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CHINA BRIEF NOTES:

‘AI +’ Initiatives Multiply After Years of Experimentation

By Arran Hope

A man photographs a smart manufacturing robot at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference in July 2025. (Source: Xinhua)

Executive Summary:

- By 2035, artificial intelligence (AI) will underpin practically all sectors of the economy and society, according to recent plans from policy planners in Beijing.
- The upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan could become the first to include “AI+” as a major policy initiative.
- Development of the “AI+” formulation is a good example of Beijing’s approach to policymaking, with almost a decade of local experimentation preceding its appearance in central-level policies.
- Experts caution that current “AI+X” approaches remain superficial and that AI diffusion could be hampered by short-changed local governments, a weak domestic venture capital sector, and the complexity of the integrating the technology throughout the economy.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is officially moving to the center of the national stage in the People's Republic of China (PRC). In the words of the National Development and Reform Commission (NDRC), it "is the core engine of a new round of technological revolution and industrial transformation" (新一轮科技革命和产业变革的核心引擎) and is "reshaping the way economic development and social life operate" (重塑经济发展与社会生活的运作方式) (NDRC, August 26). This description appears in an explainer released in late August alongside the "Opinion on Deepening Implementation of the 'AI+' Action Plan" (关于深入实施"人工智能+"行动的意见), a landmark document from the State Council that signals the Party-state's intentions for the direction of development policies over the next decade (State Council, August 26). By 2035, the "Opinion" states that the country will have "fully entered a new stage of development based on an intelligent economy and society" (国全面步入智能经济和智能社会发展新阶段). That, at least, is the plan.

Six Areas of Focus for AI-Driven Development

The core of the "Opinion" sketches out six priority areas, appending them with the "AI+" moniker. These include science and technology (科学技术), industrial development (产业发展), improving consumption quality (消费提质), people's welfare (民生福祉), governance capacity (治理能力), and global cooperation (全球合作) (CCTV, August 27). Despite being highlighted as key areas of focus, they nevertheless encompass an enormous section of the economy and society. Specific sub-topics within these areas proposed for deeper integration with AI range from "revolutionizing research methodologies in philosophy and the social sciences" (创新哲学社会科学研究方法) to the "intelligent upgrading of agriculture" (农业数智化转型升级) to others as vague as simply creating a "better quality of life" (更有品质的美好生活).

Of the six priority areas, the last two—governance and global cooperation—overlap. They speak in part to a grand vision for shaping the rollout of AI at home and abroad, one that aligns with the Party's values. This approach emphasizes the indivisibility of security and development, which the Party views as unitary. The "Opinion" refers of a "new vision of human-machine symbiosis in social governance" (社会治理人机共生新图景), and alludes to the Global AI Governance Action Plan, which the PRC announced earlier in the summer (Xinhua, July 26). In practice, technologically enhanced social governance in the PRC generally refers to pervasive surveillance and monitoring of the population. This is part of a security-forward model that the PRC is increasingly pushing overseas, whether through assisting Pakistan's government with spying on its citizenry through Chinese-built phone-tapping systems, or having Chinese police officers collect biodata and household information from citizens of the Solomon Islands (Reuters, September 9; The Australian, September 11).

Also dovetailing with the recent flurry of AI-related announcements was an update to the AI Safety Governance Framework (人工智能安全治理框架), announced on September 15 by the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) This framework, which aims to "span borders, sectors, and industries," similarly calls for safeguarding "national sovereignty, security, and development interests." It also lists threats that AI might exacerbate, including spreading disinformation, which could "threaten social stability and public security," and "seizing discourse power and agenda-setting power in cyberspace" (CAC, September 15; Global Times, September 16).

Eight Years of 'AI+' Experimentation

Central government policy documents often function as signals. In this way, this latest "Opinion" likely has cleared the way for an intense period of policymaking, investment, and innovation over the next few years. Whether the country will achieve the ambitious goals set by the action plan depends on a number of factors, however, not all of which are within Beijing's control. The announcement nevertheless appears to be having immediate impact, at least among policymakers.

Already, in the first week of September, the National Energy Administration unveiled an "opinion" of its own. Released in conjunction with the NDRC, the "Opinion on Promoting the Implementation of High-Quality Development "'AI+' Energy" (关于推进"人工智能+"能源高质量发展的实施意见) explicitly builds on the "AI+" action plan, seeking to "seize on the important strategic opportunities of AI" (抢抓人工智能发展重大战略机遇). With an even more ambitious timeline, it calls for reaching a "world-leading level" (世界领先水平) in energy-related AI technologies and applications by 2030 (NEA, September 4). Several days later, a vice minister from the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT), Zhang Yunming (张云明), announced plans to formulate an "AI+Industrialization" ("人工智能+制造") roadmap, implementation guide, and other related plans (SCIO, September 9).

In the months ahead, the formulation "AI+" is likely to become ever more present in both official discourse and business jargon, as entrepreneurs across the board seek to capitalize on its newly established imprimatur. Other "AI+" plans could appear for the rest of the priority areas highlighted in the "Opinion," but also in separate sectors. In fact, many of the drivers underpinning the "AI+" action plan long predate the plan itself.

Public and private entities throughout the country have spent years experimenting with the "AI+" label, figuring out what sectors, products, or ideas it can be attached to, and which might eventually get political endorsement. Uses of the "AI+" formulation go back to at least the 2016 "'Internet+' AI Three-Year Action Plan" ("互联网+" 人工智能三年行动), and likely were given a boost by the 2017 New Generation AI Development Plan (新一代人工智能发展规划) (NDRC, May 18, 2016; State Council, July 20, 2017). That latter document planned for AI application scenarios across healthcare, finance, manufacturing, education, and security. Although it doesn't refer explicitly to "AI+," but within weeks of its release, media began referencing "AI+Education" (AI+教育), with reporting stating that, "with policy support, it is poised to spark a new wave of investment" (在政策支持下，将会掀起新的投资高潮) (BJNews, July 31, 2017).

Over subsequent years, AI was added to a variety of things, from "Easier Travel" (人工智能+出行更轻松) in 2018 to traffic lights ("AI+信号灯")—a subset of a broader "AI+Transport" ("AI+交通") push (People's Daily, February 2, 2018; Shanghai S&T Liberation Daily, September 16, 2018). By 2019, even English-language state media was providing explainers of "AI+." CGTN noted that it is "more than just a simple addition"; instead, it is about "deeply integrating AI technology and Internet platforms with traditional and emerging industries to create real benefits for society." It lists smart homes, autonomous vehicles, and intelligent healthcare as good examples of "AI+" (CGTN, March 25, 2019)

"AI+" began to feature in policy around 2019, but only at the local level. An AI innovation and application pilot zone was launched in Shanghai, with a focus on AI plus comprehensive research and development, manufacturing, life, and transport (AI+综合研发、AI+制造、AI+生活、 AI+交通) (CAC, May 21, 2019). In early 2020, Beijing's annual government work report discussed cultivating the emerging industry of "AI+health" (重点培育"AI+健康"新兴产业), as well as building an "AI+government affairs" (AI+政务) platform (Beijing Daily, January 19, 2020). By the end of that year, some observers argued that the security industry was currently the hottest, most frequently mentioned in the AI industry, with a wave of references to "AI+ security" (AI+安防) (Uniview, December 31, 2019). Security firms capitalized on this, offering smart security applications and 5G integration to "strengthen social governance" (强化社会治理) (iResearch, November 2, 2021; (Fibocom, September 20, 2022). Perhaps the most important milestone in subnational policy was the reference to "exploring interdisciplinary 'X+AI' talent cultivation models" (探索开展"X+人工智能"的交叉融合人才培养模式) in Beijing's Implementation Plan for Accelerating the Development of Beijing as a Globally Influential AI Innovation Hub (2023-2025) (北京市加快建设具有全球影响力的人工智能创新策源地实施方案 (2023--2025 年)) (Beijing Government, May 30, 2023). This framing in terms of "X+AI" implied the fungibility of AI as general tool to enhance a variety of different modes of production.

Finally, "AI+" reached the level of national policymaking, appearing in both the 2024 and 2025 government work reports, the latter of which highlighted smart vehicles, robots, and manufacturing equipment (Xinhua, March 12, 2024, March 12). As an article by a professor at Zhejiang University wrote in the *People's Tribune* in February 2025, "AI+" represents "a new paradigm" (一种新的范式), fusing AI with new technologies to spur new productivity (通过新技术的融合与创新， 催生新的生产力) across all sectors of the economy and society (People's Tribune, February 5).

Conclusion

The proliferation of AI+ initiatives, policies, and plans will not automatically entail a rapid buildout of AI-integrated technologies throughout the PRC economy. Such a fundamental shift will take time. As the Zhejiang University professor warned, "current 'AI+X' or 'X+AI' approaches remain superficial" ("AI+X"或"X+AI"还较为肤浅). Moreover, as some observers have noted, diffusion likely will be hampered due to short-changed local governments, a weak domestic venture capital sector, and the sheer intensity of the efforts required to deeply integrating AI throughout the economy (Substack/Matt Sheehan's Newsletter, September 9).

As the above analysis shows, however, "AI+" has been gathering momentum now for the best part of a decade. The upcoming 15th Five-Year Plan, which is currently being finalized, could provide even further support if it becomes the first to include "AI+" as a major policy initiative. If there is a lesson here for analysts, it may be to underscore the importance of watching as local signals, such as successful policy experimentation, start to gain momentum. These could indicate the eventual direction of travel for future national policy.

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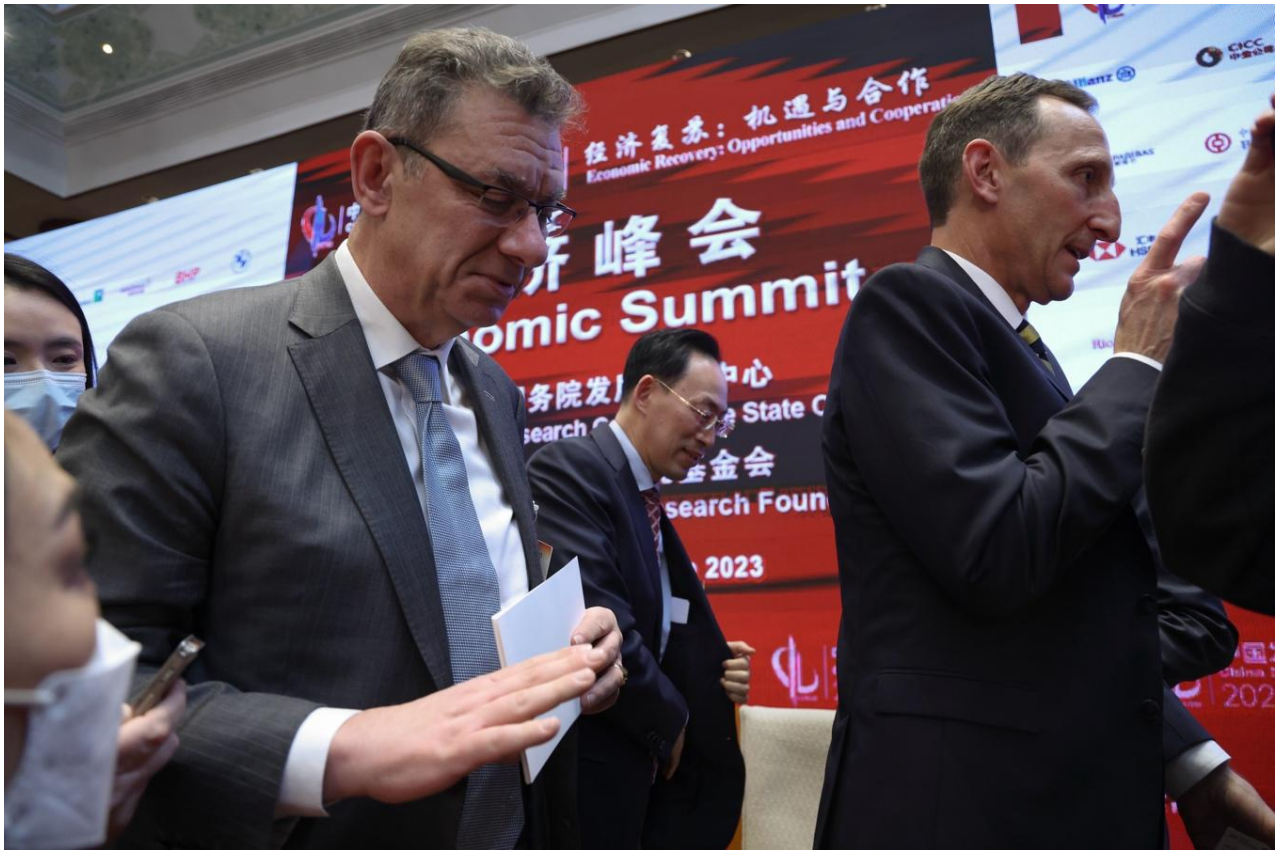
PRC Consolidates Pharmaceutical Supply Chain Dominance

By Daniel Burke



Albert Bourla, the CEO of Pfizer, attended the China Development Forum in Beijing, 2023. (Source: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images)

Executive Summary:

- The pharmaceutical manufacturing industry in the People's Republic of China (PRC) appears to be consolidating around a handful of national giants such as Sino Biopharm and Jiangsu Hengrui Medicine.
- These companies occupy a large and growing presence in international supply chains and hold bottlenecks in at least three "essential medicines."
- The PRC government has released a policy initiative targeting the pharmaceutical industry almost every year since at least 2015.
- Much of the PRC's pharmaceutical manufacturing development is also linked to Western investment in Chinese capabilities, with leadership from companies such as AstraZeneca, Roche, and Sanofi contributing billions of dollars to research and development in the PRC and personally meeting with Xi Jinping.

In July, LaNova (礼新医药), a major international supplier of innovative biomedical technology, was acquired by the large Chinese pharmaceutical conglomerate Sino Biopharm (中国生物制药) (Sino Biopharm, July 15; BioSpace, July 16). This move comes amid substantial growth in the burgeoning pharmaceutical production and development sector within the People's Republic of China (PRC) and has the potential to further entrench the country in both international and U.S. supply chains.

LaNova saw major development in late 2024, when Merck, an American pharmaceutical giant, paid the company nearly $600 million to further develop, produce, and commercialize its flagship LM-299 anti-cancer treatment, along with a possible $2.7 billion for technology transfer, development, regulatory approval, and additional commercialization (Merck, November 14, 2024). This agreement followed an earlier deal between LaNova and AstraZeneca for treatment of a certain type of bone marrow cancer that neared $600 million (BioSpace, May 15, 2023). These partnerships and others marked a reversal of the previous dynamics of U.S. innovation and Chinese manufacturing and point to extensive Chinese advancements in the pharmaceutical and biomedical fields. The recent acquisition of LaNova by Sino Biopharm will likely further strengthen the conglomerate and increase its overall innovation potential through LaNova's staff and patents.

Beijing's Rare Earths Playbook Signals Danger for API Dependence

This development is only the latest milestone in the PRC's recent rise in the medical, biotech, and pharmaceutical fields. In particular, production in the PRC of Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients (APIs), the inputs that are essential to diagnose, cure, mitigate, and treat diseases, has increased rapidly in the last decade (Bioengineered, February 8, 2022). As of 2019, API manufacturers for at least three drugs identified by the U.S. Government as "essential medicines" were located solely in the PRC (FDA, October 30, 2019). Chokepoints in the pharmaceutical field can have strong ripple effects downstream and cause direct harm to patients. This was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic, with the Department of Health and Human Services reporting over 100 drug shortages in the United States (Johns Hopkins University, November 2020). The effect was most acute in low-cost generic drugs, whose production had been greatly outsourced abroad. During related supply chain disruptions, the U.S. government initiated emergency actions such as invoking the Defense Production Act, government stockpiling efforts, and ordering military airlifts of supplies (Congressional Research Service, December 23, 2020). Many of these shortages persist. One report found an average of 301 critical drug shortages in 2023, with 85 percent "critically or moderately" impacting patient care (American Hospital Association, May 22, 2024). While these shortages represent a dangerous and known bottleneck, there may be many more essential medicines that have not yet been discovered to be wholly reliant on Chinese manufacturing.

Information into pharmaceutical supply chains can be opaque and difficult to parse (Brookings, July 28). U.S. reliance on Chinese APIs may be anywhere between 8–47 percent, with the PRC possibly having a further stake in nearly 90 percent of global API supply chains. These estimates vary wildly due to the secondary and tertiary inputs that come from upstream processes in manufacturing, which frequently lead back to the PRC but are just as often unknown. For example, the United States reportedly receives 50 percent of its finished generic drug imports from India, while India in turn likely receives around 30 percent of its APIs and Key Starting Materials (KSMs) from the PRC (Jerin Jose Cherian et al., "Economies", January 18, 2021; Exiger, April 16; Andrew Rechenberg, The Hill, June 22). **[1]** This reveals a possible additional 15 percent upstream exposure

to the PRC that may have been unaccounted for in some estimates that only examine direct shipments to the United States.

When left uncovered, unknown connections, bottlenecks, and dependencies can have drastic effects on policymaking, as developments in the rare earths sector make clear. For example, the PRC controls an estimated 98 percent of raw gallium extraction as a byproduct of its aluminum production (U.S. Geological Survey, January 2023). The mineral is used in nearly all advanced semiconductors and is an essential ingredient in everything from missile defense systems to radar arrays, and even the F-35 stealth aircraft (CSIS, July 18, 2023). This gives the PRC a firm grip over these key supply chains and substantial leverage to force issues in their favor. The PRC government first moved to utilize this dependency in 2020, when its Export Control Law, which restricted access to its chokepoints, came into effect. The law included a provision for extraterritoriality to control sales beyond its immediate buyers (National People's Congress, October 17, 2020; China Brief, March 15, 2021). Beijing made good on this threat in 2023 and 2024, when it used the new law to restrict gallium sales to U.S. buyers. In December 2024, it introduced the Dual-use Item Export Control Regulations to ban the sales outright (Medeiros, Evan and Andrew Polk, "China's New Economic Weapons," April 8). **[2]**

The U.S. government significantly underestimated the threat from these restrictions and the damage it would cause to U.S. industry and consumers (CSIS, July 17). On paper, the United States did not import much gallium from the PRC, instead trading with allies such as Japan, Germany, and Canada, and mostly importing high-purity forms of the mineral. Yet these partners' supply chains all ran back to the PRC, and many were forced to stop trading with the United States once restrictions were implemented. Additionally, the PRC government recently tightened its grip over the mineral by introducing further export bans on the technology and techniques used for gallium extraction (Herbert Smith Freehills Kramer, July 25). These policies likely signal Beijing's intent on maintaining this avenue of control, and an understanding of the power this leverage gives them in the international arena.

Like gallium and other minerals, the PRC's growing presence in pharmaceutical supply chains and biomedical research represents a steadily developing chokepoint that the PRC government is keen on fostering. By 2018, estimates already showed a strong trajectory for growth. Increasing FDA approvals for pharmaceutical products coincided with Xi Jinping's direct interest and large investments from the Made in China 2025 plan (CNBC, April 19, 2018). This attention appears to have borne fruit. According to the PRC-based Prospective Industry Research Institute, the number of Chinese API manufacturers increased 36 percent from 1,250 to 1,700 between 2018 and 2023. Likewise, API production increased from 2.3 to 3.9 metric tons, representing a 70 percent increase, while overall industry profits increased 25 percent, and are expected to grow a further 23 percent by 2030 (Prospective Industry Research Institute, April 19, 2024).

Much of this growth appears to be linked to direct government investment, mirroring developments in other priority sectors highlighted in strategic policy documents issued by Beijing. Almost every year since 2015, the government has implemented a major policy initiative targeting the pharmaceutical industry (Sina Finance, September 5, 2024). Plans such as the 2015 National Medical and Health Service System Planning Outline (全国医疗卫生服务体系规划纲要), 2016's Pharmaceutical Industry Development Planning Guide (医药工业发展规划指南), or the 2021 Implementation Plan for Promoting High-Quality Development of the API

Industry (推动原料药产业高质量发展实施方案) all provided clear roadmaps for building the industry along with general support from the 13th and 14th Five Year Plans in 2017 and 2022 (State Council, March 6, 2015; National Health Commission, November 9, 2016; National Development and Reform Commission, November 9, 2021).

In the first half of 2025, the State Council released the "Opinions on Comprehensively Deepening Drug and Medical Device Regulatory Reform" (全面深化药品医疗器械监管改革促进医药产业高质量发展的意见), while the National Healthcare Security Administration (NHSA) announced "Several Measures to Support the High-Quality Development of Innovative Drugs" (支持创新药高质量发展的若干措施). Both of these documents seek to streamline regulatory requirements, provide further monetary support, and direct government resources toward supporting medical innovation, particularly big data and emerging technology (State Council, January 3; NHSA, July 1). For example, when discussing support for drug and medical device innovation (药品医疗器械研发创新的支持力度), the "Opinions" suggest establishing a regulatory body for introducing artificial intelligence and medical robots, as well as further strengthening intellectual property protections for the data gathered during R&D and clinical trials for new pharmaceuticals. Likewise, the "Several Measures" document calls for a much greater presence of newly developed drugs in the PRC's medical system. It also demands drastically reducing the time required for drug approval down from an estimated five years to one and keeping initial pricing relatively unchanged during yearly purchasing renegotiation.

Beyond these activities, Beijing often establishes pilot and demonstration zones to cluster industries and experiment with regulations and other mechanisms (State Council, September 7, 2024). These zones are concentrated in coastal provinces and cities. Four in particular, Jiangsu, Zhejiang, Shandong, and Shanghai, represent 37 percent of the PRC's API manufacturing output, with Jiangsu being the single largest contributor (Prospective Industry Research Institute, April 19, 2024). Shanghai's Pudong District is home to a recent large scale investment from Sino Biopharm and its partners to fund more pharmaceutical companies seeking to establish businesses in the area (Yicai Global, April 23). Further, the local government is partnering with private investment firms and loosening regulations on foreign investment to direct even more capital into developing the sector (Shanghai Government, January 17).

The push for foreign capital extends all the way to Xi Jinping, who in March met with leaders from leading foreign pharmaceutical firms, including AstraZeneca, Bayer, Merck, Pfizer, and others in March. The meeting reportedly lasted 90 minutes, included over 40 international CEOs and other senior leaders primarily from the pharmaceutical industry, and focused on the need to maintain global supply chains and invest in the PRC's growth (Xinhua; Fierce Pharma, March 28). During the meeting, Xi stated directly that international investment was inseparable from the country's economic growth (也离不开国际社会支持帮助). He also emphasized the PRC's stability and business environment (State Council, March 28). Investments from these international firms are vital to developing Chinese pharmaceutical manufacturing, to the extent that in 2024 the PRC government refrained from punishing AstraZeneca to the full extent of the law, despite finding the company guilty of widespread medical insurance fraud (China Brief, December 6, 2024).

Early signs suggest that Beijing's reforms of regulations and foreign investment laws may already be generating results. The months following Xi's meeting with foreign executives saw a series of international firms investing in Chinese drug manufacturing. For example, in May the Swiss company Roche Pharmaceuticals announced

a $280 million investment into Shanghai's Zhangjiang Hi-Tech Park (张江高科技园区) to establish drug manufacturing capabilities and further integrate the region into its supply chains (Shanghai Government Foreign Affairs Office, May 9). Roche's investment followed the French pharmaceutical company Sanofi's announcement of a $1 billion investment in insulin production in the PRC, as well as AstraZeneca's $2.5 billion in funding for Chinese research, development, and testing (Pharmaceutical Technology, March 24; Global Corporate Venturing, April 4). This series of investments have led Chinese media to emphasize the PRC's "magnetic pull" (磁吸力) in drawing foreign funding to build out its pharmaceutical production capabilities (Xinhua Finance, April 1). On top of governmental support, this direct investment from international firms may well cement Chinese pharmaceutical companies' place in international supply chains for years ahead.

Conclusion

The PRC's ability to successfully cultivate its pharmaceutical industry will ultimately depend on the extent of international pushback. Within the U.S. government, the Department of Commerce's Bureau of Industry and Security announced an API supply chain investigation in 2024 that, when released, may lead to further action to prevent another chokepoint from developing in a critical sector (U.S. Department of Commerce, July 9, 2024).

For now, while the PRC does not have complete dominance in international pharmaceutical supply chains, it is well positioned to continue to grow in that direction. The closer it comes to realizing that dominance, the more leverage Beijing will have to maintain its global interests.

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Notes

[1] Cherian, Jerin Jose, Manju Rahi, Shubhra Singh, Sanapareddy Eswara Reddy, Yogendra Kumar Gupta, Vishwa Mohan Katoch, Vijay Kumar, Sakthivel Selvaraj, Payal Das, and Raman Raghunathrao Gangakhedkar. "India's Road to Independence in Manufacturing Active Pharmaceutical Ingredients: Focus on Essential Medicines." *Economies* Vol. 9 No. 2 (2021): p.71. https://doi.org/10.3390/economies9020071

[2] Medeiros, E. S., & Polk, A. "China's New Economic Weapons." *The Washington Quarterly* Vol. 48 No. 1 (2025): p.99–123. https://doi.org/10.1080/0163660X.2025.2480513

Xi Jinping's Visit to Lhasa Elevates Tibet in National Policymaking Agenda

By Devendra Kumar

Xi Jinping arrived in Tibet on August 20. (Source: Yan Yan/Xinhua/AP)

Executive Summary:

- Xi Jinping's third trip to the Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR) underscores its importance to his agenda at the national level. His Tibet policy emphasizes regional stability, economic development, ecological conservation, and border defense, but the top priority remains stability.
- The ceremony, which celebrated the TAR's 60th anniversary, saw low public attendance, undermining the Party's narrative of ethnic unity and "unwavering support" for the Party-state's policies in the region.
- The sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism and culture serves to sever religious, cultural, and political links across borders, reinforcing the CCP's control of lama reincarnation.

Chinese Communist Party (CCP) General Secretary Xi Jinping visited Lhasa on August 20–21, to participate in the celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the establishment of the Tibet Autonomous Region (TAR; 西藏自治区). Xi's itinerary included attending a ceremony in Lhasa and a visit to the region's party committee. His limited participation in the ceremony itself suggests that his visit may have been decided on relatively short notice. Xi nevertheless traveled with a powerful delegation, including senior Party leaders such as Wang Huning (王沪宁), the chairperson of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) and fourth-ranked member of the Politburo Standing Committee (PBSC). **[1]** Wang and others remained in the TAR for two additional days after Xi departed on August 21 (Xinhua, August 21).

The backdrop to the visit was the Dalai Lama's decision in July that Tibetans will be responsible for recognizing his successor, without interference from CCP authorities (Office of His Holiness the Dalai Lama, July 2). This decision has been denounced by officials, with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA) spokesperson claiming that succession is "determined by the central government" (由中央政府确定的) and ambassadors warning that suggestions otherwise are "purely malicious misrepresentation and distortion" (纯属恶意篡改和歪曲) (MFA, March 11, June 2, July 1). Xi's visit underlines the confidence among his advisors about the People's Republic of China's (PRC) current policies for reinforcing control and legitimacy in the region. It also indicates Tibet's importance to Xi's agenda at the national level.

Tibet's Rise Among National Priorities

Xi's visit to Lhasa is a strong indication that Tibet now ranks higher in political salience under his leadership than in previous years and under previous leaders. The trip was Xi's third to the TAR (and second as General Secretary), having visited in July 2011 and August 2021 for the 60th and 70th anniversaries, respectively, of the region's "peaceful liberation" (和平解放) (Xinhua, July 23, 2021, August 24). **[2]** By comparison, his predecessors Hu Jintao and Jiang Zemin each visited once during their tenures at the top of the Party.

Under Xi, Beijing has engaged directly in setting the policy agenda for the TAR, enhancing central oversight at the expense of provincial leadership. In his first speech to the Tibetan delegation at the "two sessions" (两会) as CCP General Secretary, Xi stated that "to govern the country, we must govern borders, and to govern borders, we must govern Tibet" (治国必治边，治边先稳藏) (National Ethnic Affairs Commission, October 17, 2022). This statement, a continuation of the rhetoric he had delivered in Lhasa in 2011, indicated a preoccupation with increasing security in the country's borderlands (Xinhua, July 19, 2011).

Tibet's salience to Xi is often underlined in official media pronouncements that he "personally" (亲自) steers Tibet-related work. This specific phrase has skyrocketed in frequency, particularly during Xi's second term, and is usually associated with regional development initiatives and (domestic) united front work—areas that overlap significantly with Tibet work (Asia Society, June 25). This, along with state media characterizations of the position of Tibet work as "special and important" (特殊重要), suggest its importance to Xi. **[3]**

Reinforcing Security-driven Policies

Xi's August visit reinforced Beijing's security-driven economic and nationalist agenda in Tibet. Xi has defined policy objectives through a focus on "four big matters" (四件大事): stability (稳定), development (发展), ecological conservation (生态), and strengthening the border (强边)—in that order of priority (People's Daily Online, August 22). Building on policies instigated in the wake of the 2008 protests across Tibetan areas, the Party under Xi has doubled down on policies aimed at strengthening internal security to fight secessionism (China Brief, May 13, 2008). This has involved heavy investment in the security apparatus, which roughly tripled between 2014 and 2023 (CSEP, July 2).

The Party also has concentrated efforts on cultivating patriotism and socialist core values, promoting the Sinicization of Tibetan Buddhism, and controlling religious affairs by regulating the reincarnation of lamas and remaking cadre teams into a loyal and, increasingly, Han-led cadre force (Xinhua, August 29, 2020; Leibold, James & Devendra Kumar, May 27). **[4]** Additional policies have sought to enhance the Party's control over state institutions and expand the capacity of foreign affairs offices in the region (Taotao Zhao & James Leibold, October 13, 2019; Center of Excellence for Himalayan Studies, March 2024). **[5]** These initiatives, while helping to strengthen control at home, are also aimed at "coordinating internal and external situations" (必须统筹国内国际两个大局). In other words, severing linkages between domestic audiences and Tibet's government in exile, which is based in Dharamshala, India (Xinhua, August 19).

Deepening economic integration with neighboring inland provinces continues to be driven by central policies, including the massive central subsidies and the Tibet Aid Program (TAP, 对口援藏) (China Brief, November 15, 2024). Big-ticket infrastructure projects like the Lower Yarlung Zangbo Hydropower Project (雅下水电工程) and the Sichuan-Tibet Railway (川藏铁路), both of which Xi mentioned in his remarks to the TAR party committee and government, are frequently highlighted in official accounts of regional development (Xinhua, August 20). The hydropower project, also known as the Medog Hydropower Station (墨脱水电站), began construction in July after it was finally approved in December 2024, over four years after it was first announced. The project was framed in the announcement as a "security project" (安全工程), indicating that security remains the regime's overriding preoccupation in the TAR (China Brief, January 31). This was underscored by Xi, who in August referred to social and political stability as the primary task (Xinhua, August 20).

Ceremony Signals Ethnic and National Unity

Genuine public support for the regime is likely to have been impacted by the official response to the Dalai Lama's approach to the reincarnation issue. Thus, the anniversary celebrations were an opportunity to project unity between central and local leadership. The presence of retired Tibetan officials and other Tibetan elites at the ceremony was an occasion for propaganda organs to shape a narrative of "unwavering support" (坚定信心) for the Party-state's policies (Xinhua, August 21). However, low public attendance at the ceremony undermines this narrative.

The ceremony was attended by thousands of people, though the exact number is likely lower than official estimates. State outlets have claimed that 20,000 people attended, while this author estimates a maximum of

10,500, based on live footage of the event (YouTube/CGTN, August 21; Guangming Online, August 22). Moreover, among those who attended, at least a quarter appear to have consisted of personnel from the People's Liberation Army, Public Security Bureau, People's Armed Police, and students from local schools (see Figure 1). Along with other officials and state employees, total public participation may have accounted for fewer than half of attendees; among those attendees, it is not possible to discern how many were there voluntarily.

Figure 1: Ceremony to Celebrate the 60th Anniversary of the Establishment of the TAR

(Source: YouTube/CCTV, August 20; Author highlights)

The symbolism on display nevertheless foregrounded "people-centric" (以人民为中心) policies and sanitized references to Tibetan culture. For example, TAR Governor Karma Tsetan (嘎玛泽登), who chaired the ceremony, wore a chuba (Tibetan traditional dress) while making a speech in the Tibetan language (YouTube/CCTV, August 21). Ethnic Tibetan cadres, such as provincial governors, often wear ethnic dress on ceremonial occasions (Xinhua, July 23, 2021, August 19, 2021). This is done as a show of cultural tolerance, but stands in contrast to Beijing's restrictive language and cultural policies in the region (China Brief, May 14, 2024). Such decisions also are rooted in the CCP's united front tactics, aiming to build political affiliations among the people in order to exert control through coercion and cooptation. **[6]**

Key Challenges

Beneath the fanfare of the 60th anniversary celebrations are fundamental challenges to Beijing's governance of the TAR. As central government investment has poured into the region, corruption has emerged as a key problem. Since the 20th Party Congress in October 2022, dozens of senior cadres have been investigated. Most recently, these have included Wu Yingjie (吴英杰), TAR Party Secretary for 2016–2021, and Che Dalha (齐扎拉), TAR Chairman for 2017–2021 (International Campaign for Tibet, May 20). Wu is accused of

siphoning renminbi (RMB) 343 million ($48 million) from official funds, including from engineering contracts (CCDI, July 16). His confidants, including his former deputy Jiang Jie (姜杰), have also been found guilty of financial crimes (People's Daily, October 12, 2024). As infrastructure investment continues to increase, this problem appears unlikely to subside in the near term.

Xi's instructions to local officials to prioritize developing grassroots party organizations as "fortresses" (战斗堡垒) are illustrative of the securitized approach to grassroots governance that has been particularly distinctive under Xi's leadership. Unlike previous periods, the Party-state has invested heavily to boost the capacities of grassroots institutions with grid management, ideological control, and party building in villages, towns, and remote pastoral areas (Xinhua, August 20). As policymakers fear internal political fallout from how the Dalai Lama's reincarnation is handled, grassroots control will gain prominence in the near term (China Net, August 12).

A third challenge is sustaining an acceptable rate of economic growth. In recent years, five-year plans and speeches by senior officials have emphasized that economic policies must move from "blood transfusion" (输血) to "blood production" (造血). In other words, they must help generate indigenous sources of growth and transition from overreliance on central transfers and subsidies (TAR Government, 2016). Two-way exchange (双向交流) between Tibet and inland provinces is one way to promote growth through commercializing ethnic Tibetan products such as medicines and handicrafts, tourism, and attracting private investment (Xinhua, August 20). Several recent initiatives have aimed at achieving these goals, such as the establishment of industrial and agricultural parks, economic and technological zones, and cooperatives for promoting commercialization and indigenous entrepreneurship (Xinhua, 23 July; China Brief, July 26). Currently, these projects rely on TAP funding, something that is unlikely to change given Tibet's limited international trade profile (China Brief, 15 November, 2024; TAR Government, 12 January).

Conclusion

The Party leadership intended the August ceremony as a vehicle for reaching out to the Tibetan population. Instead, it revealed the Party's ambitions to govern Tibet as a normal province of the PRC by gradually dismantling its distinctive character. This was captured in the symbolism of the event: The venue, a massive Chinese-style square in front of the Potala Palace, was adorned with CCP slogans and an inflated image of Xi, and the dais set up at its foot. The Potala Palace's significance lies in it being the former residence of the exiled Dalai Lama, and as a symbol of Tibet's distinctive history. Beijing's impulses are clear in official media's characterization of the Potala Palace as a symbol of "national integration" (民族交融画卷) and a "treasure of Chinese civilization" (中华文明瑰宝) (CCTV, August 19).

In Xi's first and second terms, Hong Kong and Xinjiang received significant attention as restive border regions. In his third term, Tibet has emerged as an important issue on Xi's national policy agenda and is likely to remain a priority in the next few years of his rule. Policies unveiled since the 20th Party Congress are likely to figure prominently and even be expanded in the forthcoming Eighth Tibet Work Forum and in the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). **[7]**

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Notes

[1] Other officials in attendance included Cai Qi (蔡奇), who leads the CCP's central secretariat and is the fifth-ranked member of the PBSC; Li Ganjie (李干杰), the Head of the United Front Work Department; He Lifeng (何立峰) and Zhang Guoqing (张国清), the second- and third-ranked vice premiers of the State Council; and Wang Xiaohong (王小洪), the Minister of Public Security (CCTV, August 20).

[2] The Central Tibetan Administration, Tibet's government in exile based in Dharamshala, India, refers to this event as the "Chinese invasion of Tibet." Elsewhere it is referred to as the annexation of Tibet.

[3] The full phrase often repeated in media and official documents is "since the 18th CCP National Congress, General Secretary Xi Jinping has personally steered and planned Tibet's work" (党的十八大以来，习近平总书记亲自为西藏工作把舵定向，谋篇布局) (TAR Government, August 10).

[4] Leibold, James & Devendra Kumar, "Vanishing Quotas: Tibetan Political Disenfranchisement in Xi Jinping's New Era of Han-Centrism," *The China Journal*, Vol. 94, July (2025): p. 1–29.

[5] Zhao, Taotao & James Leibold. "Ethnic Governance under Xi Jinping: The Centrality of the United Front Work Department & Its Implications," *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 29, No. 124 (2019): p. 487–502. https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2019.1677359.

[6] Invoking Tibetan cultural symbols can also be politically significant for cadres in Tibet. For Tibetan cadres, wearing traditional dress can be perceived as a demonstration of their affiliations with the Dalai Lama. For senior non-Tibetan cadres, however, it can signal that they are going too far, raising suspicions that such acts can revive ethno-national sentiments. For example, Wu Jinghua (CCP Party Secretary of TAR from 1985 to 1987) used wearing Tibetan traditional dress during an official ceremony as political strategy to woo Tibetans and signal a relaxed political environment. See, Melvyn Goldstein. *The Snow Lion and the Dragon: China, Tibet, and the Dalai Lama*. University of California Press, 1999, p. 75–76.

[7] Exact dates for the forum are yet to be announced, but it is expected to take place before March 2026.

Corruptible Connections: CCP Ties and Smart Device Dangers

By Matthew Gabriel Cazel Brazil

The founder of Xiaomi, Lei Jun, now serves as a deputy to the National People's Congress. (Source: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images)

Executive Summary:

- Smart home device manufacturers in the People's Republic of China (PRC) benefit from efforts by Beijing to export data infrastructure and governance standards along with "Internet of Things" (IoT) devices.
- Manufacturers like Xiaomi, TCL, and Skyworth maintain strong links with the PRC government via internal Party-aligned structures, leadership by Party members, and participation in bidding for contracts from state-owned enterprises and military procurement.
- PRC companies have shipped products overseas that have been assessed as having serious cybersecurity risks: a U.S. government agency found TCL smart TVs allowed unauthorized access to the devices' data and media files, while users discovered Skyworth Group smart TVs were sending back data about other devices in users' homes back to a Beijing-based company's servers.

On September 8, the 2025 World Smart Industry Expo concluded in Chongqing. A sprawling event hosting over 600 companies from around the world, the venue comprised 130,000 square meters of indoor exhibition space, in addition to a large outdoor area for live demonstrations of drone hardware and other tech. It was a chance for the People's Republic of China (PRC) to flex its growing technological and industrial muscles to a global audience (World Internet Congress, September 9).

Coverage of the expo in state media noted that "smart home" (智能居家) technologies were one of five main dedicated sections, along with autonomous networked electric vehicles (智能网联新能源汽车), digitized urban management systems (数字城市), low-altitude autonomous commercial drones (低空经济), and autonomous robots (智能机器) (Xinhua, September 9).

"Smart home" technologies, which include networked consumer-grade appliances under the umbrella of the "Internet of Things" (IoT), are rapidly becoming available in homes across the world. Beijing has spent years ensuring that these products are designed and manufactured in the PRC and then exported alongside data infrastructure and governance standards. Centrally directed efforts since 2009 to control end-product manufacturing, component supply chains, and technical standards point to ambitions to make dominance of the global IoT industry a national priority (China Brief, July 25, August 7).

Within the PRC, legislative requirements to share data via the 2021 "Data Security Law" (数据安全法) mean that, in an authoritarian system that lacks legal protections from government overreach, seemingly innocuous appliances present significant security risks to consumers (Xinhua, June 6, 2021). Such devices range from home security systems to kitchen appliances to smart TVs.

PRC smart home and IoT Manufacturers

The United States imports millions of smart home devices from the PRC every year, including those manufactured by PRC companies or foreign manufacturers operating in the country. The largest Chinese smart home device manufacturers, as with similar firms across all sectors in the PRC, have extensive ties to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP). According to the 1993 "Company Law" (公司法), all companies with more than three employees who are CCP members, are required to form CCP cells, branches, or committees composed of company employees (Xinhua, December 29, 2023). As of 2021, companies with 50 or more employees are also required to create Party cells, regardless of the number of Party members employed (MERICS, August 20). This is also the case for foreign companies operating in the country. Since 2021, all 500 of the largest firms in the PRC have such internal party organizations (CNA, September 6, 2024). Much of this renewed pressure has been driven by a newly created ministerial-level body, the Society Work Department (SWD; 社会工作部) (MERICS, August 20; SWD, accessed September 17).

A typical PRC-based smart home device manufacturer is Beijing-based consumer electronics giant Xiaomi (小米). One of the world's largest manufacturers of smart home devices under its subsidiary Mijia (米家), Xiaomi produces millions of products, including smart TVs, smartphones, electric vehicles, and software. In 2021, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) designated the company as a Communist Chinese Military Company (CCMC) due to its military ties, though the designation was later removed following a lawsuit (Reuters, May 26, 2021). Founded by entrepreneur and inventor Lei Jun (雷军), who now serves as a deputy

to the National People's Congress (NPC), Xiaomi established an internal CCP committee in 2015. This year, Lei even presented suggestions for national policy changes in areas like AI governance and electric vehicle regulations to the NPC (People's Daily, March 9).

An article on the website of the Society Work Department from March 2025 highlights Xiaomi as an exemplar for Party-building within non-state-owned enterprises (非公有制企业). According to the article, the Xiaomi Party Group "promotes the integration of Party building into the entire production and operational process" (推动党建融入生产经营全过程). It notes that Party members constitute 25 percent of its workforce (over 10,000 people), and that Xiaomi's Party members typically are "young and smart" (年轻、高知), have an average age of 32, and work in technology, product management, or research and development (R&D)—something that holds true across the technology sector. A core aim of those selected to work in the company's Party organizations is to promote "the resonance and mutual integration of Party-building work and business development" (推动党建工作与企业发展同频共振、互融互促). Among its institutional innovations is the development of a "smart Party-building system" (智慧党建系统) to assist its members. Most relevant to interactive smart devices, the article praises the work of Party members involved in acoustic phonetics R&D within the company's AI lab. The employees were awarded a "National Pioneering Worker" (全国工人先锋号) award for their work on improving technologies that can perform human-like interactions (SWD, March 18).

Xiaomi's trajectory over the past decade toward embedding the Party throughout its entire organization does not appear to be exceptional for smart device manufacturing companies. Many other large manufacturers of smart home and IoT devices share even deeper ties to the CCP and PRC government. TCL Technology Group Corp (TCL 科技), headquartered in Guangzhou, is a huge—and growing—manufacturer of Smart TVs. In its latest quarterly report, it states that it has grown its global market share in TVs and commercial displays by 4 percent in the last year to 24 percent (TCL, September 13). It is a partially state-owned, and publicly traded, company whose founder and current board chair, Li Dongsheng (李东生), is a Party member (Party Member's Net, December 12, 2020). This latter detail is omitted from Li's extensive bio on the company's English-language website, though it notes that he has received a number of prestigious awards from Party and state bodies over the last four decades (TCL, accessed September 18). But such affiliations are likely of interest to both policymakers and those in industry, as the company has declared a plan to "build a world-leading smart ecosystem" (打造全球领先的智能物联生态系统), in part by shaping industry-wide standards (TCL, September 9, 2021). Reports in the United States have also alleged that the company has received sizable subsidies from central and provincial governments (The National Interest, March 27, 2020).

The prevalence of Party members throughout world-leading manufacturers of smart home devices is principally a concern due to the requirement for members to pursue CCP goals. These goals, as defined by Party leaders, can be inimical to the interests of the United States and its allies and partners (China Brief, September 5). But legal requirements for government cooperation, thanks to the 2021 Data Security Law (数据安全法), provide an additional source of potential risks for those concerned with data security. PRC companies that generate or handle data are required by law to implement security measures such as informing PRC authorities of data breaches or vulnerabilities (Article 29), while simultaneously being obligated to

cooperate with PRC authorities by providing data access "for the purpose of safeguarding national security and investigating crimes" (关为了维护国家安全和侦查犯罪的需要) (Article 35) (China Brief, July 16, 2021, September 10, 2024).

Technical Risks

Industry-leading firms in the PRC may pose risks in association with their links to the CCP, but these are not necessarily the firms that pose the biggest risks at the technical level. According to an anonymous source working on IoT cybersecurity regulation and certification within the European Union, lesser-known IoT device companies are the most risky for average users. Larger manufacturers with established reputations and large user bases typically have stronger security features, such as random or user-defined passwords, secure storage, and frequent updates. But some smaller manufacturers are more likely to ship devices with weak security features and leave potential exploits unpatched for longer—sometimes never resolving them at all. The rationale for this relatively lax approach to security, according to the source, is usually a simple profit motive. If demand for a device manufactured by a smaller company only amounts to several thousand units, especially outside of their home market, the company may make the calculation that an exploitable security feature, even if identified, is simply not worth resolving (Author interview, September 15).

Weak device security can be exploited by hackers, often using weak default credentials to gain access to devices by taking advantage of poor encryption. The best way to avoid this is to simply change default passwords on devices to a new, personal, secure password. A typical goal of hackers is to hijack smart home devices (which usually have much lower computing power than a laptop or desktop) and forcibly recruit these devices into a botnet: a swarm of many devices "enslaved" to carry out tasks provided by the person controlling the swarm (also known as a botnet "herder"). The "herder" uses a small fraction of the computing power of each device to carry out Distributed Denial of Service (DDoS) attacks, contacting a target with requests from each device in the swarm to overwhelm it. Botnets can also be used for cryptocurrency mining, again by using a small amount of computing power from each of thousands or even millions of devices to solve blockchain equations to verify cryptocurrency transactions, rewarding the "miner" with a small sum of cryptocurrency.

More disturbingly, once a malicious actor has access to a device linked to a home network, it becomes possible to spread malware from that device onto other networked devices. Even if "quarantined" in less sensitive areas of the home, devices connected to the internet by wifi or ethernet cable still can spread malware to other devices on the same network. This could include personal computers, televisions, or home security systems equipped with cameras and microphones. IoT devices equipped with cameras with weak or no credentials can be found by searching resources like ShoDan.io, a search engine that allows users to search for webcams, microphones, routers, and device types connected to the internet (ShoDan.io, accessed September 17). The security risks associated with unauthorized access to cameras and microphones without the knowledge or permission of their owners are many and varied. They include eavesdropping, command injection (triggering smart speakers to place orders, unlock doors, or open garages via malicious skills), as well as biometric and behavioral profiling.

In recent years, expert assessments have found that some devices manufactured by PRC firms have contained security risks. In 2020, the U.S. Department of Commerce's National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST) found that TCL has shipped products with serious vulnerabilities. At least two TCL-

manufactured smart TVs allowed unauthorized access to the device's data and media files. According to the NIST's report, any user or device connected to the adjacent network could "arbitrarily browse and download sensitive files" (NIST, November 10, 2020).

Similarly, in 2021, an anonymous poster on the Chinese online forum V2EX said that their smart TV was collecting information and sending it a PRC data analytics company headquartered in Beijing (v2ex, April 22, 2021). The following week, Skyworth Group (創維), the Shenzhen-based maker of the TV, made a statement in response. The company claimed that it had terminated its partnership with the firm responsible for the violations, Gozen Data (勾正数据) (Skyworth, April 27, 2021). It is unclear if any of the models Skyworth sells in the United States were affected, but as the original poster noted, their smart TV was scanning all devices connected to the same wifi network every 10 minutes, sending various information back to a domain owned by Gozen, "gz-data.com" (tom's guide, May 5, 2021).

Skyworth's customers extend beyond those overseas. A subsidiary, Skyworth Qunxin Security (創維群欣安防), focuses on security products like CCTV systems and cameras. It has previously been awarded contracts by state-owned enterprises like the Bank of China, and there is historic evidence of Skyworth bidding on contracts with the People's Liberation Army (PLA). Its current contracts are unknown, but the company was banned from military procurement processes by the PLA in 2024 for "false bidding violations" (虚假投标违规行为) (CPS, September 3, 2008; Sina Finance, December 31, 2024).

In the United States, consumers remain at risk in part due to a lack of any comprehensive program for IoT verification or certification. Individual states like California and Oregon have some privacy and cybersecurity laws, but these are quite basic by global standards (California DOJ; Oregon DOJ, accessed September 18). For instance, EU standards under the 2014 Radio Equipment Directive (RED) cover IoT devices with explicit requirements protecting personal data, privacy, and preventing fraud in place for internet-connected consumer devices (EUR-lex, December 28, 2024). The United States nevertheless contains requirements for what devices can be purchased and used via guidance from federal agencies. The Federal Communications Commission (FCC), for example, is in the process of standing up a new, voluntary labeling program for consumers to understand the security of their smart home and other IoT devices. This program, U.S. Cyber Trust Mark, is expected to come into effect by the end of 2025. Like current EU certification guidelines, specific privacy and security parameters must be met to obtain the U.S. Cyber Trust Mark label.

Products manufactured outside the United States are eligible to apply for the Cyber Trust Mark, but those manufactured by certain entities are not. Proscribed entities largely overlap with the FCC's Covered List, the U.S. Department of Commerce's Entity List, and the DoD's List of Chinese Military Companies (DoD, October 18, 2022; FCC; U.S. Department of Commerce, accessed September 18). Given this, it is conceivable that the deep connections between PRC tech and AI companies and the PRC government could provide justification for an outright ban on many PRC-based manufacturers that currently export smart home and IoT devices to the United States. There are no current plans for such a course of action, which is unlikely to happen without a significant worsening of bilateral relations, but the regulatory powers exist to do so.

Conclusion

The high level of control exerted by government on businesses in the PRC means that IoT devices manufactured in the country may constitute hazards. End users currently have options to mitigate the risk of misuse and exploitation by third parties. Given links to the PRC government and obligations under PRC Data sharing laws, many Chinese manufacturers could prove to be insecure. That said, U.S. Cyber Trust Mark certification and labeling should roll out within the end of the year and provide a simple way for consumers to verify trusted device manufacturers. In the meantime, limiting the use of IoT devices in sensitive areas, including one's own home, could be the best defense of all.

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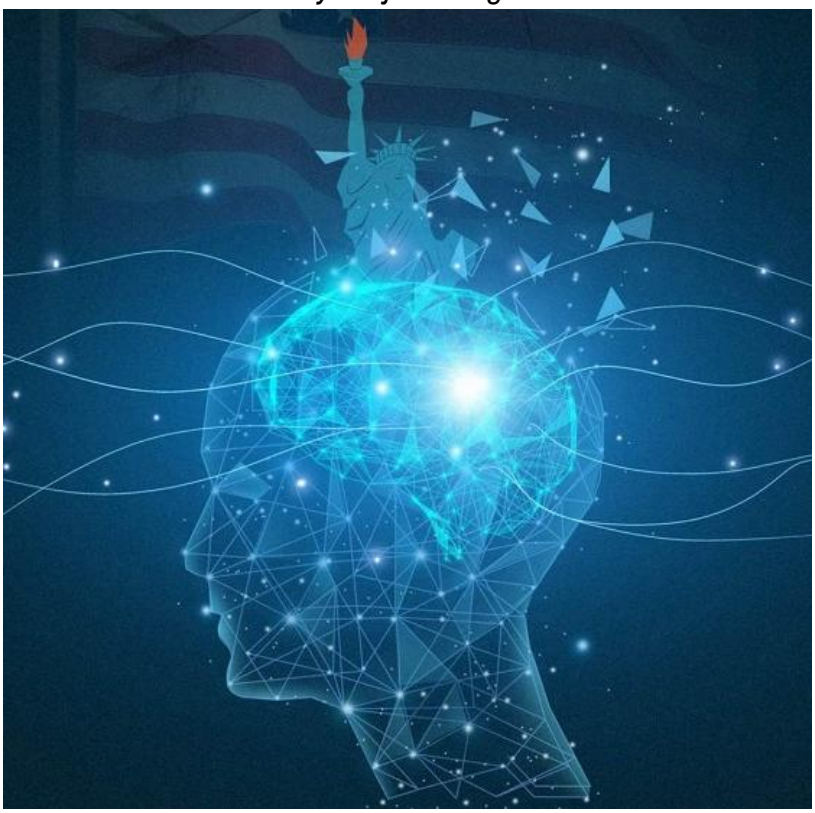
Decoding Beijing's 'Colonization of the Mind' Narrative

By Shijie Wang



Graphic from the Xinhua Institute Report "Colonization of the Mind: The Means, Roots, and Global Perils of U.S. Cognitive Warfare.". (Source: Xinhua)

Executive Summary:

- A new report by the Xinhua Institute argues that U.S. "cognitive warfare" attempts to "colonize" the minds of people across the world, in particular in global south countries. American influence is framed as ideological infiltration designed to generate social conflicts, undermine stability, and even subvert regimes.
- The consistency of messaging from the PRC indicates that attempts at reassurance from the United States will not be effective in shifting Beijing's assumptions regarding U.S. intent.
- Media outlets and prominent online commentators in the People's Republic of China (PRC) often characterize negative domestic news stories as evidence of U.S. infiltration, accusing "foreign forces" while avoiding potential structural explanations for governance failures.
- Beijing sees American cultural strength as one of five forms of hegemony to be eroded, along with political, military, technological, and economic hegemony. It believes it is succeeding in the first three, while it is making steady progress in the economic domain. This latest report represents a further step toward undermining U.S. soft power globally.

On September 7, the Xinhua Institute (新华社研究院), a think tank under Xinhua News Agency, released a report titled "Colonization of the Mind: The Means, Roots, and Global Perils of U.S. Cognitive Warfare" (思想殖民——美国认知战的手段、根源及国际危害). The report was distributed to participants at the 2025 Global South Media Think Tank High-Level Forum (全球南方媒体智库高端论坛) held in Kunming, Yunnan Province (Xinhua, September 8). It also gained traction on social media, where the term "colonization of the mind" saw a spike in exposure compared to other trending internet memes (see Figure 1). Most content related to the term originated from large accounts such as Xinhua News Agency and prominent "key opinion leaders" (KOLs), (see Figure 2).

As with many PRC narratives, the report underscores Beijing's entrenched view of the United States, one that has proven resistant to external messaging. This consistency reflects not only a propaganda strategy but also a deeply held set of assumptions about U.S. intentions. The report reads less like an analytic study and more like a "*tao zei xi wen*" (讨贼檄文)—the proclamations common during China's premodern civil wars that enumerated an enemy's crimes while rallying support among one's own forces. It contains three chapters, covering, respectively, the historical background of the so-called "colonization of the mind" worldwide, the methods of this form of influence, and the global harms that it causes. These are followed by a conclusion, in which the report shifts from a combative tone to one of lofty appeal, invoking Xi's frame for a new world order, the "community of common destiny for mankind" (人类命运共同体), and calling for confident and equal "dialogue and mutual learning" (交流互鉴) (Xinhua, September 7).

The content of the report offers little that is new in terms of accusations against the United States. The five major actions it highlights all have appeared in previous critiques. These include "subverting other governments" (颠覆他国政权), "stoking geopolitical conflicts" (挑拨地缘冲突), "cultivating pro-U.S. forces" (培育亲美势力), "interfering with independent development" (干扰自主发展), and "exacerbating civilizational clashes" (加剧文明冲突) (Xinhua, September 7).

Figure 1: Online Popularity of the term 'colonization of the mind'

关注度 2025-08-11 到 2025-09-09 全国

关键词	关注度	关注度环比	关注度同比
思想殖民	349	>1000% ↑	>1000% ↑
吴京	13,986	611.44% ↑	529.89% ↑
时代少年团	12,112	48.09% ↑	-27.94% ↓

(Source: 360 Index, accessed September 9)

Figure 2: Usage of the Term 'Colonization of the Mind' on Social Media

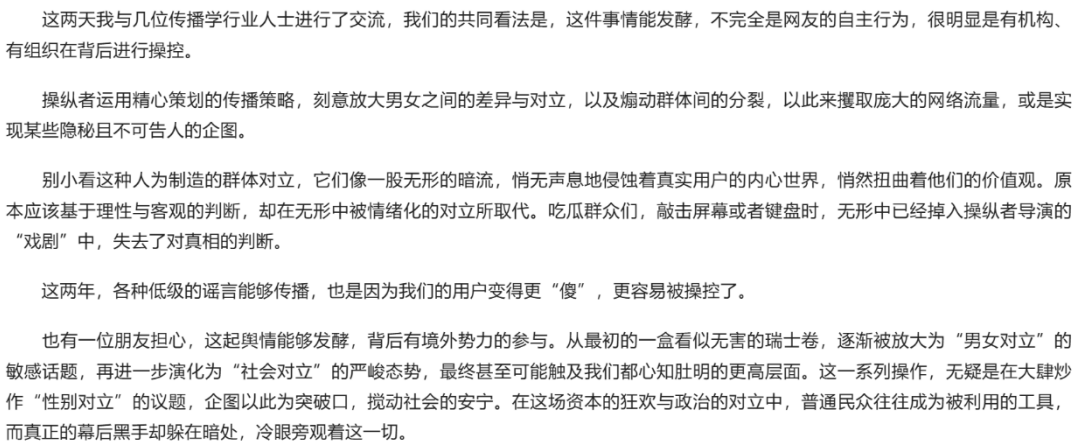
(Source: Newrank, accessed September 9)

Beijing's Panacea for Social Conflicts

Some official media outlets and influential online commentators attribute social tensions within PRC society to foreign ideological infiltration. Over time, repeated insinuations regarding foreign interference, such as in Syria or Ukraine, have led people to believe that certain social contradictions confronting the PRC either do not exist or are exaggerated. Those who raise these issues risk being attacked: they are accused of "*dai jiezou*" (带节奏), a term that originated in video game livestreams to describe steering chatroom discussions for a particular purpose; alternatively, they are labeled as "foreign forces" (境外势力) seeking to undermine PRC society. In one example from 2024, a domestic dispute became a viral story, with a well-known journalist opining that online commentators supporting the wife were either being manipulated by "foreign forces", or were "foreign forces" themselves, and accusing them of "disturbing social stability" (搅动社会的安宁) (see Figure 3).

The Xinhua Institute report reinforces this narrative that the United States is exporting harmful ideologies to undermine stability or subvert the regime. For those who embrace this narrative, any domestic social tension can be reinterpreted as the product of U.S. ideological infiltration. For example, Guo Jicheng (郭继承), an associate professor at the Marxism Institute of China University of Political Science and Law (中国政法大学马克思主义学院) in Beijing, recently argued on his personal social media that the current skepticism toward traditional Chinese medicine exists only because of "American ideological implants" (美国思想植入) (Douyin/@继承之道, September 9). Beijing's "colonization of the mind" theory can act as a panacea—a catch-all explanation that shifts the blame for domestic social conflicts onto external forces.

Figure 3. Screenshot of the journalist's blog



这两天我与几位传播学行业人士进行了交流，我们的共同看法是，这件事情能发酵，不完全是网友的自主行为，很明显是有机构、有组织在背后进行操控。

操纵者运用精心策划的传播策略，刻意放大男女之间的差异与对立，以及煽动群体间的分裂，以此来攫取庞大的网络流量，或是实现某些隐秘且不可告人的企图。

别小看这种人为制造的群体对立，它们像一股无形的暗流，悄无声息地侵蚀着真实用户的内心世界，悄然扭曲着他们的价值观。原本应该基于理性与客观的判断，却在无形中被情绪化的对立所取代。吃瓜群众们，敲击屏幕或者键盘时，无形中已经掉入操纵者导演的“戏剧”中，失去了对真相的判断。

这两年，各种低级的谣言能够传播，也是因为我们的用户变得更“傻”，更容易被操控了。

也有一位朋友担心，这起舆情能够发酵，背后有境外势力的参与。从最初的一盒看似无害的瑞士卷，逐渐被放大为“男女对立”的敏感话题，再进一步演化为“社会对立”的严峻态势，最终甚至可能触及我们都心知肚明的更高层面。这一系列操作，无疑是在大肆炒作“性别对立”的议题，企图以此为突破口，搅动社会的安宁。在这场资本的狂欢与政治的对立中，普通民众往往成为被利用的工具，而真正的幕后黑手却躲在暗处，冷眼旁观着这一切。

(Source: Maimai/@Ding Daoshi, November 8, 2024)

Declaring War on U.S. 'Cultural Hegemony'

The term "colonization of the mind" is relatively new. It entered common online parlance in the PRC in October 2024, when a Venezuelan scholar published an article on the semi-official nationalist platform Guancha titled "To Achieve Modernization in the Global South, We Must First Decolonize Our Thinking." (实现全球南方现代化，首先要从思想上去殖民化). The article called on the developing world to respond to Xi Jinping's appeal to "carry out dialogue among civilizations" (开展文明对话) and to pursue a modernization free from the control and influence of developed countries (Guancha, October 29, 2024). In Chinese official discourse, such modernization is explicitly framed as rejecting the Western path, which it characterizes as "the strong must become hegemonic" (国强必霸) (Party Member's Net, September 22, 2021; China Brief, May 10, 2024).

According to a 2023 article released by the PRC's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Beijing conceptualizes U.S. "hegemony" as comprising five dimensions: political, military, economic, technological, and cultural (MFA, February 20, 2023). From this perspective, Xi's suite of "global initiatives" (全球倡议) is contributing to a better world through the erosion of U.S. hegemony. A sense of triumphalism can be detected in recent weeks, as the September 3 military parade further reinforced Beijing's confidence in its own capabilities, leading officials and commentators to suggest that U.S. military hegemony is now over. As Wang Qiang (王强), a professor at National Defense University, declared, the PRC is "outpacing" (领跑) the United States militarily (Kankan News, September 3). Beijing also insists it has already achieved breakthroughs in artificial intelligence, robotics, biotechnology, materials science, deep-sea equipment, and aerospace, effectively overcoming U.S. "technological blockades" (技术封锁) and, to some degree, resolving so-called "chokepoints" (卡脖子) (China News, February 5, 2024; East Money Securities, April 1, 2024; MFA, June 10; Sina Finance, June 30; China Brief, August 9).

This leaves economic and cultural hegemony as the only remaining forms of U.S. hegemony to be defeated. In dismantling U.S. economic hegemony, Beijing has already placed the internationalization of the renminbi

and global de-dollarization high on its agenda. This initiative, which has been promoted with increasing fanfare in 2025, is framed as a direct response to Washington's push for dollar-based stablecoins as an extension of U.S. "hegemonism" (Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, January 21; Tencent News, September 3).

Conclusion

The new Xinhua Institute report forms part of a two-pronged strategy for eroding American cultural hegemony. Its combative rhetoric is designed—in a zero-sum way—to persuade readers that U.S. values are not a source of inspiration, unlike those of the PRC. Still cognizant of the global appeal of American culture, however, the PRC also invests heavily in inviting American influencers to visit the PRC, host livestreams, or even to use American sports as a "bridge" (桥梁) for advancing soft power (Huanqiu, April 13; Baijiahao/@Qianjiang Evening News, July 22; People's Daily, September 8; Baijiahao/@Jimu News, September 9).

These actions should be seen as part of a wider cognitive framework geared at eroding U.S. influence around the world, which operates in conjunction with similar efforts in other areas of U.S. power. They are actions based on internal assessments of PRC and U.S. power, and as such are likely impervious to attempts at strategic reassurance.

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Dissipative Warfare: The PLA's Potential New Strategy in the AI Era

By K. Tristan Tang

PLA soldiers monitoring news in Chongqing, 2014. (Source: Imaginchina Limited/Alamy)

Executive Summary:

- For PLA in the AI era, dissipative warfare could be the theory that replaces attrition with a strategy focused on maintaining internal order and creating disorder in an adversary's system.
- The strategy reflects China's broader emphasis on intelligentized warfare, prioritizing information dominance, algorithms, and systemic disruption over population, resources, or industrial capacity.
- Multiple signs suggest the PLA will likely adopt dissipative warfare to some degree, making it a development the United States and its partners must monitor closely.

On September 10, the PLA Daily's military forum published an article by Wang Ronghui (王荣辉) titled "From Attrition Warfare to Dissipative Warfare: An Analysis of the New Transformation in Winning Intelligentized Wars (从消耗战到耗散战——试析智能化战争制胜方式新变革)." **[1]** He had previously published "Dissipative Warfare: A Typical Form of Intelligentized Warfare (耗散战：智能化战争典型方式)" in the same outlet on May 9, 2023 (PLA Daily, May 9, 2023; September 10). Wang argues that, in the era of artificial intelligence (AI), dissipative warfare (耗散战) differs from traditional attrition warfare and that the key to victory in both strategic competition and combat lies in maintaining order within one's own system while creating disorder within the adversary's system. Multiple signs indicate that the People's Liberation Army will likely adopt this concept to some degree.

A Theory of Intelligentized Conflict

Wang defines dissipative warfare as a form of intelligentized warfare under conditions of nuclear deterrence. It reduces the degree of bloodshed but intensifies political isolation, economic blockades, and diplomatic strangulation. It is enabled by the fusion of military systems to generate comprehensive combat power (综合战力), creating sudden external changes that combine material consumption, energy dissipation, and information diffusion. **[2]** Crucially, Wang argues, the PLA can conduct dissipative warfare in both wartime and peacetime.

Wang develops the theory of dissipative warfare by borrowing concepts from physics, including about energy consumption and disorder. He argues that to achieve victory, one must follow four fundamentals: "negative entropy infusion, threshold recognition, phase transition activation, and advantage control" (负熵灌注、阈值认定、相变触发、胜势控制). He further states that a force must build a rapid closed loop of "sensing, decision-making, action, and evaluation" (感知、决策、行动、评估) to conduct dissipative warfare. The objective is to continuously increase the adversary's entropy in a dynamic, hybrid contest until it loses its overall operational capability.

While abstract in theory, dissipative warfare has emerged within a specific historical context, evolving out of attritional warfare. In a war of attrition, superior material and energy are the conditions for victory. The side that can better sustain the conversion of material resources into battlefield lethality and absorb greater losses will prevail. These conditions are underpinned by factors such as population, resources, and industrial capacity. In Wang's view, recent advances in technology and AI have now displaced some of these conditions, and dissipative warfare has become central to modern conflict.

The elements of combat in dissipative warfare differ sharply from those in attrition warfare. First, the foundation of war no longer relies on competition over stockpiles of population, minerals, or industrial capacity. It instead relies on advantages in information, intelligent algorithms, network structures, and the ability to dynamically regulate energy and information flows. Second, the target of operations has shifted from destroying material entities such as soldiers, tanks, or factories to dismantling the functions and order of the adversary's warfighting system (战争体系). Third, the measure of combat effectiveness and results has shifted from the destruction or annihilation of enemy forces to the pursuit of efficient asymmetric paralysis. This means achieving maximum disruption and dysfunction in the adversary's system at minimal cost to one's own side. Fourth, the center of

gravity in war has moved beyond traditional contests in the physical domains of land, sea, and air, toward an integrated contest across multiple domains, including the information domain (China Brief, June 21, 2024).

In other words, Wang argues that in the era of intelligentized warfare, victory will not belong to the side with the largest stock of resources. It will belong to the side that can maintain internal order more effectively and generate greater disorder for its opponent.

PLA to Adopt Dissipative Warfare?

Three signs show the PLA likely will adopt dissipative warfare to some degree.

First, based on reporting in PLA Daily, the military leadership at least does not reject this concept and may even wish to stimulate further discussion around it. A willingness to publish two articles on this concept more than two years apart suggests that, even though no additional discussions have appeared in open sources so far, the PLA has not dismissed the idea of dissipative warfare and that space for further debate exists.

Second, compared with other PLA Daily articles on AI, the concept of dissipative warfare appears more complete. It also aligns with the PRC's strategic development priorities. Since 2023, the PLA Daily's military forum has published about 130 articles focused on AI, but most describe or predict only partial features of AI or its impact on military use. Very few comprehensively address AI's implications for the core warfighting concepts. The discussion also aligns with requirements laid out in the 2020 edition of *The Science of Military Strategy* (战略学) regarding the strategic guidance of "military struggle in the intelligent domain" (智能领域军事斗争). These requirements emphasize paying close attention to the new changes that intelligentization brings to military affairs and providing forward-looking theoretical guidance for building the armed forces. **[3]**

Third, the concept's strategic content fits the PLA's elements of war design and operational guidance requirements. Its substance and methods do more than describe potential and value; they also align with standards in *The Science of Military Strategy* for "war design" (战争筹划), which emphasize identifying the features of war and making firm wartime decisions. These standards include reflecting the characteristics of informatized local wars and pursuing both clear political purposes and specific military objectives. At the same time, the concept matches the requirements of basic operational thought under operational guidance (作战指导), including asymmetric operations and system destruction campaigns aimed at striking critical nodes. **[4]**

Conclusion

Dissipative warfare outlines a comprehensive new strategy for the era of artificial intelligence, meeting multiple standards for the PLA's military strategy and war design. This makes it highly likely that the PLA will adopt the concept. More than the extent to which the PLA adopts this concept or whether the military incorporates it verbatim into its internal plans, the impact of this concept should be measures by its effect on the PLA's operational planning or campaign design. Currently, it is too early to assess this impact. But tracking the development of dissipative warfare in theory and in practice is something the United States and the international community must begin to assess, prepare for, and respond to.

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Notes

[1] Wang's current position remains unclear, but he served has previously served as an associate professor at the PLA Academy of Armored Forces Engineering and as a member of the Youth Working Committee of the Chinese Association for Command and Control (Harbin Engineering University, 2018)

[2] This framing puts Wang's theory in the lineage of work on systems engineering and cybernetics, which have informed military theory in the PRC for decades (China Brief, September 5).

[3] Science of Military Strategy [战略学] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2020), p. 179.

[4] Science of Military Strategy [战略学] (Beijing: National Defense University Press, 2020), pp. 262-274.