# The Emerging Role of 'AI' in the Foreign Policy of China

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**Abstract.** This analysis highlights how advances in Artificial Intelligence (AI) are reshaping international relations and driving nations to compete for technological dominance. This Article emphasis the significant introduction of AI by China to positively influence its economy, Security and Foreign Policy in general as outlined in their "Next Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan" and various other state-led initiatives. By using Qualitative conceptual analysis of previous scholarly literature, this study investigates how China is using technological AI breakthroughs to 'leap-frog' and get advantage in global arena over states like USA. Furthermore, it also points the importance of incorporating Technocrats and private enterprise as they are the main drivers of AI Innovation. Nation-states cannot turn a blind eye on the growth of AI as it is now being considered the new 'oil' In the game of International Politics affecting labour markets, human rights, international regulation and more. China believes that the state that will lead in AI could potentially dominate militarily and economically. Drawbacks and limitations such as ethical concerns are also discussed in the paper. Finally, By encouraging international cooperation and the responsible development of AI, nation-states can ensure a future in which AI benefits humanity as a whole.

**Index Terms-** Artificial Intelligence (AI), China, Foreign Policy, Technology, International Relations

## I. Introduction

In Academia, Foreign affairs, and as well as in everyday life terms like e-governance, computational diplomacy, cybersecurity, and digital diplomacy have a growing influence. All of these concepts bring the domains of technology, foreign policy, and international relations together. This paper is to understand this interconnection that is so new to the world of politics (Adesina, 2017). As pointed out by Grant (2004) the Internet affects every aspect of government policy, including foreign policy. These advancements have a major impact on interactions between nation-states, which are the primary objective of diplomatic relations.  Yet, the most powerful technological innovation the world has seen in the 21st century is Artificial Intelligence (hereinafter "AI")  with China declaring its intention to lead the world in AI both in terms of creating and implementing the technology and managing it through relevant laws and regulations (Lucero,2019). One of the two leaders in the development of AI worldwide is now China, other being the USA.  When it comes to

the number of patents linked to AI that are created, published, and cited globally, China leads the field (Khanal, Zhang, et al, 2024). Additionally, it is quickly creating an ecosystem that makes it easier to use AI systems in daily life.

As contended by Dickow & Voelsen (2018) the digitalization process has progressed to a fresh and higher level with the recent advancements in AI. Shortly, it is expected that AI systems will also alter the planning and decision-making processes related to foreign policy. Numerous nations have joined the trend and initiated public funding and development initiatives. China, in particular, has made significant investment announcements and stated its goal to overtake the United States technologically (Dickow & Voelsen, 2018). With the potential to upend labor markets, value chains, and the balance of economic power globally, AI is a disruptive technology with far-reaching effects (Scott, Heumann, et al, 2018). The global challenge of AI is expanding beyond national boundaries as it gets more and more integrated into the Internet's connectivity.

Therefore, this study attempts to argue how nation-states especially China is actively infusing technical narratives particularly those surrounding artificial intelligence (AI) into their foreign policy decisions as a result of the world's expanding technological breakthroughs. This research attempts to analyze whether or not such fusion is beneficial for foreign policy in general, as well as its scope and limitation to effectively handle the expanding impact of AI on different sectors of global affairs.

## II. Literature Review

Putri, Chairil, et al (2020) contends that the application of "AI" in political contexts is the subject of a growing corpus of literature. Yet, only a small portion of that literature thoroughly looks at the recent and historical advancements in AI in the subject of international relations (IR) and foreign policy, both as a study and in practice. Furthermore, the literature currently in publication has only a small amount of analysis on possible AI/IR system designs. An exception to this rule is research by Cummings et al (2018); Scott et al (2018); and Dickow & Voelsen (2018) which identifies the operational tasks for which artificial intelligence is required to support decision-makers and imagines how AI can integrate into foreign policy-making.

While some researchers (Bhatnagar et al., 2018; Monett and Lewis, 2018) argue that defining AI is an intimidating task. Lucero (2019) asserts that AI is a term that may be precisely defined and understood by various individuals and regulatory bodies. Although the purpose of this study is not to explain AI, it does analyze AI using the definition given by the National Artificial Intelligence Initiative Act of 2020 to facilitate understanding:

"The term 'artificial intelligence' means a machine-based system that can, for a given set of human-defined objectives, make predictions, recommendations or decisions influencing real or virtual environments. "

The author of this article would like to address the claim made by Bonsu & Song (2020) that Information and data are supposedly the new oil. The person (in this case, the state) in charge of data and its management (AI) also manages the global developing future. This paper's author analyses that China may have foreseen these changes in foreign policy. Lucero (2019) explains that therefore, China aims to lead the global AI industry by 2023. As stated in a document presented by the State Council in July 2017 and named "New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan" (the "AI Development Plan" or 'AIDP') . China's national AI plan demonstrates how governments view this technology with great concern.

However, before this plan as Zeng (2021) explains in his paper "China's Artificial Intelligence Innovation: A Top-down National Command Approach" the Chinese central government released several AI policies papers which is when China's AI aspirations began to garner international attention. The National Development and Reform Commission, the Ministry of Science and Technology, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, and the Central Leading Group for Cyberspace Affairs jointly proposed the "Internet + AI three-year implementation plan" in May 2016, long before the era of AI emerged. China is making significant investments in robotics and artificial intelligence development. Gigova (2017) states that Vladimir Putin, the president of Russia, said clearly in an address that the nation with the greatest advantage in artificial intelligence will govern the world.

Similar to Bonsu & Song (2020), the paper by Scott, Heumann, et al (2018) argues that AI has the power to reorder the winners and losers in international marketplaces, bringing about both possibilities and shocks to the economy. To protect their intellectual property (IP) and further their economic interests, nations must carefully place themselves in the global AI market. As it is explained in the beginning, defining 'AI' is a daunting task, it is significantly imperative to point out that China has taken advantage of this fact to bring potential in its economy. A few players in the market see China's national AI initiatives as an exceptional chance to promote AI companies. Chen (2017) contends that they have played a part in China's national AI boom carnival, which has resulted in the country's AI business being valued at unicorn proportions, unrealistically high salaries, and high expectations for international investment returns.

This paper corresponds with Yuanpu (2019) in his analysis that despite being a worldwide phenomenon, China is arguably experiencing the most excitement around AI because of its well-publicized state AI initiatives.

Scott, Heumann, et al (2018) also speak about the development of AI technology that may have a significant impact on national security. Countries are engaged in a competitive race as a result of governments aggressively investing in AI to obtain a strategic advantage. AI can further security and economic goals, which makes it crucial to include AI in foreign policy agendas. Hoadley & Sayler (2019) explain that according to a US Congress report on AI and National Security, the majority of analysts believe that China's cohesive, all-encompassing government

effort to create AI is a clear advantage over the US's AI efforts. Zeng (2021) furthers this point by arguing numerous international evaluations of Beijing's strategic thinking about the AI race and its geopolitical objectives have focused on AI as a national strategy. The author of this paper agrees that there is merit to these arguments. Allen (2019) articulates that The Chinese government views AI as a promising military "leapfrog development " prospect, which means that China will be able to adopt AI more easily than the US and that it will give military advantages over the US.

In other words, Should China's assessment of AI as a leapfrog opportunity be accurate, then China will be in a better position than the US to implement military AI. According to this theory, the US's present advantages in precision munitions, stealth aircraft, and aircraft carriers would be long-term disadvantages because the deeply ingrained political and commercial interests that sustain US military dominance today will make it difficult for the US to make the transition to an AI-enabled military technology paradigm in the future. As Xi Jinping notes, "We need to ensure that the core AI technologies are firmly in our own hands" (Zeng, 2021, 4). Accelerating the development of a new generation of AI is an important strategic handhold for China to gain the initiative in global science and technology competition.  This has amply illustrated the great power rivalry mindset while presenting China's audacious AI projects. Furthermore Zeng (2021) in his paper "Securitization of Artificial Intelligence in China" demonstrates how important national security is to China's strategic thinking on AI. Horowitz &. Mahoney  (2018) highlights the military ramifications in their research. China may create new weapon systems that have an impact on international relations and military balance as a result of its AI defense and security strategy. Modernizing and bolstering China's defensive capabilities is attributed in large part to the military's adoption of AI.

Dickow & Voelsen  (2018) argues in their report "The global debate on the future of artificial intelligence" that human rights norms are a crucial place to start when considering how a state should employ AI systems. They highlight the applications where government coercion is paired with the usage of AI systems. China is the place where these developments culminated: There, a "Social Credit System" is being implemented by the government with assistance from the employment of AI systems by a state and the obligations of human rights can be reconciled, if at all, is still a matter of much debate. Similar to these views, Scott, Heumann, et al (2018) states that for diplomats, the relationship between AI technologies and civil liberties is a contentious one. They are responsible for promoting both a human rights agenda that aims to improve freedom through technology and security objectives that priorities control technologies. In non-democratic nations, the immediate consequences are more concerning. China is a leader in AI-enabled monitoring, with its interest in censorship and surveillance motivated by worries about national security.

Jing (2018) points out at interesting analysis that the achievement of private enterprise in China's high-tech sector. Rather than official directives from Beijing,

privately held digital businesses like Alibaba, Tencent, and Baidu are the main forces behind China's expanding digital economy. These privately held internet behemoths are also the main drivers of AI innovation in China. China's greatest technologies, such as digital payments and bike sharing, were developed through market entrepreneurship rather than official investment or directives from Beijing (Jing, 2018). This explains another side of AI regulation where technocrats hold major power in AI industry. This argument also corresponds to Dickow & Voelsen  (2018) in their analysis that regarding the usage of AI systems by private companies, regulations are also necessary. Once again, states bear the responsibility of safeguarding pertinent legal interests against infringement by external actors, as per the human rights rules of international law. National regulations must be complemented by appropriate international regulations, as the majority of businesses in this industry operate on a global scale.

## III. Methodology

This paper uses qualitative conceptual analysis to investigate the relationship between AI and foreign policy. Documents relating to machine learning, globalization, democracy, artificial intelligence (AI), foreign policy, and security were thoroughly cross-referenced. Only books, research articles, documents, government reports, and online media from the relevant time were selected for analysis because of the topic's uniqueness and relevance; these materials had to be timely and published within the last seven to eight years. The scholarly research publications that were chosen as archive texts for this study have addressed a field of inquiry that this work aims to identify. Therefore, for this paper, a data retrieval technique is selected. Applying the case study technique to evaluate China's use of AI in its foreign policy framework is the first step in conducting qualitative research.

Additionally, there are a few limitations associated with this study that ought to be discussed. Firstly, though it studies AI and foreign policy, much weightage is given to China and hence, it might not be relevant to other states. However, the connection between AI and Foreign policy still provides valuable insights and lessons for other nations to consider in their foreign policy decision-making and strategies. Furthermore, the reliance on secondary data sources may limit the availability of certain information or perspectives and can create biases. However, the researcher has taken measures to mitigate these limitations by utilizing a diverse range of data sources and employing rigorous qualitative content analysis methods. The results of the study will be presented in the following result and discussion and reviewed in light of the research questions and associated materials.

## IV. Result and Discussion

After analyzing previous literature, it can be deduced that AI has opened up new scientific and technological avenues for foreign policy, but many aspects of old diplomacy can be transferred into this new arena while preparing for the major changes that will occur shortly. Because of AI's potential to transform the world, state

governments are competing with one another to obtain a strategic edge. Hence, it is contended that a key idea in assessing China's place in the world is its AI strategy, which outlines the nation's goals and objectives for the advancement and use of AI (Lewis, 2019). In light of this, it can be used to infer how China intends to employ AI technologies to influence its economy, security, and foreign policy.

The author of this paper would like to shed light on the fact that by design, any AI foreign policy strategy blueprint has limited scope due to its revolutionary nature. Nonetheless, effective adaptation is the secret to creating a successful foreign policy for AI. It is not inspirational to look at how governments have handled the Internet in foreign policy circles, and maybe states are therefore showing commendable interest in AI (Scott, Heumann, et al, 2018).  Hitherto, as Khanal, Zhang, et al (2024) asserts that developing the nation into a worldwide AI powerhouse by 2030 and winning the AI race is one of the main goals of the central government's new AI plan, especially in light of the growing competition between China and the US for AI leadership.

It can be argued that foreign policymakers cannot turn a blind eye to AI as they risk losing out on AI's potential to drastically alter the economy & security, the major aspects as understood from the literature review of this paper,  given AI's explosive rise to prominence. The time has come to swiftly modify the institutions, especially in the areas of economy and security crisis (Scott, Heumann, et al, 2018). It can be deduced that nation-states, China in particular, are actively incorporating technology narratives especially those related to AI into their foreign policy choices because AI has attracted a lot of interest and given rise to theories that view the development of AI as a massive geopolitical competition, with the winner controlling the future (Zhong & Mozur, 2018).

In response to the economic narrative produced by Bonsu & Song (2020), Scott, Heumann, et al (2018), and, Chen (2017), it can be deduced that China's adoption of AI technology to boost output rather than relying more on imports may continue to change trade ties and international supply chains (Balding & Clarke, 2019). Besides, the labor market in the field of AI may grow in a way that makes it possible to identify so-called multiplier effects. Thus, automation of labor processes is one of the primary ways AI can have a multiplier effect on the labor market (Wenning, 2023).  Yet, with growing power as an economically advanced state, the place of AI in the framework of foreign policy could positively impact China's global collaboration and the balance of geopolitical power.

Furthermore, as Scott, Heumann, et al (2018), Zeng (2021), Horowitz &. Mahoney  (2018) explains how Using AI, China wants its military to significantly strengthen China's defenses, this paper envisages through this unification, China hopes to project more military might and strengthen its capacity to handle or project hybrid threats and asymmetric warfare (wenning, 2023). Or at least, the capacity to use the same as a threat.

The synthesis of AI and Foreign policy is beneficial for foreign policy in general, especially in obtaining strategic and technological advantage over other states. This paper endorses the claim of Bonsu & Song (2020) that Information and data are supposedly the new oil as it has dominated IR and so will AI. Nonetheless, A limitation concerning human rights and technocrats should be considered while formulating foreign policies. To ensure that the world reaps the greatest benefits from artificial intelligence, governments, and foreign policymakers would have to take an accommodating stance towards these technologies while regulating laws governing their future use for commercial(tech) businesses, academic institutions, and civil society. Strict regulation could significantly hamper its growth. Lastly, this paper corresponds to Heumann, et al (2018) and Scott,  Heumann, et al (2018) in their analysis and argues that human rights are challenged by the integration of AI into many facets of society, necessitating proactive steps to reduce dangers and advance moral AI practices in foreign policy decisions, practices, and goals. To build soft power and advance moral AI communication tactics, foreign ministries should make use of public diplomacy instruments to educate the public about the advantages and dangers of AI. Ministries should assess how AI technology can erode civil rights by perpetuating prejudices based on race, ethnicity, gender, and other characteristics, and bring up these concerns with other administrations (Scott, Heumann, et al, 2018).

Lastly, this illustrates the competitive national races to acquire the largest share of artificial intelligence. Although China's initiatives are just getting started, they demonstrate ambition and prompt announcement in the technological sphere in foreign policy.

## V. Conclusions

In summary, the author of this paper advances the idea that foreign policy is being transformed by the technological advent of artificial intelligence (AI). States have begun to incorporate AI narratives in their foreign policies, a development now led by China. The reason for this is that nation-states believe whichever country leads in AI will also dominate militarily and economically. The paper looks into different benefits and drawbacks of such an approach with regard to national security and economic competitiveness. Establishing more robust military capabilities and boosting local production are among what China seeks through its AI policy.

However, ethical concerns should not be brushed aside when dealing with potential human rights abuses arising from uncontrolled growths of AI within global relations which are already marked by imbalances in power distribution. nonetheless, Nations should adopt a holistic approach towards governing AI which encompasses global cooperation for regulating it through public diplomacy initiatives among other mechanisms while taking into account these findings.

Furthermore, communication between different stakeholders including governments, tech companies' civil society organizations academia etc should be encouraged so that the development of AI can be directed towards benefiting humanity more than anything else. A safe prosperous future requires nations to

embrace comprehensive strategies toward controlling AI that involve collaboration between states on matters related to its governance.

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