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The Ideological Infrastructure of Chinese AI: How Nationalism Drives Governance Practices

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The Ideological Infrastructure of Chinese AI: How Nationalism Drives Governance Practices

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ABSTRACT

China's 2022–2023 rules on algorithms, deep synthesis, and generative AI form an early, integrated regime for governing AI. This thesis examines how nationalism shapes that regime relative to security, social governance, and economic goals. Through a qualitative content analysis of fifteen central-government documents, including regulations, Q&As, CAC “expert interpretations,” and MFA papers, the study codes for national security, social governance, the economy, and nationalism, treating Party watchwords (*tifa*) as operational categories.

Four findings follow. First, oversight targets systems with “public opinion” or mobilization potential, enforced through registration, assessments, and provenance rules. Second, social governance is codified, where ideas like “positive energy” and “Core Socialist Values” are embedded in ranking, labeling, and moderation mandates. Third, economic policy ties industrial scaling to auditability and labeling, with risk-sensitive entry conditions. Fourth, nationalism orders instrument choice, privileging Party security, reframing co-governance as state-led, and aligning providers with Party narratives.

The study shows how ideology becomes compliance architecture, links digital nationalism scholarship to technical governance, and proposes a method for reading *tifa* as design requirements. Limits include the focus on central texts and the 2022–2023 window. Findings suggest China treats values not as rhetoric but as system specifications, making innovation contingent on Party-centered nationalism.

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1. INTRODUCTION: CONTEXT AND AIMS OF THE STUDY

As artificial intelligence becomes more advanced, governments around the world are working to govern the technology. However, countries are not enacting regulations for the same reasons or in the same ways. China presents a clear case as a first mover in AI governance.¹ Between 2022 and 2023, the central government issued a set of measures and guidelines that covers areas like model design, the content presented to users, filing systems, and scenario innovation. Together, these publications outline more than mere compliance, instead revealing how the Chinese Communist Party's priorities shape AI capabilities and how this vision is implemented in everyday operation.²

The two-year period is distinctive because it signifies China's first comprehensive response to emerging systems like algorithmic recommendation, deep synthesis—a term used in China to refer to deepfake technology, and generative AI. Unlike previous CCP publications, the 2022–2023 measures and discourse present a concrete outline of when oversight increases, what AI providers must do in advance, and what information must be shared with users. The central government combines this oversight with scenario-based industrial guidance aimed at promoting AI across priority sectors. These features make China's approach a valuable test for how values are integrated into rules.

Most existing work explains Chinese AI governance through three main goals: social governance, national security and international competition, and economic growth. A much smaller part of the literature connects this governance to national narratives. The scholarship lacks an in-depth explanation of how narratives are turned into concrete obligations for AI providers, where Party consolidation becomes part of content provenance rules and audit processes, and why economic growth is contingent on such choices.

As a result, this thesis aims to address this gap by asking: To what extent, if at all, does nationalism drive China's central AI governance between 2022 and 2023, and how does this relate to economic, national security, and social governance goals? The argument advanced is relatively straightforward, positing that nationalism is not just a fourth category that drives governance, but also operates as the rule that orders instrument choice and defines

¹ Hipolito Calero, "An Analysis of China's AI Governance Proposals," Center for Security and Emerging Technology (Georgetown University), September 12, 2024, <https://cset.georgetown.edu/article/an-analysis-of-chinas-ai-governance-proposals/>; this thesis uses "China" to refer to the People's Republic of China and its central government.

² This thesis uses "Chinese Communist Party" and abbreviates it as "CCP." See Ryan Ho Kilpatrick, "CCP or CPC: A China Watchers' Rorschach," China Media Project, March 30, 2023, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2023/03/30/ccp-or-cpc-a-china-watchers-rorschach/>.

where they apply. The study promotes this argument through a qualitative content analysis of a Chinese and English corpus of central government documents in 2022 and 2023. The corpus includes the three core measures, official Q&As, expert interpretations published by the state, and related guidelines and discourse. The coding scheme combines categories from the literature with an inductively coded nationalism category. It also treats watchwords (*tifa*) as operational categories, enabling the analysis to trace how value-laden terms appear as binding requirements instead of mere rhetoric.³

This thesis presents four main findings. First, the corpus describes a specific and internal type of security, where oversight mainly concentrates on public opinion capabilities and is actualized through preauthorization, documentation, and traceable outputs that enable targeted correction. Second, social governance is operationalized, where state values are manifested in technological systems. Third, economic policy is scenario-driven and dependent on compliance, as entities expand based on governability rather than just innovation potential. Finally, nationalism serves as the overarching framework that determines the tools of governance and their application.

The study has three main contributions. It shows how values are turned into enforceable duties and how influence-bearing capabilities are managed throughout deployment. On a theoretical level, it connects Chinese and digitized nationalism to specific compliance strategies, illustrating how identity projects are executed. It also provides a practical method to analyze official discourse by viewing watchwords as operational categories, helping researchers better understand intent and compare nationalist claims.

The thesis proceeds as follows. Section 2 reviews the scholarship on Chinese AI governance and nationalism, identifying the gap the study addresses. Section 3 outlines the research, data collection, and coding procedure. Section 4 presents the findings relating to security, social governance, the economy, and the overarching framework of nationalism, situating them in the existing scholarship. Section 5 concludes with implications, limitations, and areas for further research.

³ For the purposes of this thesis, “*tifa*” (提法) is written as toneless pinyin to align with its typical spelling in the literature.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW: CHINESE AI GOVERNANCE AND NATIONALISM

2.1. Chinese AI Regulations and Guidance

Although many agencies in China contribute to AI regulation, the Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC) plays the most important role. Between 2022 and 2023, the agency issued three key regulations: the Provisions on the Management of Algorithmic Recommendations in Internet Information Services in 2022 (“Algorithm Provisions”), the Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis Internet Information Services (“Deep Synthesis Provisions”), and the Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services (“Generative AI Measures”).⁴ While earlier measures and guidance were more focused on micromanagement, outlining endpoints rather than principles, these new regulations emphasize *ex ante* content governance. Additionally, the CAC used a layered approach, with both the Deep Synthesis Provisions and the Generative AI Measures building on previous algorithm governance and reflecting an ongoing evolution in policy development.⁵

Notably, scholarship on AI governance often assumes a uniform environment for implementation. While analyzing the central government alone can provide valuable insights into key drivers, some literature unrealistically isolates the central government as the sole actor.⁶ This local-level implementation enables the central government to issue more principle-based policies, which in turn provide a deeper understanding of the underlying drivers of China’s AI governance. This study analyzes only central government publications but considers them within the context of a larger implementation structure to best interpret

⁴ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Provisions on the Management of Algorithmic Recommendations in Internet Information Services (互联网信息服务算法推荐管理规定) - Chinese,” Cyberspace Administration of China, January 4, 2022, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-01/04/c_1642894606364259.htm; Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis Internet Information Services (互联网信息服务深度合成管理规定) - Chinese,” Cyberspace Administration of China, December 11, 2022, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-12/11/c_1672221949354811.htm; Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services (生成式人工智能服务管理暂行办法) - Chinese,” Cyberspace Administration of China, July 10, 2023, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2023-07/13/c_1690898327029107.htm; despite the inclusion of “interim,” the Generative AI Measures are codified and final.

⁵ Rogier Creemers, “How China Wants to Tame Tech’s Use of Algorithms,” interview by Kevin Schoenmakers, September 17, 2021, China Media Project, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2021/09/17/how-china-wants-to-tame-techs-use-of-algorithms/>.

⁶ *The Chinese Communist Party’s Layered Artificial Intelligence Strategy*, no. 00019 (National Security Data and Policy Institute, 2025), 6, 8, 11, 12–13, <https://nationalecurity.virginia.edu/research/chinese-communist-partys-layered-artificial-intelligence-strategy>; Amir Al-Maamari, “Between Innovation and Oversight: A Cross-Regional Study of AI Risk Management Frameworks in the EU, U.S., UK, and China,” version 1, preprint, arXiv, 2025, 4, 8–9, 10, <https://doi.org/10.48550/arXiv.2503.05773>.

the background behind the main rhetoric, allowing for a more informed reading of central government policies.⁷

Several articles and other works that focus on Chinese AI governance explore the goals outlined in Chinese regulations and policies. The research identifies three main drivers: social governance, competition and national security, and economic concerns. Huw Roberts *et al.* (2022) identify these themes in AI literature, specifically linking social governance to the idea of social construction (社会建设).⁸ Social construction in this context relates to building a civil society, covering areas such as welfare, environmental protection, health, administration of justice, and more controlling domains like policing morality and “immoral” behavior, often through surveillance.⁹ Furthermore, Roberts *et al.* highlight international competition and national security as additional factors shaping China’s AI governance. They emphasize competition with the United States and the use of military innovation to “leapfrog” ahead as part of this security strategy. Finally, they argue that AI governance aims to foster economic and industrial growth.¹⁰

Rogier Creemers (2020) outlined similar categories based on Chinese regulations, which were also published before 2022. He argues that the 2017 AI Development Plan views AI as a tool to counteract declining GDP by supporting industrial transformation and expanding digital markets. Creemers also highlights national security and international competition with the United States as key drivers of AI governance. Additionally, he suggests that governance reflects a desire to use AI across all levels of social governance, both through sectors identified by Roberts *et al.* and more coercive applications.¹¹ Creemers believes these goals align with the broader aim of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” (中華民族

⁷ Jinghan Zeng, *Artificial Intelligence with Chinese Characteristics: National Strategy, Security and Authoritarian Governance* (Springer Nature, 2022), 1, 12, 15, 20, 105–6, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-19-0722-7>; Jinghan Zeng, “China’s Artificial Intelligence Innovation: A Top-Down National Command Approach?,” *Global Policy* 12, no. 3 (2021): 1–2, 5, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1758-5899.12914>; Huw Roberts *et al.*, “The Chinese Approach to Artificial Intelligence: An Analysis of Policy, Ethics, and Regulation,” in *Ethics, Governance, and Policies in Artificial Intelligence*, ed. Luciano Floridi, Philosophical Studies Series (Springer International Publishing, 2021), 144:6, https://link.springer.com/10.1007/978-3-030-81907-1_5.

⁸ Roberts *et al.*, “The Chinese Approach to Artificial Intelligence,” 2, 8–9, 11, 13.

⁹ Roberts *et al.*, “The Chinese Approach to Artificial Intelligence,” 14–17; Holly Snape, “Social Management or Social Governance: A Review of Party and Government Discourse and Why It Matters in Understanding Chinese Politics,” *Journal of Chinese Political Science* 24, no. 4 (2019): 692, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s11366-019-09605-2>; Qian Gang, “Society Lost,” China Media Project, September 27, 2012, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2012/09/27/society-lost/>.

¹⁰ Roberts *et al.*, “The Chinese Approach to Artificial Intelligence,” 8–9, 11.

¹¹ Rogier Creemers, “The Ideology Behind China’s AI Strategy,” in *The AI Powered State: China’s Approach to Public Sector Innovation* (Nesta, 2020), 64, https://media.nesta.org.uk/documents/Nesta_TheAIPoweredState_2020.pdf.

偉大復興). However, he extrapolates from the 2017 AI Development Plan without being able to consider the core regulations and guidelines issued after his 2020 article.¹² Matt Sheehan (2023) also proposed similar, though not identical, categories in analyzing the Algorithm Provisions, the Deep Synthesis Provisions, and a draft of the Generative AI Measures. He identifies three main goals: coercive social governance via information control, overall economic prosperity, and leadership in AI innovation. Furthermore, he proposes an additional goal of becoming a leader in AI governance.¹³ In an article discussing previous regulations but focusing specifically on the Generative AI Measures, Amy Yang and Bob Li (2025) cite the Measures to explain the “core issues,” which ultimately relate to social governance and national security.¹⁴ Yirong Sun and Jingxian Zeng (2024) identify similar drivers behind the Generative AI Measures, which also fall into broad areas of social governance and national security.¹⁵

2.2. Nationalism: Concepts and Frameworks

Umut Özkirimli (2005) argues that nationalism includes both civic—a commitment to public institutions centered on subscribing to a “political creed” regardless of race—and cultural or ethnic—a form of identity based on culture or ethnic boundaries. He views nationalism as a discursive practice that constructs the “nation” through ongoing claims of shared ideas and memories. This form of nationalism usually has at least one of four features: it maintains an us-them dichotomy by asserting fixed and exclusive identities, it dominates political discourse by legitimizing the dominant narratives and marginalizing alternatives, it naturalizes itself by presenting national identity as eternal and morally absolute, and it is reinforced through everyday practices and social structures that sustain its power.¹⁶ While this definition provides a helpful framework for analysis and can be broadly observed in Chinese nationalism regarding AI governance, it does not offer a specific interpretation that considers China or digital technologies.

¹² Creemers, “The Ideology Behind China’s AI Strategy,” 65–67.

¹³ Matt Sheehan, “China’s AI Regulations and How They Get Made,” *Horizons: Journal of International Relations and Sustainable Development*, no. 24 (2023): 117–18, JSTOR, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48761167>.

¹⁴ Amy Yang and Bob Li, “AI Watch: Global Regulatory Tracker,” White & Case, May 29, 2025, <https://www.whitecase.com/insight-our-thinking/ai-watch-global-regulatory-tracker-china>.

¹⁵ Yirong Sun and Jingxian Zeng, “China’s Interim Measures for the Management of Generative AI Services: A Comparison Between the Final and Draft Versions of the Text,” ed. Josh Lee Kok Thong and Sakshi Shivhare, Future of Privacy Forum, 2024, <https://fpf.org/blog/chinas-interim-measures-for-the-management-of-generative-ai-services-a-comparison-between-the-final-and-draft-versions-of-the-text/>.

¹⁶ Umut Özkirimli, “What Is Nationalism,” in *Contemporary Debates on Nationalism: A Critical Engagement* (Bloomsbury Publishing, 2005), 22–23, 29–31, 32–33.

Scholars see Chinese nationalism as a unique form of nationalism, and the research behind it is both strong and scattered, yet still incomplete.¹⁷ Nonetheless, scholars generally agree on the key features. After Xi Jinping was elected in 2012, the CCP spread nationalist slogans like the “Chinese Dream” (中国梦), which links to the idea of the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation.”¹⁸ Xi Jinping defined these concepts in a 2012 speech: “In my opinion, achieving the rejuvenation of the Chinese nation has been the greatest dream of the Chinese people since the advent of modern times. This dream embodies the long-cherished hope of several generations of the Chinese people, gives expression to the overall interests of the Chinese nation and the Chinese people, and represents the shared aspiration of all the sons and daughters of the Chinese nation.”¹⁹

The Chinese Dream has become a central nationalist goal, with the state using it as a rallying cry for the future. However, its usage still depends on shared history and memory of the “Century of National Humiliation” (百年国耻). The narrative presented by the central government describes the period from the First Opium War in 1839 to the CCP’s victory over the Kuomintang in 1949 as one marked by unfairness, emphasizing China’s experience with “unequal treaties,” foreign domination through treaty ports, territorial losses such as those from the 1919 Treaty of Versailles, and atrocities committed by external powers, most notably the Nanjing Massacre.²⁰

The concept of the “nation” (国家) in China differs from common understandings of the nation seen in broader literature. Unlike typical definitions that describe a nation as people sharing features like territory, governance, language, history, and culture, the CCP views the nation as a more complex and multifaceted concept. The Party-defined nation is based on shared territory, history, and civilization, but it primarily centers on Han Chinese ethnicity and includes all Chinese citizens, including the Chinese super-ethnicity and the Chinese diaspora beyond the state’s borders. The Party stands at the heart of this concept,

¹⁷ David R. Stroup, “Chinese Nationalism: Insights and Opportunities for Comparative Studies,” *Nationalities Papers* 51, no. 3 (2023): 498–99, <https://doi.org/10.1017/nps.2022.99>.

¹⁸ Danna He and Wenfang Tang, “Constructed Community: Rise and Engines of Chinese Nationalism Under Xi Jinping,” *Journal of Contemporary China* 34, no. 153 (2024): 510, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10670564.2024.2339303>.

¹⁹ Xi Jinping, “Achieving Rejuvenation Is the Dream of the Chinese People,” National Ethnic Affairs Commission, November 29, 2012, <https://www.neac.gov.cn/seac/c103372/202201/1156514.shtml>.

²⁰ Jyrki Kallio, “Dreaming of the Great Rejuvenation of the Chinese Nation,” *Fudan Journal of the Humanities and Social Sciences* 8, no. 4 (2015): 522, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s40647-015-0097-4>; Stroup, “Chinese Nationalism,” 499; Mark Metcalf, “The National Humiliation Narrative: Dealing with the Present by Fixating on the Past,” *Teaching Asia’s Giants: China* 25, no. 2 (2020): 45–46, <https://www.asianstudies.org/publications/eaa/archives/the-national-humiliation-narrative-dealing-with-the-present-by-fixating-on-the-past/>.

with citizens expected to follow the principle of “loving your nation” (爱国). Following this practice means loving and remaining loyal to the CCP, allowing the Party to both define the nation and occupy its core.²¹ As Uradyn Bulag (2024) argues, the CCP is fused to the idea of the nation and can best be conceptualized as a “party-nation.”²² This sentiment is similarly echoed by Shigong Jiang (2010).²³

Any analysis that depends only on offline nationalism as its foundation, though, will fail to thoroughly examine the unique dynamics of nationalism in digital spaces.²⁴ Examining scholarship on forms of nationalism in digital environments introduces additional nuance. Ahmad uses “digital nationalism” as an umbrella term that encompasses any nationalism related to the internet. He points out that technology enables the rapid spread of ideas in an environment without physical borders, making it easier to learn information and creating large networks where netizens interact regardless of geography. Additionally, the internet allows users to promote and challenge different narratives much more easily, as there are almost no barriers to accessing social media or forums, unlike real-world expression.²⁵ In a widely cited essay, Ian Hogarth (2018) introduces the term “AI nationalism” to describe a trend where governments play a leading role in shaping AI policy, with AI becoming a disproportionately important part of governance. It also involves protectionism that favors domestic over foreign actors and international competition escalating into an AI arms race.²⁶ However, many authors offer their own definition of the term. In contrast to Hogarth, J. Paul Goode (2020) defines “AI nationalism” as the interplay of structural forces and daily experiences of AI that together cultivate nationalist sentiment. He also warns against likening

²¹ Jerker Hellström, “Nation,” in *Decoding China Dictionary*, Second, ed. Malin Oud and Katja Drinhausen (Decoding China Dictionary, 2023), <https://decodingchina.eu/>.

²² Uradyn E. Bulag, “The Wheel of History and Minorities’ ‘Self-Sacrifice’ for the Chinese Nation,” *Comparative Education* 60, no. 1 (2024): 112, <https://doi.org/10.1080/03050068.2023.2271781>.

²³ Jiang Shigong, “Written and Unwritten Constitutions: A New Approach to the Study of Constitutional Government in China,” *Modern China* 36, no. 1 (2010): 24, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0097700409349703>.

²⁴ Piotr Ahmad, “Digital Nationalism as an Emergent Subfield of Nationalism Studies. The State of the Field and Key Issues,” *National Identities* 24, no. 4 (2022): 313, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14608944.2022.2050196>; Florian Schneider, “China’s Digital Nationalism,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Nationalism in East and Southeast Asia*, ed. Zhouxiang Lu (Routledge, 2023), 167–68, 170, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/chapters/edit/10.4324/9781003111450-14/china-digital-nationalism-florian-schneider>.

²⁵ Ahmad, “Digital Nationalism as an Emergent Subfield of Nationalism Studies. The State of the Field and Key Issues,” 313–14.

²⁶ Ian Hogarth, “AI Nationalism,” Ian Hogarth, June 13, 2018, <https://www.ianhogarth.com/blog/2018/6/13/ai-nationalism>; for a more recent application of “AI Nationalism,” see Aaronson’s work on the subject. Susan Ariel Aaronson, “The Age of AI Nationalism and Its Effects,” *Centre for International Governance Innovation*, no. 306 (2024): 1–26, <https://www.econstor.eu/handle/10419/306687>.

international competition over AI to an arms race, further distancing his definition from Hogarth's.²⁷

Like the literature on traditional nationalism and Chinese nationalism, it is not sufficient to focus only on research about online forms of nationalism or AI nationalism when analyzing Chinese AI policies. Instead, it is necessary to combine an understanding of general nationalism, Chinese nationalism, and electronic forms of nationalism with the literature on the Chinese form of digitized nationalism. Even within this more specific body of work, however, authors often struggle to establish a clear and shared definition of Chinese nationalism. In a comprehensive review of the field, Zhang *et al.* use the terms “digital nationalism,” “cyber-nationalism,” and “online nationalism” interchangeably to describe expressions of a nation’s identity, the promotion of nationalist agendas, and expressions of belonging to a nation by both state and non-state actors through the internet. They describe “techno-nationalism” as the belief that technological advancement enhances a nation’s power within a fiercely competitive global economy.²⁸ In a demonstration of the fragmentation of the field, Florian Schneider (2023) argues that each of the four terms defined by Zhang *et al.* is distinct and provides different interpretations in the context of Chinese technology.

Schneider first uses “techno-nationalism” to describe how a nation develops the legal and political structures for national media ecosystems to operate. He argues that this form includes the push for cyber sovereignty, which is the extension of territorial sovereignty into cyberspace.²⁹ He goes on to claim that “online nationalism” includes nationalist discourses and expressions found online, whether in text, images, or other media that users produce and share. Importantly, this form of nationalism also involves the interaction between online and offline nationalism, since anyone can upload traditional discourse, such as a speech, to the internet.³⁰ Schneider also describes “cyber-nationalism” as a subset of cyber-activism, referring to online social or political mobilization, such as organizing a protest or inundating posts with nationalist content. Additionally, he characterizes “digital nationalism” as the way digital technologies influence the expression of nationalism, where a platform’s content, algorithms, or features actively shape how nationalist ideas are created and shared. In this context, “digital nationalism” encompasses both online and cyber-nationalism.³¹ Overall,

²⁷ J. Paul Goode, “Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Nationalism,” *Nations and Nationalism* 27, no. 2 (2020): 366, 368, <https://doi.org/10.1111/nana.12684>.

²⁸ Xiaoyu Zhang *et al.*, “Mapping Chinese Digital Nationalism: A Literature Review,” *International Journal of Communication* 18 (2024): 1892, 1896, <https://ijoc.org/index.php/ijoc/article/view/20767/4545>.

²⁹ Schneider, “China’s Digital Nationalism,” 168.

³⁰ Schneider, “China’s Digital Nationalism,” 169.

³¹ Schneider, “China’s Digital Nationalism,” 169–71.

Schneider's definitions offer a more nuanced framework. Because there is a lack of consensus on the meaning of various terms, using these more precise interpretations enables a more detailed analysis of nationalism in the context of Chinese technology. As a result, this work adopts Schneider's definitions.

2.3. Gap in the Scholarship: Nationalism in AI Governance (2022–2023)

While many works identify the aims of China's AI policies, the nationalist aspects remain underdeveloped, especially as they pertain to governance between 2022 and 2023. Creemers offers the most developed pre-2022 link between AI governance and nationalism, explicitly focusing on the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation," where social governance, security and competition, and economic growth are tied to the development of the "nation." However, his work precedes the Algorithm Provisions, Deep Synthesis Provisions, and the Generative AI Measures, meaning it cannot show the ways nationalist pursuits are translated into quotidian obligations for providers. Other work, like that of Roberts *et al.*, Sheehan, Yang and Li, and Sun and Zeng, emphasizes matters of social governance, security and competition, and economic prosperity, but does not demonstrate how these areas are operationalized.

Conceptually, research on digital and techno-nationalism, such as Zhang *et al.*, Schneider, Hogarth, and Goode, has rarely been tied to the concrete instruments of these measures. Additionally, the literature tends to treat watchwords as rhetorical flourishes rather than operational categories, so it typically struggles to understand how ideas like "mainstream" values (主流) or "positive energy" (正能量) are actualized. For example, Sheehan refers to them as "boilerplate" without reading into the way they are deployed.³²

The majority of analyses also focus on earlier documents, like the 2017 AI Development Plan, not publications between 2022 and 2023, thus excluding the three cornerstone regulations, the associated Q&As, state-published expert opinions, or other guidance. This exclusion leads to three unresolved factors: provenance and conspicuous labeling as continuous duties compared to a one-time check, registration and security assessments focused on politically salient features, and scenario-based economic policy that conditions growth on governability.

³² Sheehan, "China's AI Regulations and How They Get Made," 114.

Consequently, this thesis bridges the gaps in the literature to reveal how nationalism serves as the logic that determines which instruments are used and where they apply. The analysis links nationalist goals to auditability standards, especially for opinion-mobilizing functions, also identifying the way that economic growth is conditioned on adherence to national priorities.

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research Design: Qualitative Content Analysis

This work employs a qualitative content analysis design to analyze how the Chinese central government framed AI governance from January 1, 2022, to December 31, 2023. This period offers a clear window during which China promulgated three significant AI policies. The question aims to investigate the under-explored area of nationalism by seeking to identify how, if at all, nationalism exists in Chinese AI discourse. Building on scholarship that identifies national security, social governance, and the economy as the primary drivers of Chinese AI governance, this study incorporates literature on nationalism to assess whether and how it fits into, or diverges from, this triad. By examining the Algorithm Provisions, Deep Synthesis Provisions, and Generative AI Measures, along with related discourse, this thesis draws insights from the government's initial response to each type of technology.

The categories of national security, social governance, and economic concerns were deductively coded based on the literature, while sub-codes were developed inductively during the coding process. Nationalism was treated differently, being introduced as an open analytical category, with both the main code and its sub-codes emerging inductively. This approach ensured that any evidence of nationalism surfaced organically from the texts rather than being assumed in advance.

3.2. Data Collection: Search Strategy, Inclusion, and Corpus

This study employed a variety of search strategies during the data collection process. Nearly all searches were performed in Chinese to exclude English-language sources and better match keywords.³³ Two methods were used to limit the results to the central government. First, using the “site” search operator in Google, websites could be restricted to

³³ Of the 15 sources comprehensively analyzed, only one was originally published by the central government in English.

only those belonging to agencies in China.³⁴ Second, to find sources that an agency may have published on a different site, searches also utilized the names of these agencies in Chinese. For example, searches included “中央网信办” and “国家互联网信息办公室” (Cyberspace Administration of China as an organ of the CCP and as an organ of the state, respectively). Additionally, keywords like “规定” (regulation) and “意见” (opinions) were used to restrict the scope to white papers, regulations, guidelines, official interpretations, official statements to the press, and position papers. Searches incorporated terms like “算法治理” (Algorithmic Governance), “人工智能治理” (Artificial Intelligence Governance), “生成式人工智能” (Generative Artificial Intelligence), and “深度合成” (Deep Synthesis) to ensure results were related to the major regulations. The study reviewed approximately 50 sources and selected 15 of them based on relevance to be included in the qualitative content analysis. The process of coding sources involved analyzing both Chinese originals and English translations.

This corpus includes the three core regulations that define China’s AI governance; analyzing the Algorithm Provisions, Deep Synthesis Provisions, and Generative AI measures provides a view of China’s comprehensive response to each technology. Four expert interpretations, each published by the CAC, are included because they offer an official extrapolation of the three main regulations and give insight into the CPP’s strategy regarding these technologies. Two publications by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs were selected for the corpus because they are public statements that distill China’s views on AI governance into clear messages aimed at informing other countries of China’s position. The documents also encompass regulations that implement parts of the three core policies, offering additional insight into the CCP’s motives related to these issues. Furthermore, the Q&As covering each of the three main publications provide insight into what the Party considers most crucial and what is most important for a broader audience to understand, in turn communicating state priorities. Documents concerning the governance of humanoid robots were included as they explain how Chinese AI principles are applied in specific cases.³⁵

This thesis specifically analyzed the Chinese texts to identify *tifa*. The term, literally meaning “formulation,” refers to words or phrases deliberately used in government texts that convey specific political intentions and reflect ideological priorities. Scholars often overlook *tifa*, but their significance cannot be overstated.³⁶ David Bandurski, a leading scholar on *tifa*,

³⁴ For instance, searches for works by the CAC can be found using “site:cac.gov.cn.”

³⁵ See Appendix A.

³⁶ Gloria Davies, *Chapter 1 - A Dream of Perpetual Rule*, Yearbook, Yearbook 2019: China Dreams (Australian Centre on China in the World, 2020), <https://www.thechinastory.org/yearbooks/yearbook-2019-china->

describes them as “watchwords,” which reflects their role as carefully watched and purposefully crafted phrases imbued with ideology that are used to signal political priorities, maintain Party unity, and reveal shifts in power or policy within the CCP.³⁷ One example of a watchword is the term “Two Establishes” (两个确立). The term refers to the establishment of Xi Jinping as the “core” of the CCP and the establishment of “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era.”³⁸ Because *tifa* carry so much meaning beyond a literal interpretation and serve as a window into Party thinking, understanding this nuance was crucial in analyzing CCP publications.³⁹

3.3. Coding Procedure: Analytical Framework and Coding Strategy

All of the selected documents were coded in ATLAS.ti using a codebook developed deductively from the literature and inductively during the analysis of the publications. The previously mentioned code groups of national security, social governance, and economic concerns came from the convergence on those topics in existing works. Social governance

dreams/chapter-1-a-dream-of-perpetual-rule/; David Bandurski, “Buzzword Babble,” China Media Project, October 21, 2022, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2022/10/21/buzzword-babble/>.

³⁷ David Bandurski, “Watchwords: The Life of the Party,” China Media Project, September 10, 2012, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2012/09/10/watchwords-the-life-of-the-party/>.

³⁸ David Bandurski, “Two Establishes,” China Media Project, February 8, 2022, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/two-establishes/; Notably, both pillars of the Two Establishes contain *tifa*. “Core” is a term that signifies political dominance within the CCP, dating back to its use during Mao Zedong’s consolidation of power, as well as its application to Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin. Stella Chen, “Core,” China Media Project, June 13, 2022, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/the-core/; The phrase “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” also called “Xi Jinping Thought,” similarly reflects Xi’s massive consolidation of power, hearkening back to “Mao Zedong Thought” and “Deng Xiaoping Theory.” CMP Staff, “Xi Jinping Thought on Socialism with Chinese Characteristics for a New Era,” China Media Project, March 27, 2021, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/xi-jinping-thought-on-socialism-with-chinese-characteristics-for-a-new-era/.

³⁹ For sources where no English version is publicly available, I translated using a custom-built tool that utilizes both fine-tuned generative pretrained transformers (GPTs) and the principles behind generative adversarial networks (GANs). The system is trained to be domain-specific, intended to only translate Chinese laws, regulations, policy white papers, standards, and government pronouncements on tech and AI governance. One part of the system translates text, and another part of the system judges the translation on accuracy and intent, completeness, terminology, intertextual nuance, formatting, and English readability. The translation is output alongside a brief report about each of the criteria. Translations are reviewed in part by a fluent Chinese speaker. Final translations have demonstrated high reliability comparable to official translations. This process is used for all translations bearing my name. For these translations, the cited date reflects the original. Data from the following informs the system. Malin Oud and Katja Drinhausen, eds., *Decoding China Dictionary*, Second, with David Bandurski *et al.* (2023), <https://decodingchina.eu/>; “The CMP Dictionary,” Reference, China Media Project, <https://chinamediaproject.org/CMP-Dictionary/>; “Glossary of Legal Terms,” Reference, China Law Translate, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/glossary-of-legal-terms/>; Hong Kong Department of Justice, “Combined DoJ English-Chinese Glossary of Legal Terms,” Reference, Combined DoJ Glossaries of Legal Terms, 2021, <https://www.glossary.doj.gov.hk/index.php>; The system was built and utilized in line with best practices. Leiden University - Humanities, “Machine Translation: Critical and Effective Use,” GenAI and LLMs in the Academic Community.

was interpreted as “social construction” as it is understood in the Chinese context. National security was utilized to represent concerns regarding security and international competition. However, an essential inductive sub-code reflecting internal security was added. The code group representing economic concerns reflected broad ideas about the economy and industry, and nationalism was also inductively coded. To ensure proper coding and accurate results, meticulous analytical and reflexive memoing took place throughout the coding process. Additionally, codes were iteratively rechecked to verify accuracy, and code recoding was performed three times at roughly weekly intervals.

Nationalism was coded through a synthesis of the current literature. This study grounds its analysis in the CCP’s own definition of the “nation,” since the Party is the central actor under examination. At the core of this multifaceted definition lies the CCP itself, positioned as the center of national identity.⁴⁰ As discussed, the Party and the Chinese nation are largely coterminous, with the CCP framing all concepts in relation to itself. Accordingly, this study interprets the nation through the Party’s lens and, in turn, understands the CCP’s efforts to consolidate and safeguard its power as inherently nationalist pursuits. Within this framework, the Party’s use of self-aggrandizing *tifa* that reinforce national goals and ideology is treated as nationalist. In addition, this study adopts Schneider’s typology of techno-nationalism, online nationalism, digital nationalism, and cyber nationalism, employing his framework as a diagnostic tool for identifying potentially nationalist language.

As Creemers notes, governance, economy, and security intersect and are not mutually exclusive.⁴¹ Nationalist drivers are also involved in the other three categories. For example, the term “positive energy,” which appears frequently in AI governance, is both nationalist and related to social governance. The CCP often uses this term to refer to controlling media and information to promote “positive” views of the CCP and China while suppressing “negative” content about the government.⁴² This *tifa* inherently has nationalist implications, as it reinforces national pride, cultural distinctiveness, and loyalty to the Party and its ideology. However, “positive energy” also falls under social governance, as it aims to shape public discourse, maintain social stability, and control information flows to construct the

⁴⁰ Jérôme Doyon and Chloé Froissart, “A Long-Term Perspective on the Chinese Communist Party,” *Journal of Current Chinese Affairs* 51, no. 3 (2022): 355, <https://doi.org/10.1177/18681026221141448>.

⁴¹ Creemers, “The Ideology Behind China’s AI Strategy,” 67.

⁴² CMP Staff, “Positive Energy,” China Media Project, April 16, 2021, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/positive-energy/; David Bandurski, “China’s Media under Mr. Positive,” China Media Project, May 6, 2015, <https://chinamediaproject.org/2015/05/06/chinas-media-under-mr-positive/>.

desired social order in Chinese society. Consequently, because of overlapping categories, some quotations had multiple codes.

4. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

4.1. Overview of Findings and Argument

This study examines the aims and drivers of China's AI governance regulations and related official discourse from 2022 to 2023, and how nationalist narratives influence these publications alongside economic, strategic, and social governance factors. To do so, it synthesizes Chinese and English versions of the Algorithm Provisions, Deep Synthesis Provisions, and Generative AI Measures, along with Q&A sessions about these topics with Chinese officials, opinions on humanoid robots, international-facing statements demonstrating positions, and official expert interpretations.⁴³ The qualitative content analysis extracted 291 code-quotation pairs from the English and Chinese versions of the 15 publications.

As expected, four main themes emerged: national security and international strategy, economic and industrial concerns, social governance, and nationalism. However, this discussion will demonstrate that nationalism not only underpins the other three categories but also acts as an underlying framework that supports requirements, enforcement mechanisms, and broad policy motivations.

4.2. Findings

The primary trend stated and implied throughout the documents is that “the state is to adhere to the principle of placing equal emphasis on development and security.⁴⁴ To carry out this principle, the government mandates security assessments and requires registering and filing all algorithms created, with a specific emphasis on services that contain “public opinion attributes or social mobilization capabilities.”⁴⁵ Analysis of this topic revealed that

⁴³ The “Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Strengthening Ethical Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI)” was originally published in English.

⁴⁴ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services (生成式人工智能服务管理暂行办法),” trans. China Law Translate, China Law Translate, July 13, 2023, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/generative-ai-interim/>.

⁴⁵ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Provisions on the Management of Algorithmic Recommendations in Internet Information Services (互联网信息服务算法推荐管理规定),” trans. China Law Translate, China Law Translate, January 4, 2022, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/algorithms/>;

Chinese governance often reflects this view, with patterns focused on pre-release oversight, defined risk categories, and mechanisms that ensure the auditability of functions that might influence public opinion. The widespread presence of this idea throughout the documents indicates it is a core design principle used by the CCP.

Notably, enforcement discretion allows uneven application, enabling some innovation to move forward with fewer constraints. For example, most laws do not apply to entities developing AI for non-public use.⁴⁶ This exception allows for faster development, especially in the service of the CCP. Moreover, the rules place much of the enforcement burden on AI providers to regulate themselves, while giving the government flexibility to selectively enforce regulations. This discretion aligns with a nationalist logic as it privileges projects linked to Party-defined national objectives while constraining those seen as threatening unity. Through these mechanisms, the CCP can foster technological progress that advances Party-defined national objectives, such as strengthening China's geopolitical standing, promoting cultural narratives related to the "great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation" and the collective Chinese Dream, and protecting the image of the nation.⁴⁷

Moreover, the strategic promotion of AI is embedded within a broader technonationalist project. In CCP narratives of the Century of National Humiliation, China is depicted as having lagged behind other nations in technological advancement, with inferior capabilities playing a decisive role in its past defeats and subjugation. For example, the government invokes the British superiority in artillery and modern naval power during the First Opium War as a critical factor in China's loss. Consequently, the country's leadership regards achieving technological superiority as essential to overcoming and symbolically reversing the humiliations of the past.⁴⁸ Thus, when China seeks to "promote the establishment of generative AI infrastructure and public training data resource platforms" and "promote collaboration and sharing of algorithm resources, increasing efficiency in the

Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, "Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis Internet Information Services (互联网信息服务深度合成管理规定)," trans. China Law Translate, China Law Translate, December 11, 2022, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/deep-synthesis/>; Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, "Generative AI Measures."

⁴⁶ For example, the Generative AI Measures specify that the regulations do not apply "where industry associations, enterprises, education and research institutions, public cultural bodies, and related professional bodies, etc., research, develop, and use generative AI technology, but have not provided generative AI services to the (mainland) public." Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, "Generative AI Measures."

⁴⁷ Johanna Costigan, "Picking the Rose, Leaving the Thorn: Why China's AI Regulations Are Worth Careful Examination," Asia Society Policy Institute, April 11, 2023, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/picking-rose-leaving-thorn-why-chinas-ai-regulations-are-worth-careful-examination>.

⁴⁸ Xiaoguang Wang, "The 'Techno-Turn' of China's Official Discourse on Nationalism," *Communist and Post-Communist Studies* 53, no. 4 (2020): 223, 224–25, <https://doi.org/10.1525/j.postcomstud.2020.53.4.220>.

use of computing resources,” the initiatives are framed within a broader narrative of transcending past humiliation and advancing toward the “great rejuvenation of the Chinese nation” to actualize the Chinese Dream.⁴⁹

Beneath the surface, calls for security are also rooted in nationalist thinking. The general concept of security used in state publications is also the same word for national security (国家安全). As a result, an accurate reading of the corpus demands that the broader idea of security be understood in context. In this framing, security rhetoric emphasizes the Party’s security above all else, with the security of the country’s citizens as secondary. For the CCP, security can only be achieved if the Party’s own security is secured first.⁵⁰

At the intersection of social governance, national security *qua* Party security, and nationalism lies the curtailment of social liberties in pursuit of the CCP’s security and expansion. The CCP employs its regulations to turn values into obligations regarding what content can appear, how it is ranked, and where it can come from. In this way, the Party is implementing “guidance of public opinion” (舆论导向). The term, dating back to the June 4 crackdowns on pro-democracy demonstrators in Tiananmen Square, refers to a requirement for media to reject content contrary to Party policy, actively promote and explain Party publications, align public opinion with Party spirit, block trends opposing Party objectives, refuse unfavorable news, strictly follow propaganda discipline, and ensure journalists are trained in advanced propaganda techniques.⁵¹ These elements are echoed throughout the 15 documents.

For instance, Chinese government publications promote a normative framework surrounding “public opinion” (舆论). The term is not limited to use in the security scrutiny of platforms with “public opinion attributes or social mobilization capabilities.” Overall, the term appears 27 times in the sampled documents. One expert interpretation explicitly discusses the issue of unchecked “public opinion” in four parts. First, it can create “information cocoons.”⁵² Second, the author argues that the absence of public opinion guidance can result in the creation of fake accounts and fabricated traffic, such as through likes or comments, as well as what is known online as “brigading.”⁵³ Third, if left unchecked,

⁴⁹ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Generative AI Measures.”

⁵⁰ Jerker Hellström, “Security,” China Media Project, April 6, 2021, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/security/.

⁵¹ David Bandurski, “Guidance of Public Opinion,” *China Media Project*, April 14, 2020, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/guidance-of-public-opinion/.

⁵² An “information cocoon” may be better known as a “filter bubble” or “echo chamber.”

⁵³ “Brigading is a slang term for an online practice in which people band together to perform a coordinated action, especially a negative one, such as manipulating a vote or poll or harassing a specific person or members

entities like algorithmic services can impermissibly block or excessively promote content. Finally, they can also unjustly favor their own content over others, such as by blocking third-party links, which allows them to unduly influence public opinion.⁵⁴ All of these pillars present the Party as a necessary part of public opinion formation; without government intervention, ideas and opinions can develop in ways that work counter to state stability. Consequently, no public opinion can be considered legitimate unless the Party approves it.

This guidance of public opinion can take the form of the promotion of “positive energy.” As previously discussed, this concept is inherently nationalist, as it encourages positive discourse about the state and suppresses negative discourse. The Party often uses this watchword throughout its publications, and the current corpus is no exception. For example, entities are required “to transmit positive energy and address illegal or negative information.”⁵⁵ The documents further promote censorship in the service of the Party through mandates about “mainstream” values, which refers to ideas in line with the prescribed views of the CCP.⁵⁶ In the context of AI policy, China mandates that “service providers shall persist in being oriented towards mainstream values.”⁵⁷ The requirement to promote “Core Socialist Values” (社会主义核心价值观) throughout AI governance further constrains speech to promote the Party’s ideals. The “Core Social Values” contain 12 pillars that generally serve nationalist aims: prosperity and national strength, democracy, civilized behavior, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, the rule of law, patriotism or “loving your nation,” dedication, integrity, and friendship.⁵⁸ The CCP further cements this mandate by banning content that harms the “nation’s image” in numerous publications.⁵⁹ As part of this proscription, the CCP requires content to adhere to “social mores and ethics” across multiple

of an online community.” *Dictionary.Com*, “brigading” (Dictionary.com, May 3, 2022), <https://www.dictionary.com/e/slang/brigading/>.

⁵⁴ Yang Jianjun, “Expert Interpretation | Focusing on the Disorder of Algorithmic Recommendation and Building an Algorithm Security Governance System (专家解读 | 聚焦算法推荐乱象问题 构建算法安全治理体系),” trans. Ben Amiel, Cyberspace Administration of China, January 4, 2022, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-01/04/c_1642894653080250.htm.

⁵⁵ Secretariat of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, “Notice on Launching the Clear 2022 Special Action on the Comprehensive Governance of Algorithms (关于开展‘清朗·2022年算法综合治理’专项行动的通知),” trans. China Law Translate, China Law Translate, April 8, 2022, <https://www.chinalawtranslate.com/en/special-action-on-algorithms/>.

⁵⁶ CMP Staff, “Mainstream,” China Media Project, May 13, 2021, https://chinamediaproject.org/the_ccp_dictionary/mainstream/.

⁵⁷ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Algorithm Provisions.”

⁵⁸ China Open Source Observatory, “Core Socialist Values,” Council on Foreign Relations, <https://chinaopensourceobservatory.org/glossary/core-socialist-values>.

⁵⁹ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Generative AI Measures.”

documents in the corpus.⁶⁰ Overall, by embedding these values into AI governance, the CCP ensures that artificial intelligence systems become tools for its ideological agenda. The resulting ecosystem links the legitimacy of expression to adherence to Party-prescribed national narratives.

The corpus also exhibited broad themes of economic improvement. For example, the Generative AI Measures “encourage the innovative application of generative AI technology in each industry and field.”⁶¹ The Guiding Opinions on the Innovative Development of Humanoid Robots aims to “strengthen the position of enterprises as the main agents of innovation [and] cultivate humanoid-robot ‘chain-master’ enterprises with ecosystem leadership and global competitiveness,” also discussing the need for “specialized integration and scenario-based applications.”⁶² The CCP has articulated scenario-based innovation areas regarding generative AI, aiming to “promote high-quality economic growth through high-level AI applications.”⁶³ The numerous scenarios span a litany of sectors, including manufacturing, agriculture, logistics, finance, commerce, home living, the consumer sector, and transportation.⁶⁴ Ultimately, throughout the corpus, the CCP advocates for economic growth and industry revitalization.

While companies’ main goal is to promote growth and innovation, actualizing these aims depends on having proper compliance systems in place. Providers looking to enter priority sectors like manufacturing, finance, logistics, or agriculture must complete registration and assessment processes for functions that impact the public. They must also

⁶⁰ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Algorithm Provisions.”

⁶¹ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Generative AI Measures.”

⁶² Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, “Notice of the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology on the Issuance of the Guiding Opinions on Humanoid Robots (人形机器人创新发展指导意见),” trans. Ben Amiel, Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, November 2, 2023, https://www.miit.gov.cn/zwgk/zcwj/wjfb/tz/art/2023/art_48fe01d562644aedb7ea3f4256df8190.html; The term “chain-master enterprises” (链主) refers to “leading enterprises that can shape the industrial ecosystem and drive resource integration in their respective sectors. These companies, often positioned at critical points in their industrial chains, possess strong core competitiveness, high market share, and sustained growth potential.” Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Government of Beijing Municipality, “Understanding Beijing: ‘Chain Master Enterprises’ (读懂北京：‘链主企业’),” Foreign Affairs Office of the People’s Government of Beijing Municipality, July 16, 2025, https://wb.beijing.gov.cn/home/wswm/yyhj/fyyd/202507/t20250717_4151234.html; the official definition provided in English by the Beijing government does not use a hyphen, but I have added a hyphen for clarity.

⁶³ Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology *et al.*, “Notice by Six Departments Including the Ministry of Science and Technology of Issuing the Guiding Opinions on Accelerating Scenario Innovation and Promoting High-quality Economic Development with High-level Application of Artificial Intelligence (科技部等六部门关于印发《关于加快场景创新以人工智能高水平应用促进经济高质量发展的指导意见》的通知),” trans. Ben Amiel, Ministry of Science and Technology, July 29, 2022, https://www.gov.cn/zhengce/zhengceku/2022-08/12/content_5705154.htm.

⁶⁴ Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology *et al.*, “Guiding Opinions on Accelerating Scenario Innovation.”

include clear labeling wherever synthetic media is shared. Requirements vary by sector based on different types of risk. In finance, public opinion risk is lower, but systemic risk is high. As a result, the focus is on auditability, testing, and data governance before deployment. Conversely, media and social features face greater exposure to public opinion, so providers must meet additional controls, including registration, pre-release reviews for new influence-enabling features, and clear labeling where synthetic content appears. In both cases, these scenarios are not open-ended experiments. They operate within the same record-keeping, assessment, and labeling systems that support broader governance efforts. This approach ensures that economic growth remains inseparable from oversight and state control.

This control takes the form of a strict, standards-based framework that prioritizes the CCP's interests above all else. As shown by the Party's guidance of public opinion, companies must adhere to strict measures that ensure all content disseminated fits into the narrative promoted by the government. The regulations and official interpretations consistently link application scenarios with strict requirements for data governance, labeling, evaluation, and ongoing monitoring, so expansion into priority sectors proceeds in an auditable manner. As a result, economic growth is conditioned on state approval. In order to gain market share, increase revenue, and compete with other enterprises, an entity must focus equally on innovation and following strict, self-serving rules designed to support the Party. In this way, governance turns nationalist slogans and *tifa* into concrete actions.

Taken together, this analysis reveals a two-pronged approach, where institutional controls focus on capabilities that can mobilize the public, while value-based requirements shape how those capabilities function at the surface. However, a third aspect emerges, as the 2022–2023 measures serve as the operational form of techno-nationalism and digital nationalism, in which state-based identity claims are embedded in filing systems, disclosures, and standards. Ultimately, nationalist narratives are translated into institutional design.

First, the CCP frames coordination as “multi-stakeholder co-governance.”⁶⁵ However, beneath this guise, the process is state-led.⁶⁶ The Party ultimately has dominion over industry associations, enterprises, educational and research institutions, public cultural bodies, and professional institutions.⁶⁷ The Party positions itself as the nation's custodian, treating non-

⁶⁵ Yang Jianjun, “Expert Interpretation | Upholding Multi-Stakeholder Co-Governance to Provide Institutional Safeguards for the Sound Development of Generative Artificial Intelligence (专家解读 | 坚持多方共治 为生成式人工智能健康发展提供制度保障),” trans. Ben Amiel, Cyberspace Administration of China, July 13, 2023, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2023-07/13/c_1690898364564309.htm.

⁶⁶ Sheehan, “China's AI Regulations and How They Get Made,” 122–23.

⁶⁷ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Generative AI Measures.”

state actors as partners tasked with implementing national priorities with no room for negotiation.

Second, the government's publications establish a framework for registries and audits to ensure that all provider decisions are easily reviewable. The implementation of security assessments and the requirements for registering algorithms in online services, deep synthesis, and generative AI create a clear paper trail for state inspection, which supports the Party's goal of "national unity" and its strength. The rules guide providers to produce and rank content that upholds Party centrality and power.⁶⁸ The result is an institutional record that links algorithms, models, features, and content to accountable parties, enabling targeted interventions without hindering orderly development.

Third, the state ensures that it can always trace any content providers, even when an individual's rights are not violated, as would be the case with a deepfake. Providers are required to align themselves with "goodness and virtue" by "conspicuously [labeling] algorithmically generated or synthesized information" to promote "the spread of positive energy that aligns with mainstream values."⁶⁹ The CCP's provenance rules aim to establish a strong link between content and its source to assign responsibility, even if the content is not necessarily harmful to anyone. The Party views provenance as a part of maintaining a national information order rather than just a platform-level safeguard. This structure gives regulators more certainty, allows for retrospective review without disrupting activity, and enables targeted enforcement on content related to politics or public opinion. As a result, provenance rules serve both as a technical control and a nationalist tool, shaping communication around state-defined values and holding providers accountable for the information they produce.

Importantly, traceability enables targeted enforcement. Outputs are labeled and linked to identifiable providers, allowing regulators to investigate specific incidents, mandate corrections, and impose sanctions for non-compliance without obstructing lawful operations. This approach aligns with techno-nationalist state-building, as it ties innovation to state power and national goals.

⁶⁸ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, "Generative AI Measures"; this concept of Party power is articulated by the CAC through the term "国家政权." While China Law Translate interprets the term to mean "sovereignty," it may be better understood as "state power," where the Party is the state. "国家" means "state," and "政权" translates to "governmental authority" or "regime." The terms together represent the authority of the governing body (i.e., the CCP).

⁶⁹ Yang, "Focusing on the Disorder of Algorithmic Recommendation"; "向上向善" can also be translated as "upward and good."

4.3. Positioning the Findings within the Scholarship

Stepping back from the analysis of China's operationalization of nationalism, this section places the findings within the existing literature on social governance, security, and the economy, as well as research on digital and techno-nationalism. Importantly, nationalism is not just a fourth category but a key organizing factor that pervades Chinese AI governance and serves as the primary calculus for choosing and applying instruments. It shapes the ways capabilities are subject to prior oversight, what values are reflected in content shown to users, and how sector-specific scenarios are actualized. This section confirms and extends previous scholarship on social governance, shifts the perspective on security in the literature, updates economic interpretations, connects different scholarly strands, and highlights the methodological advantages of reading *tifa*.

First, the findings support the literature's emphasis on social governance but also go beyond mere description, demonstrating how watchwords become operational duties. The incorporation of *tifa*, such as "mainstream" values, "positive energy," and "Core Socialist Values," functions beyond simple ideological slogans, transforming into ongoing obligations that shape the AI sector, becoming requirements to be built into auditable and traceable systems, in line with Roberts *et al.*'s view of social construction.⁷⁰ The manifestation of these nationalist values in user interfaces and backend requirements aligns with Zhang *et al.*'s research, which demonstrates how platform design can reinforce national boundaries.⁷¹ It also reflects Schneider's distinction between the expressed content of "online nationalism" and the technological structuring of expression in "digital nationalism," while also fitting into three of the pillars suggested by Özkirimli.⁷² Specifically, the publications consolidate the dominant ideology by requiring alignment with "mainstream" values and the promotion of "positive energy," it casts obligations as moral common sense through ideas like "goodness and virtue," and it builds these claims into routine and quotidian procedures, like algorithm filing and registration, security assessments, and conspicuous labeling.⁷³ Ultimately, this study contributes by showing how value-ridden language becomes implemented as product features rather than remaining merely rhetorical.

⁷⁰ Roberts *et al.*, "The Chinese Approach to Artificial Intelligence," 13–16.

⁷¹ Zhang *et al.*, "Mapping Chinese Digital Nationalism: A Literature Review," 1892.

⁷² Schneider, "China's Digital Nationalism," 169–171, 172–73.

⁷³ Özkirimli, "What Is Nationalism," 32–33.

Second, the results demonstrate which capabilities are subject to heightened scrutiny and why, namely, public opinion and social mobilization services. It explains how this scrutiny becomes converted into systems for preauthorization, attribution, and targeted enforcement. The updated 2022–2023 corpus shifts focus from general security or competition in the abstract, instead pivoting to building regulatory visibility, where political features are preauthorized, attributable through provenance rules, and support later enforcement. All of these measures are part of a state-building effort, echoing themes highlighted by Creemers and Hogarth.⁷⁴ In direct contrast to Hogarth, however, the study finds that the documents do not significantly discuss participation in an arms race, which aligns with Goode’s warning against accepting scholarly rhetoric about arms races in this context.⁷⁵ Of note, international-facing statements project the same logic as the sovereignty-based themes of auditability or traceability.

Third, while earlier studies primarily focused on the 2017 AI Development Plan, this study benefits from the inclusion of more recent CCP publications. Consequently, the corpus confirms previous findings that identify economic growth as a key driver, while also illustrating how the economy is managed through actionable standards and scenarios. Additionally, it offers a more nuanced view of application scenarios; rather than acting only as an industrial stimulus, these scenarios and their related standards serve as conditions for growth. Specifically, to expand, firms must follow provenance rules, register algorithms, and operate within an auditable framework. Entry into priority sectors must meet strict compliance standards, such as registering functions that influence public opinion, assessing risks, and conspicuously labeling synthetic content. All of these requirements connect back to nationalism, where industry expansion is contingent on Party priorities. This analysis complements Creemers’ discussion of industrial transformation and Sheehan’s emphasis on innovation leadership by detailing the conditions necessary for economic scaling.⁷⁶

Notably, this study succeeds in analyzing operationalized nationalism by bridging the gap between research on Chinese AI governance and work on nationalism and its technological expressions. The current literature lacks in-depth integration of these fields, which reduces its analytical power. The analysis highlights thematic overlaps, such as the use of technological infrastructure for nationalist purposes, as well as the structural mechanisms

⁷⁴ Creemers, “The Ideology Behind China’s AI Strategy,” 66; Hogarth, “AI Nationalism.”

⁷⁵ Goode, “Artificial Intelligence and the Future of Nationalism,” 368.

⁷⁶ Creemers, “The Ideology Behind China’s AI Strategy,” 64; Sheehan, “China’s AI Regulations and How They Get Made,” 118.

through which these goals are embedded into governance. This approach offers insight into how the CCP's nationalist aims are translated into technical requirements and compliance systems that influence behavior. As a result, the study provides a more comprehensive understanding of the co-evolution of ideology and AI, disabusing the notion that nationalism is just rhetorical fluff and instead showing it as a central driving force.

As a methodological improvement on a large portion of existing works, this study includes an analysis of *tifa*, revealing the ideological scaffolding of AI governance. As Gloria Davies (2020) notes, “comprehending the China Dream requires understanding of the CCP’s preoccupation with the use of *tifa*.”⁷⁷ However, the current literature is largely bereft of a serious interpretation of watchwords, despite being crucial to accurately analyzing Chinese political discourse. Consequently, this scholarship is unable to reach the most informed conclusions.⁷⁸ By incorporating *tifa* into the analysis, this study offers additional insights into the aims and drivers of Chinese AI governance that were previously overlooked by more superficial investigations.

This thesis shows that Chinese AI governance differs from that of other countries. For example, China’s nationalist, Party-first approach contrasts with Germany’s model. Instead of prioritizing the state, German regulations focus on protecting individual rights first. While both may limit innovation, Germany does so to protect consumers, whereas China aims to protect the Party.⁷⁹ The United States, on the other hand, has taken a more *laissez-faire* approach to AI governance. However, the extent to which the market has been permitted to drive innovation has varied between presidents. President Biden concentrated his efforts on protecting consumers, such as through Executive Order 14110. In a clear illustration of the contrast between presidents, President Trump revoked Executive Order 14110 within hours of taking office.⁸⁰ The United States has since promoted a more market-oriented environment with minimal regulations and an emphasis on strengthening its tech dominance.⁸¹

⁷⁷ Davies, *Chapter 1 - A Dream of Perpetual Rule*.

⁷⁸ Howard Wang, *Political Discourse, Debate, and Decisionmaking in the Chinese Communist Party*, Research Report (RAND Corporation, 2025), 6–7, https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA3821-1.html.

⁷⁹ Viktor Tuzov and Fen Lin, “Two Paths of Balancing Technology and Ethics: A Comparative Study on AI Governance in China and Germany,” *Telecommunications Policy* 48, no. 10 (2024): 102863, <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.telpol.2024.102850>.

⁸⁰ Executive Order 14148: Initial Rescissions of Harmful Executive Orders and Actions, 90 FR § 8237 (2025). <https://www.federalregister.gov/documents/2025/01/28/2025-01901/initial-rescissions-of-harmful-executive-orders-and-actions>.

⁸¹ Emmie Hine, “Governing Silicon Valley and Shenzhen: Assessing a New Era of Artificial Intelligence Governance in the United States and China,” *Digital Society* 3, no. 50 (2024): 15–16, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s44206-024-00138-7>; Emmie Hine and Luciano Floridi, “Artificial Intelligence with American Values and Chinese Characteristics: A Comparative Analysis of American and Chinese Governmental AI Policies,” *AI & SOCIETY* 39 (2024): 268, <https://doi.org/10.1007/s00146-022-01499-8>.

5. CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS AND NEXT STEPS

This thesis examined how the CCP framed AI governance from the start of 2022 to the end of 2023, assessing how nationalist narratives fit with social governance, national security, and economic considerations. By analyzing Chinese rules, Q&As, expert interpretations, and related guidance, the qualitative content analysis offers insight into the ways values and instruments interact. Ultimately, the study found that nationalism functions as the ordering logic of the state, determining which tools are used and where they apply.

The investigation of social governance revealed that value language is operationalized. Requirements focusing on ranking, disclosure, and labeling are incorporated into systems, mainly focusing on public opinion attributes. The analysis of these requirements transforms what earlier work often framed as rhetorical advice into tangible design specifications and compliance obligations. The study of national security demonstrated that oversight is specific rather than general. Government scrutiny is focused on services that enable social mobilization or are politically salient. This targeting displays national security not as providing protection for the country against threats, but instead shielding the Party, operating at the center of the “nation,” from internal threats to its power. Requirements focusing on preauthorization, documentation, or traceability enable visibility throughout the deployment process, allowing targeted correction in the service of the CCP. For economic concerns, AI enterprises are situated in a scenario-led and conditional growth framework. The ability to expand is dependent on an entity’s demonstration of compliance through measures like registration, security assessments, and labeling. The study partially relies on an analysis of *tifa*, understanding them as serving operational ends throughout the corpus. In doing so, this analysis can better infer intent and comprehend how the rules operate, also providing a clear template to compare how nationalist slogans turn into technical rules across places and over time.

The study is not without limits. It focuses entirely on central texts, which necessitates the exclusion of sub-national implementation. While the thesis benefits from understanding how the central-level publications fit into the multi-layered governance structure, it lacks any analysis of how sub-national entities interpret central outputs. Additionally, the study does not incorporate information about how entities have carried out the regulations. Moreover, the documents in the corpus only include what was published from 2022 to 2023, meaning future governance is not considered. As a result, subsequent promulgations may change

governance practices in a way not observed by this work. Importantly, the author is not a fluent speaker of Chinese. Lastly, the scope only includes formal publications and related official discourse, which could benefit from understanding the informal practices that could shape enforcement.

As a result, there are four general areas for future work. First, subsequent analysis can investigate provincial or municipal interpretations of central government publications. Second, future work can map how the various central agencies promote nationalism differently or compare the implementation of nationalism across multiple sectors. Third, this research can be extended by examining how enforcement mechanisms shape product creation at the firm level. Lastly, repeating this thesis' analysis for a different time range can yield additional insight.

The analyzed publications from 2022 to 2023 present a coherent governance model. It shows how norms become enforceable duties, influence-bearing functions are rendered visible and accountable, and economic scaling is contingent on adherence to the CCP's strict rules. A focus on nationalist state-building in the service of the Party emerges as a common thread. Thus, nationalism is not a supplementary aim, but rather the ordering logic of governance, deciding what tools are used and where they apply.

APPENDIX A

Publications Included

English Title	Chinese Title (Pinyin)	Publisher	Type	Inclusion Rationale
Expert Interpretation Building a New Data-Governance Ecosystem for the AI Era ⁸²	专家解读 构建面向AI时代的数据治理新生态	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Expert Interpretation	Provides a state-sanctioned extrapolation of the Generative AI Measures
Expert Interpretation Focusing on the Disorder of Algorithmic Recommendation and Building an Algorithm Security Governance System ⁸³	专家解读 聚焦算法推荐乱象问题 构建算法安全治理体系	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Expert Interpretation	Provides a state-sanctioned extrapolation of the Algorithm Provisions
Expert Interpretation Regulating Deep Synthesis Services to Foster a Clean and Healthy Cyberspace ⁸⁴	专家解读 规范深度合成服务 营造风清气正的网络空间	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Expert Interpretation	Provides a state-sanctioned extrapolation of the Deep Synthesis Provisions
Expert Interpretation Upholding Multi-Stakeholder Co-Governance to Provide Institutional Safeguards for the Sound Development of	专家解读 坚持多方共治 为生成式人工智能健康发展提供制度保障	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Expert Interpretation	Provides a state-sanctioned extrapolation of the Generative AI Measures

⁸² Wu Shenkuo, “Expert Interpretation | Building a New Data-Governance Ecosystem for the AI Era (专家解读 | 构建面向AI时代的数据治理新生态),” trans. Ben Amiel, Cyberspace Administration of China, August 29, 2023, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2023-08/29/c_1694965943882536.htm; unless separately cited on the Chinese title, table footnotes refer to a document with both the English and Chinese versions.

⁸³ Yang, “Focusing on the Disorder of Algorithmic Recommendation.”

⁸⁴ Shi Jianzhong, “Expert Interpretation | Regulating Deep Synthesis Services to Foster a Clean and Healthy Cyberspace (专家解读 | 规范深度合成服务 营造风清气正的网络空间),” trans. Ben Amiel, Cyberspace Administration of China, December 12, 2022, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-12/12/c_1672217053955777.htm.

Generative Artificial Intelligence ⁸⁵				
Global Artificial Intelligence Governance Initiative ⁸⁶	全球人工智能治理倡议	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	International Statement	Provides a distilled view of China's values and priorities on AI
Guiding Opinions on Humanoid Robots ⁸⁷	人形机器人创新发展指导意见	Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT)	Guiding Opinion	Exemplifies Party views on AI integration
Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services ⁸⁸	生成式人工智能服务管理暂行办法 ⁸⁹	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Core Regulation	One of the three primary regulations
(Notice by Six Departments Including the Ministry of Science and Technology of Issuing the) Guiding Opinions on Accelerating Scenario Innovation and Promoting High-quality Economic Development with High-level Application of Artificial Intelligence ⁹⁰	科技部等六部門關於印發《關於加快場景創新以人工智能高水平應用促進經濟高質量發展的指導意見》的通知	Ministry of Science and Technology (MST)	Guiding Opinion	Displays CCP thought on the broad integration of AI into the economy

⁸⁵ Yang, "Upholding Multi-Stakeholder Co-Governance."

⁸⁶ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, "Global Artificial Intelligence Governance Initiative (全球人工智能治理倡议)," trans. Ben Amiel, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, October 20, 2023, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/web/ziliao_674904/1179_674909/202310/t20231020_11164831.shtml.

⁸⁷ Ministry of Industry and Information Technology, "Guiding Opinions on Humanoid Robots."

⁸⁸ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, "Generative AI Measures."

⁸⁹ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, "Generative AI Measures - Chinese."

⁹⁰ Chinese Ministry of Science and Technology *et al.*, "Guiding Opinions on Accelerating Scenario Innovation."

(Notice on) Launching the Clear 2022 Special Action on the Comprehensive Governance of Algorithms ⁹¹	关于开展“清朗·2022年算法综合治理”专项行动的通知	Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission (CCAC)	Special Action	Implements parts of the Algorithm Provisions
Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Strengthening Ethical Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI) ⁹²	-	Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MFA)	Position Paper	Is an explicit, outward-facing statement of CCP values on AI
Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis Internet Information Services ⁹³	互联网信息服务深度合成管理规定 ⁹⁴	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Core Regulation	One of the three primary regulations
Provisions on the Management of Algorithmic Recommendations in Internet Information Services ⁹⁵	互联网信息服务深度合成管理规定 ⁹⁶	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Core Regulation	One of the three primary regulations
Q&A on the Provisions on the Administration of Algorithmic Recommendations in Internet Information Services ⁹⁷	《互联网信息服务算法推荐管理规定》答记者问	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Q&A	Official elaboration on the Algorithm Provisions

⁹¹ Secretariat of the Central Cyberspace Affairs Commission, “Clear 2022 Special Action.”

⁹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Position Paper of the People's Republic of China on Strengthening Ethical Governance of Artificial Intelligence (AI),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs, November 17, 2022, https://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/wjb/zzjg_663340/jks_665232/kjlc_665236/AI/202211/t20221117_10976730.html.

⁹³ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Deep Synthesis Provisions.”

⁹⁴ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Deep Synthesis Provisions - Chinese.”

⁹⁵ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Algorithm Provisions.”

⁹⁶ Cyberspace Administration of China *et al.*, “Algorithm Provisions - Chinese.”

⁹⁷ Cyberspace Administration of China, “Q&A on the Provisions on the Administration of Algorithmic Recommendations in Internet Information Services (《互联网信息服务算法推荐管理规定》答记者问),” trans. Ben Amiel, Cyberspace Administration of China, January 4, 2022, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-01/04/c_1642894606594726.htm.

Q&A on the Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis Internet Information Services ⁹⁸	《互联网信息服务深度合成管理规定》答记者问	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Q&A	Official elaboration on the Deep Synthesis Provisions
Responsible Official of the Cyberspace Administration of China Answers Reporters' Questions on the "Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services" ⁹⁹	国家互联网信息办公室有关负责人就《生成式人工智能服务管理暂行办法》答记者问	Cyberspace Administration of China (CAC)	Q&A	Official elaboration on the Generative AI Measures

⁹⁸ Cyberspace Association of China, "Q&A on the Provisions on the Administration of Deep Synthesis Internet Information Services (《互联网信息服务深度合成管理规定》答记者问)," trans. Ben Amiel, Cyberspace Administration of China, December 11, 2022, https://www.cac.gov.cn/2022-12/11/c_1672221949570926.htm.

⁹⁹ Cyberspace Administration of China, "Responsible Official of the Cyberspace Administration of China Answers Reporters' Questions on the 'Interim Measures for the Management of Generative Artificial Intelligence Services' (国家互联网信息办公室有关负责人就《生成式人工智能服务管理暂行办法》答记者问)," trans. Ben Amiel, International Center for Science & Technology Innovation, July 14, 2023, https://www.ncsti.gov.cn/zcfg/flfgjd/202307/t20230714_127970.html.

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