村生育支持)” ([Xinhua](#), February 3). This is the first time this policy phrase has appeared in the annual document, which usually focuses on rural governance. The policy is part of the government’s pivot away from its punitive “One Child” birth control policy, which was in place from the 1980s until it was relaxed in 2013. In 2021, the government shifted to explicitly encouraging births by adopting “supportive reproductive measures (生育支持措施).” The government says it is now focusing on “developing a high-quality population (人口高质量发展)” ([Xinhua](#), July 20, 2021).

The pivot comes as the People’s Republic of China (PRC) confronts a steep demographic decline. Statistics show that in 2023, the PRC’s population fell in absolute terms for the second year in a row ([Reuters](#), January 17). The number of women of childbearing age has been shrinking for much longer—by around four to five million people every year since 2012. This “crisis” is largely of the PRC’s own making. The government’s One Child policy, which brutally limited the number of births a family could have, compounded the natural decline in the fertility rate and an aging population, both of which are common trends in industrializing societies.

### **Cultural and Policy Pressures on Rural Women**

Some in the PRC had hoped that the solution to the problem lay with rural women ([Global Times](#), July 22, 2015). Around a decade ago, they were having more children than their urban counterparts ([The Paper](#), September 15, 2015). But data from recent years indicate that fertility rates have begun to decline in the countryside too ([China Development Observation](#), July 22, 2022). Studies show that traditional preferences persist among rural married couples, though these have become significantly less pronounced than in the past. Couples continue to want at least one child, seem to continue to show a preference for boys over girls, and women are more willing to have a second child if the first is a girl. [1]

An academic study by a researcher at Nankai University shows that among those born in the 1980s, 60 percent have two children ([Huxiu](#), March 9, 2023). Among the younger cohort—those born in the 1990s—interest in having children is lower. Most only want one child. Both cohorts show a universal lack of interest in having as many as three children.

The cost of raising children, both in terms of the time and financial resources required, is a key reason why rural women are not having more children. This is something that they share with those in the cities. Women in the countryside have more of a voice now than they did in the past—not least because possible brides are now sought after by families, due to the gender imbalance that resulted from the One Child policy. This voice apparently includes decisions over whether to give birth, even in the face of pressure from parents and in-laws, who used to hold complete authority over the fate of married women.

Women born in the 1980s and 1990s have experienced the dramatic magnification of the traditional preference for sons over daughters under the One Child policy. Consequently, they grew up thinking that

women and marriage is a bad combination. Some may have seen how their mothers who became pregnant were subjected to forced abortions by the PRC's abusive family planning officials. Some witnessed how their parents gave away their sisters—"out of quota girls (超生女)"—to be raised by extended family members so that the parents could try for a boy. Some knew baby girls were abandoned (millions of girls are estimated to be "missing" due to infanticide and forced abortions). [2] [3] They also experienced how their mothers, internalizing such oppression, recriminated them for being born, spending relatively little time or energy raising them (CDI, November 28, 2020). They were told from a young age that they were unwanted, that they were not part of the family, and that their parents were looking forward to marrying them off (Sina, May 29, 2023). Some even witnessed and experienced domestic violence.

While it is impossible to properly gauge Chinese public opinion given due to severe censorship, on less sensitive topics the mainstream social media site Zhihu offers some clues (Zhihu, October 29, 2023). Some of Zhihu's popular threads suggest that some women who grew up in the countryside show strong feminist sentiment, and a desire to not conform. In response to a question on gender discrimination, one woman, born in 1985, wrote about her experiences growing up in Feng County, a rural area in the relatively prosperous coastal province Jiangsu. Her post received over 11,000 likes and 3,000 comments (CDI, February 21, 2022):

*My mother...became pregnant with a second child, my sister. At that time, in the countryside, if the first child was a girl, [parents] were still allowed to have another child. Unfortunately, the next child was my sister. My mother cried at that time. After she finished crying, she snatched my sister and was about to strangle her when ... it was my dad who made the final decision: "Why strangle her to death? She's been born, later we could always give her away." So, my sister survived by luck. Until now, my mother would still vividly tell my sister, that "If it wasn't for your dad who pitied you, you'd have been strangled to death by me." She didn't think this matter was serious because everyone did it this way.*

These two sisters grew up as the family's *de facto* maids, looking after their younger brother who never had to lift a finger to help out at home:

*I started washing pots and pans when I was five years old and started cooking for the whole family from first grade...my sister and I [learnt to be] proficient in everything. If we slacked off a little, my dad would start hitting us immediately.*

Mistreatment of girls and women has often been more severe the more disadvantaged the girls are. This is especially true in poorer and more remote areas, or if the girls have disabilities. In cases where girls are both poor and disabled, the mistreatment can be particularly acute. One such case in 2022 shocked many in the PRC. Xiaohuamei (小花梅), a woman believed to have a psychosocial disability, was found chained at the neck in a ramshackle hut in rural Jiangsu province. She had been trafficked twice and held in the home of a man who may have forced her to bear him eight children (HRW, June 7, 2022). Such environments which can be hostile and dangerous for women contribute to the decisions of young women today to flee their



families and the places they were born. This was not an option for previous generations, such as that of their mothers. Women born in the 1960s and 1970s had few choices but to stay due to the enforcement of strict controls on movement.

### **Voting with Their Feet**

There has been an exodus of women from the countryside in recent years. This phenomenon is not exclusive to women—there is an overall trend of rural to urban migration in the PRC. But the departure of women in particular has generated concerns. One county in Hunan province went as far as saying that it is encouraging women to return or stay in the countryside so the unmarried rural men—known as “bare branches (光棍),” and who outnumber women—can have wives and children ([The Paper](#), October 11, 2021). However, many of those who have left appear determined not to return.

Some women—including those who say they grew up in villages—have expressed stridently feminist views. In a separate Zhihu thread, viewed over one million times with nearly 400 comments, a young woman from Shaanxi, who now lives in Shanghai, wrote ([Zhihu](#), October 31, 2023):

*Women have never had the right to call the shots in the countryside. If you can take the initiative to embrace “traditional” society, [the patriarchy] will transfer some of their power to you. If you are “deviant” like me, they will leave you without any power.*

Rural government officials also routinely deny women their right to use rural land ([Yixi](#), April, 2022). The same woman commented on this, saying that “while sometimes I have thoughts of returning to my hometown ... [but] all the land ... belongs to my brother.” She laments that even trying to have her body returned to her village to be buried would not be an option. So now she would “rather run away like the Yellow River ... never to return.”

These sentiments are shared by many others. A young woman from Zhejiang wrote:

*I have always been indifferent to those who say they’re escaping Beijing, Shanghai, and Guangzhou and returning to their hometowns. For girls like us who grew up in a patriarchal environment, there is no hometown.*

Another said she had escaped to Beijing:

*It didn’t matter how my family pressured me to get married ... that dozens of relatives took turns bombarding me—I would not marry. After I couldn’t stand them bothering me [any longer], I took 200 yuan with me and quietly ran to Beijing. I found a home on the outskirts of the city ... and although I had no money, I ate steamed buns every day ... I would rather die than to stay in the countryside” ([Zhihu](#), January 15).*

Many who do stay in or return to the countryside to start families do not seem to have much time or energy to devote to their children, let alone to “develop a high-quality population” as the government desires. Instead, tremendous financial pressures continue to force many rural couples to work as migrant workers in the cities, leaving their children behind. This is because government policies discourage rural children from attending schools in cities. One in five children are “left behind (留守)” with other relatives in this way, according to official statistics ([China Release](#), May 12, 2023). They are vulnerable to bullying and other abuses ([The Paper](#), March 26). An academic and a social worker has observed that some mothers, who themselves lacked love and attention from their own parents growing up, appear unable to love or care for their children ([CDI](#), December 6, 2020). The academic noted that some of these young mothers consider going to cities to work “as the best excuse to escape from bringing up their children.”

A sociologist affiliated with the Shanghai Academy of Social Science’s Institute of Sociology who studies rural development remarked that while the physical infrastructure of the PRC’s countryside has improved as a result of President Xi Jinping’s signature “poverty alleviation” initiative, “there are more and more problems in rural families,” including multiple divorces and abandoned children ([QQ](#), March 2):

*Women who go out to work cannot stand the same men when they come home. ... [W]omen sacrificing their own happiness for the family have become a thing of the past. Living a free and unrestrained life has become the dominant value ... Women who cannot support a family are no longer willing to pay blindly and choose to escape.*

### **Conclusion**

The PRC government’s efforts to boost the birthrate so far have focused in part on technocratic solutions, often borrowing solutions from other countries. These measures include providing more maternity leave, housing and tax benefits, and cash handouts. In the countryside, the government has also tried to address bride prices, which have risen to “astronomical” heights in recent years due to the gender imbalance. Official actions have also included waging publicity campaigns ([CCTV](#), February 12, 2023). At an October 2023 All-China Women’s Federation meeting, President Xi Jinping told the cadres there to “guide women to play their roles in carrying forward the traditional virtues [传统美德] of the Chinese nation” and “in establishing good family traditions” ([Xinhua](#), October 10, 2023). They should “actively cultivate a new culture of marriage and childbearing (新型婚育文化)” among women, so they can “improve the quality of population development” and “respond to the aging of the population.”

Many of these measures are important and positive. They may even help some women to better care for their families. However, for this generation of women, many are unwilling to turn their bodies on and off depending on the needs of the state. The government’s pivot from a coercive to a supportive model of birth control has thus come too little, too late.

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**Notes**

[1] 高杨 邹丽. 城市与农村育龄女性二胎生育意愿及生育行为差异研究[J]. 中国计划生育学杂志, 2020, 28(4): 475-. [http://manu27.magtech.com.cn/Jwk\\_jhsy\\_new/CN/](http://manu27.magtech.com.cn/Jwk_jhsy_new/CN/)

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[2] Wall, Winter. "China's Infanticide Epidemic." *Human Rights & Human Welfare*. Vol. 9: Iss. 1. <https://digitalcommons.du.edu/hrhw/vol9/iss1/51>

[3] Shi Y, Kennedy JJ. Delayed Registration and Identifying the "Missing Girls" in China. *The China Quarterly*. 2016; 228:1018-1038. doi:10.1017/S0305741016001132

**CCP Cyber Sovereignty Contains Lessons For AI's Future**

*by Matthew J. Dagher-Margosian*



Graphic visualizing AI sovereignty and national security. (Source: [51cto.com](https://www.51cto.com))

**Executive Summary:**

- Xi Jinping is unequivocal that US-China AI cooperation is contingent on Western artificial intelligence (AI) technology flowing into the People's Republic of China (PRC).
- Broken promises from past US-China technology transfers suggest the PRC will once again use US technology to strengthen censorship and surveillance domestically and then export these technologies to aid other authoritarian regimes.
- The emerging framework of "AI sovereignty," born out of a previous framework for "cyber sovereignty," emphasizes a nation's right to regulate AI according to its own values and interests. The PRC positions itself as a leader in this discourse.
- The PRC is lobbying for AI sovereignty globally and is already exporting AI technologies to other authoritarian regimes, raising concerns about the potential impact on global democracy and human rights.

For the past decade, the priorities of “economic security, national security, and security in other areas” have driven Xi Jinping’s pursuit of advanced technologies ([Xinhua](#), June 9, 2014). The government of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) has launched countless policies to achieve “self-reliance” in technologies like software, semiconductors, mobile phone operating systems, and robotics ([Quishi](#), July 31, 2023; [STCN](#), November 14, 2023). For Xi, self-reliance is predicated on mistrust of the West. He has previously warned that “Western countries believe that the master will starve if he passes on his knowledge to his apprentice” and argued that the PRC “must focus on our own innovation” ([People.cn](#), April 19, 2018). This has led to Western IT equipment, iPhones, and Microsoft operating systems being replaced with domestic technology across the PRC ([WSJ](#), March 7).

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) seeks a leading role in shaping global norms for artificial intelligence (AI). It is also calling for a United Nations AI governance body and has launched the Global AI Governance Initiative to demand global “information exchange and technological cooperation on the governance of AI” (MFA, [March 7](#); [October 20, 2023](#)). The Party has rolled out the red carpet for those at the forefront of Western-led AI efforts. Former Minister of Foreign Affairs Qin Gang (秦刚), Ministry of Finance and Commerce Head Wang Wentao (王文涛), and Xi himself have personally discussed US-China cooperation on AI with leading tech figures, including Elon Musk, Bill Gates, Tim Cook, Synopsis CEO Sassine Ghazi, and Microsoft President Brad Smith (MOFCOM: [March 25](#); [December 6, 2023](#); [March 3, 2023](#); MFA, May 30, 2023).

US business leaders have responded to the PRC’s outreach. Speaking at a Beijing AI conference, OpenAI CEO Sam Altman cited nuclear weapons as a precedent for global cooperation on mitigating existential risks ([Global Times](#), July 10, 2023). Elon Musk has called for US-China AI cooperation as being in the interest of “team humanity” ([Bloomberg](#), July 12, 2023). Microsoft and Google heads Satya Nadella and Sundar Pichai have also voiced support for bilateral cooperation ([BBC Chinese](#), October 7, 2019; [The Paper](#), November 17, 2023). Meanwhile, Microsoft, OpenAI, and Apple have begun collaborating with PRC AI researchers as well as with domestic companies like Baidu and Edianyun on the PRC’s domestic AI efforts ([Financial Times](#), January 11; [Global Times](#), March 26; [36kr](#), February 25).

US President Joe Biden acknowledged a need for more US-China dialogue on AI in his remarks to Xi at the APEC forum last November, as well as during a call in early April ([People’s Daily](#), April 2; MFA, November 16, 2023). Their respective nations were among 28 to sign the 2023 Bletchley Declaration, pledging international cooperation on AI safety ([Gov.uk](#), November 1, 2023). And this January, National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan met with Minister of Foreign Affairs Wang Yi (王毅) to discuss holding the first US-China bilateral meeting on AI risk (MFA, January 27). Director of the White House Office of Science and Technology Policy Arati Prabhakar has also recently alluded to future US-China AI dialogues ([Financial Times](#), January 24).



### **PRC Demands for AI Cooperation**

Major impasses remain for US-China AI collaboration. The Biden administration has implemented significant restrictions on the technology underpinning AI development through strict export controls on semiconductors to the PRC. It has also demanded that other countries follow suit ([BIS](#), November 6, 2023). These controls are in addition to restrictions on exports of chipmaking equipment, potential future sanctions on Huawei semiconductors, and restricting PRC access to AI compute via cloud service providers ([WSJ](#), July 4th, 2023; [SCMP](#), Jan 27).

The CCP has been clear that there will be no substantial US-China cooperation over AI governance while the Biden administration blocks access to AI technology. At his 2024 World Economic Forum keynote, Premier Li Qiang (李强) stated that controls over advanced technologies like AI cannot “become a means to restrict or contain other countries” ([Caixin](#), January 16). Wang Yi has also directly critiqued US policy, stating that “small courtyards and high walls” around AI are “historic mistakes” ([MFA](#), March 7). [1] Meanwhile, Xi has begun to directly pressure US allies such as the Netherlands to provide the PRC with semiconductors lithography equipment, asserting that “no force can stop China’s scientific and technological development and progress” ([AP News](#), March 27; [Xinhua](#), March 27).

### **US IT and PRC Democracy: A Failed Gambit**

History suggests that the PRC’s desire for collaboration on AI and its demands for AI technologies are not as genuine as they may seem. In the late 1990s, President Bill Clinton was convinced that providing the CCP with the transformative technology of that era—the Internet—would lead the Chinese populace to reject authoritarianism, famously proclaiming that controlling the Internet would be like trying to “nail Jell-O to a wall” ([New York Times](#), April 4, 2000). In his dialogues with Clinton, CCP leader Jiang Zemin also seemed to genuinely embrace Western technology and expertise. In 1997, Jiang toured the United States to lobby for the PRC’s inclusion in the WTO and met with Cisco and Apple. ([CISCO](#), September 21, 1998; [Washington Post](#), October 29, 1997).

US media portrayed Jiang as cheerleading Western technology, but CCP documents tell another story. As far back as 1983, Jiang framed Western technology as a way to “accelerate the development” of the PRC’s technological “self-reliance” ([Xinhua](#), April 22, 2009). In a 1999 speech, Jiang emphasized again that the PRC could not “blindly rely on foreign ready-made technologies” ([MOST](#), December 22, 2006). Jiang’s approach was to offer US tech companies market access, allowing the PRC to “digest, absorb, improve, and innovate imported technologies to facilitate development of China’s technological advantages and enhance China’s ability to be self-reliant” ([Xinhua](#), April 27, 2006).

Clinton’s gambit that the internet would conquer the CCP instead saw the CCP transform the internet into the greatest technological tool for surveillance, censorship, and authoritarianism in the PRC’s history ([The Intercept](#), February 18, 2021; [The China Project](#), August 19, 2020; [ZDNET](#), October 24, 2016; [Wired](#), May 20, 2000). Western tech firms whose knowledge helped build the CCP’s surveillance and censorship

capacities have increasingly found themselves replaced by domestic alternatives ([China Daily](#), September 24, 2015; [DCD](#), August 15, 2019).

### **Betrayal and the Birth of Cyber Sovereignty**

The PRC has now developed an ideological framework of “cyber sovereignty” to openly rebuke US “hegemony” over AI and other advanced technologies ([Global Times](#), January 28; [Global Times](#), June 29, 2023). This alternative framework for governing technology was first developed between 1994 and 2005 when PRC academics began debating cyberspace, sovereignty, and overcoming “digital colonialism” between China and Western powers ([Oxford University Press](#), Oct 2022). These debates turned into policy when, in 2010, a State Council white paper declared the PRC’s domestic internet technology and networks under the jurisdiction of “Chinese sovereignty” ([SCIO](#), June 8, 2010).

Xi Jinping later codified this policy framework as “cyber sovereignty (网络主权)” —the notion that both democratic and authoritarian countries have the right to “independently choose their own path of cyber development, model of cyber regulation, and Internet public policies” ([FMPRC](#), December 16, 2015). [2] Cyber sovereignty as a framework for governing technology, has provided the CCP with a ready-made “kit” to export technology, expertise, regulations, and ideology abroad for authoritarian use ([Qiushi](#), September 16, 2018; [Pacific Forum](#), July 2019). This “kit” further assists authoritarian nations in their justification for rejecting the Western “hegemony” of democratic and open technological governance ([World Internet Forum](#), November 9, 2023).

The PRC has worked since to form technological alliances with other authoritarian nations ([Xinhua](#), May 9, 2015). In 2015, Russia and the PRC signed a groundbreaking pact to develop “universal” cyberspace norms ([Xinhua](#), May 9, 2015). In 2017, the PRC signed the “One Belt, One Road” (Belt and Road Initiative; BRI) Digital Economy International Cooperation Initiative with Laos, Saudi Arabia, Serbia, Thailand, Turkey, and the UAE, with member countries pledging to “respect cyber sovereignty” ([CAC](#), May 11, 2015). Cyber sovereignty was also a key requirement when the PRC and fourteen African nations signed the China-Africa Initiative to Work Together to Build a Community with a Shared Future in Cyberspace ([CAC](#), August 25, 2021).

The CCP has also sought to install cyber sovereignty as a core value within global organizations. In 2015, a PRC-led member group within the UN proposed including cyber sovereignty as part of the International Code of Conduct for Information Security ([CCDCOE](#), February 2015). With CCP support, Russia formed the “Open-Ended Working Group” (OEWG) in 2018 to oppose the American-led Group of Government Experts (GGE) and promote cyber sovereignty over democratic applications of tech governance. The lack of consensus between the GGE and the OEWG has led to an unresolved split regarding the UN’s approach to global internet governance ([Just Security](#), July 16, 2021).

PRC efforts to spread cyber sovereignty are also backed by state funding and person-to-person transfers of knowledge. Officials, including the Great Firewall’s “architect” Fang Bingxing (方滨兴), directly consulted

with Russian counterparts on censorship and surveillance ([Eurozine](#), February 21, 2017). Similarly, Zimbabwe, Uganda, and Zambia have studied or adopted the PRC's cyber sovereignty principles or been given direct technical assistance ([Veritas Zimbabwe](#), March 11, 2022; [WSJ](#), August 15, 2019; [Foreign Policy](#), July 24, 2018; [Sina](#), February 10, 2015). In addition, the PRC has loaned billions of dollars to companies like Huawei and Hikvision through government-run policy banks ([IPVM](#), August 18, 2016). These state-approved loans have been traced to exports of surveillance technology and IT to authoritarian systems or weak democracies like Pakistan, the Ivory Coast, Mongolia, the Philippines, Belarus, and Serbia ([Boston University Global Development Policy Center](#), accessed April 3; [Aiddata](#), 2021; [AP News](#), October 17, 2019).

### **Defining AI Sovereignty: Infrastructure and 'Chinese Characteristics'**

An emerging framework of "AI sovereignty," or "sovereign AI" is evolving from the existing framework of cyber-sovereignty. This can be traced through public policy debates ([Carnegie Institute](#), July 10, 2023). As far back as 2018, academics were predicting that China would need to participate in global governance due to the "sovereign costs" of AI. ([Sohu](#), September 18, 2018). In 2020, the term "AI sovereignty (人工智能主权)" was defined by scholars Zhao Jun (赵骏) and Li Wanzhen (李婉贞) as the right for countries to internally regulate AI as they see fit ([Journal of Zhejiang University](#), 2020). A more expansive framework later defined it as a country's ability to regulate AI training data, how users engage with AI, and the transparency of AI algorithms ([Journal of Shanghai University of Finance and Economics](#), 2022). These concepts draw explicitly on existing Chinese legal frameworks around cyber sovereignty, data sovereignty, and algorithmic transparency. [3] [4]

Related to "AI sovereignty," Nvidia's CEO Jensen Huang (黄仁勋) has advanced the idea of "sovereign AI (主权人工智能)" as a nation state's ability to "develop AI infrastructure" while "protecting its culture and language" ([Nvidia.cn](#), February 19; [Sina](#), March 11). [5] Academics within the PRC have taken Huang's definition to theorize that to achieve sovereign AI, countries should establish "local AI systems and infrastructure to meet their own specific production needs, control their own data and intelligence security, and prevent other countries' 'AI intrusions.'" Failure to establish sovereign AI would leave the PRC vulnerable to "digital colonization (数字殖民)" and "the penetration of Western ideological trends" ([Outlook Think Tank](#), April 9). [6]

Within this discourse, "Chinese values (中国价值观)" are seen as crucial for the CCP's control of sovereign AI. Top AI researchers like Professor Yao Xin (姚新) of Lingnan University, has advocated for domestic AI to reflect "Chinese Values" ([Tencent Research Institute](#), March 21). Yan Kunru (闫坤如) of Shanghai University and a chief AI ethics expert at the National Social Science Foundation, has gone further, advocating that the PRC "must develop AI with Chinese characteristics," adding that "we cannot be influenced by Western values" ([Tencent Research Institute](#), March 21). Op-eds in state media have also emphasized that "there is no such thing as technology neutrality ... [AI] has values, generated content has a direction, and AI products have a stance" ([People's Daily](#), October 29, 2023).

State media have further expanded on AI infrastructure and sovereignty. Li Zhiqi (李志起), director of the Beijing Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference's economic committee, has stated that "sovereign AI infrastructure (主权 AI 基础设施) is a national security necessity and is "based in the localization of computing power" ([Global Times](#), February 24). Tian Feng (田丰), founding dean of the SenseTime Intelligent Industry Research Institute, has emphasized that countries must protect their AI infrastructure and that "Artificial Intelligence is national sovereignty" ([163.com](#), March 28).

### **Turning 'AI Sovereignty' into AI Policy**

The thinking behind "AI sovereignty" or "sovereign AI," although not explicitly mentioned in policy documents, is the emerging framework for the CCP's governance. [7] Former Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Fu Ying (傅莹) cautioned as far back as 2019 that the PRC must consider how AI "will inevitably impact the relationship of sovereign equality between large and small, strong and weak countries" ([Sina](#), April 12, 2019). Minister of the Ministry of Science and Technology Wang Zhigang (王志刚) has warned of several "gaps" between the PRC and leading AI powers in areas such as chips, talent, and infrastructure ([QStheory](#), August 5, 2019). To address weaknesses in the PRC's sovereign AI, Premier Li Qiang has spoken with experts about the PRC's lack of AI "self-reliance" and dependence on foreign open-source language models ([CCTV](#), March 13). These same researchers expressed to Li their concerns over the immaturity of PRC semiconductors ([SCMP](#), March 15).

Party research supports Wang's warnings, with the China Academy of Labor and Social Security Sciences calculating the PRC needs at least 300,000 more AI researchers to meet current demands ([Caixin](#), April 14, 2023). Other concerns that have been highlighted by domestic researchers include the country's shortage of high-quality data necessary for training Large Language Models (LLMs) compared to Western nations ([Tencent Research Institute](#), November 16, 2023; [People's Daily](#), October 29, 2023). Finally, flaws in China's computing power capacity, have been cited as "fragmented" and "not conducive" to developing AI ([SCMP](#), March 23).

The PRC's existing AI laws also reflect the emerging AI sovereignty/sovereign AI discourse. The laws on generative AI from the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) explicitly call for AI developed in the PRC to "adhere to the correct political direction, public opinion, and values" and not "disrupt economic and social order" ([CAC](#), November 25, 2022; [CAC](#), April 11, 2023). Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) academics have drafted a hypothetical "National AI Law" calling on AI technologies to "adhere to the core socialist values, not incite subversion of state power, overthrow the socialist system, endanger national security and interests, damage the national image, incite secession, undermine national unity and social stability" ([Data Law Alliance](#), August 16, 2023).

### **Exporting AI Sovereignty**

Globally, the PRC is lobbying for AI sovereignty in both other countries and global organizations, just as it did for cyber sovereignty. CAC and MFA officials have publicly affirmed AI sovereignty as a key position for cooperation with the PRC ([Huangjiu](#), November 25, 2023; [MFA](#), December 21, 2020). The PRC's UN ambassador Zhang Jun (张军) has also called for countries to establish “AI governance systems that are in line with their own national conditions” ([PRC Mission to the UN](#), July 18, 2023).

In 2022, PRC representatives submitted the “Strengthening the Ethical Governance of AI” position paper to the UN. This paper requested flexible AI ethics based on “national conditions” and respect for “different countries’ AI governance” ([MFA](#), November 17, 2022). Most explicitly, the PRC's Global AI Governance Initiative states that global AI technology should respect “national sovereignty and strictly abide by [countries’] laws when providing [countries] with AI products and services” ([MFA](#), October 20, 2023).

PRC companies lead the global export of AI facial recognition technologies, with nearly half of these exports heading to autocracies or weak democracies ([Brookings](#), December 24, 2022). The China AI Exports Database (CAIED) recently found that the majority of the PRC's AI exports are concentrated in non-democratic BRI partner countries, while other research shows that AI technology from the PRC undermined anti-CCP candidates in Taiwan's elections ([RAND](#), December 11, 2023; [RAND](#), September 7, 2023; [Microsoft](#), April 4).

### **Conclusion**

Xi Jinping is unequivocal that US-China AI cooperation is contingent on Western AI technology flowing into the PRC ([SCMP](#), May 26, 2023). But the broken promises of past US-China technology transfers should give the Biden Administration—and figures like Sam Altman—pause. The last time a CCP leader pledged to cooperate with the United States on a world-transforming technology, the PRC used US technology to strengthen censorship and surveillance domestically and then exported these technologies to aid other authoritarian regimes.

Unlike his predecessors, Xi has been explicit that any Western AI technologies or expertise shared with the PRC will be governed under the evolving framework of AI sovereignty. This means AI developed within the PRC will be used to strengthen authoritarian governance both domestically and abroad ([HRW](#), April 8, 2021). PRC cyber sovereignty has already inflicted damage on global democracy, and emerging evidence points to the likelihood that AI sovereignty will be equally if not more damaging.

The PRC has attained “cyber sovereignty,” but it has key technological deficits that currently prevent it from achieving “AI sovereignty.” Based on the history of cyber sovereignty, the current dialogue on AI sovereignty, and AI's future destructive capacities, policymakers must closely consider the consequences of sharing or collaborating with the PRC on AI.



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## Notes

[1] Wang is criticizing the US policy of “Small Yard, High Fence,” whereby offices like the Department of Commerce heavily restrict exports of a small set of cutting edge technologies they view as having dangerous or dual-use civilian-military applications, for more see:

<https://georgetownsecuritystudiesreview.org/2023/12/26/u-s-economic-restrictions-on-china-small-yard-high-fence/>

[2] For more on the development of cyber sovereignty in China, see: Creemers, R.J.E.H. (2020). “China’s conception of cyber sovereignty: rhetoric and realization.” In Broeders D. & Berg B. van den (Eds.) *Governing Cyberspace: Behavior, Power, and Diplomacy. Digital Technologies and Global Politics* Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield. 107-142. [https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract\\_id=3532421](https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=3532421).

[3] For more on Data Sovereignty in China, see: Chander, Anupam, and Haochen Sun (eds), *Data Sovereignty: From the Digital Silk Road to the Return of the State*. New York, 2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 14 December, 2023. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197582794.001.0001>.

[4] For more on algorithmic transparency in China, see: Matt Sheehan & Sharon Du. “What China’s Algorithm Registry Reveals about AI Governance.” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, December 9, 2022. <https://carnegieendowment.org/2022/12/09/what-china-s-algorithm-registry-reveals-about-ai-governance-pub-88606>.

[5] Oracle and Nvidia first announced “Sovereign AI” products for global governments in March ([Oracle.com/cn](https://www.oracle.com/cn), March 18). This led to domestic PRC media coverage of these products, particularly comments by Oracle CEO Larry Ellison on Oracle’s “sovereign cloud” products ([STBoard.cn](https://www.stboard.cn), April 9; [WallStreet.cn](https://www.wallstreetcn.com), March 19). However, Jensen Huang has mentioned Sovereign AI before the March announcement, and in multiple contexts. For earlier Chinese media coverage of Jensen Huang and Sovereign AI see: [WallStreetCN](https://www.wallstreetcn.com), November 21, 2023; [36kr](https://www.36kr.com), December 14, 2023; [Xinhua](https://www.xinhua.com), February 5.

[6] For more on digital colonialism in relation to China’s doctrine of cyber sovereignty, see: Wanshu Cong, Johannes Thumfart. “A Chinese Precursor to the Digital Sovereignty Debate: Digital Anti-Colonialism and Authoritarianism from the Post–Cold War Era to the Tunis Agenda.” *Global Studies Quarterly*. Volume 2, Issue 4. October 2022. <https://doi.org/10.1093/isagsq/ksac059>.

[7] The only direct reference to AI sovereignty we could find from a party member was in the lower levels of government. At this year's Two Sessions, CPPCC and CAS member Zhang Yunquan is quoted as referencing Jensen Huang's 主权人工智能 (written in the article as “主权 AI”) when explaining the need for China to develop "sovereign-level large-scale models (主权级大模型)” ([Sina](#), March 7).