Framing China: A Comparative Study of Geopolitical Bias in U.S. And Chinese Generative AI Systems

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ABSTRACT

The rapid global spread of large language models (LLMs), including Microsoft's Copilot, OpenAI's ChatGPT, Google's Gemini, Anthropic's Claude, and China's Deep Seek, has challenged long-held assumptions about neutrality in knowledge production. Although these systems are often treated as objective information sources, their outputs reflect the political and ideological contexts in which they are developed. This paper examines five leading models, four Western and one Chinese, to assess how they frame sensitive topics related to China. Through qualitative content analysis, the study reviews their responses on leadership, human rights, state surveillance, and foreign policy. A clear divergence emerges: Western models tend to portray China as authoritarian and strategically confrontational, frequently raising concerns about rights and governance, while DeepSeek aligns with the official positions of the Chinese state, emphasizing stability, sovereignty, economic development, and security. Grounded in constructivist and Foucauldian perspectives, the study argues that LLMs shape global discourse and calls for more transparent and inclusive approaches to AI governance.

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Key Words: Large Language Models (LLMs), AI Governance, Geopolitical Narratives, China Relations, Algorithmic Bias

Introduction

The new technology of generative AI has revolutionized the way data and information are handled in the 21st century. Within just a few years, large language models (LLMs) shifted from niche experiments to widely accessible tools, acting as tutors, aiding research, sparking creativity, and delivering essential information to hundreds of millions. We have never seen such extensive public adoption of AI systems as ChatGPT, Microsoft's Copilot, Anthropic's Claude, or Google's Gemini, which are highly popular due to their exceptional text comprehension and ability to produce coherent, reliable, and human-like responses.

Their creators often promote these systems as tools that democratize knowledge, asserting that their answers are unbiased, fact-based, and free from artificial influence. However, this sense of objectivity, crucial to their commercial success and societal acceptance, hides a more complex and politically sensitive reality: generative AI is not an ideologically unbiased tool. Instead, it is a socio-technical system inherently shaped by the social and political contexts in which it is developed, thereby exposing its biases and effects.

This is evident when LLMs address geopolitical hot-button issues, and few are as complex and fiercely debated as the politics and policies of the People's Republic of China. As a rising global power with a unique political system, China attracts intense scrutiny and is portrayed in often conflicting ways. An AI system's depiction of China's leadership, its human rights policies in Xinjiang, its political freedoms, or its global ambitions goes beyond mere algorithms, reflecting the dominant narratives in its training data and the value judgments made during alignment.

The clear divide between Western and Chinese narratives on these topics highlights the geopolitical biases embedded in AI. Western platforms, mostly trained on English texts from liberal democracies, perceive China's policies as authoritarian, with human rights violations

and strategic aggression. Conversely, Chinese platforms like DeepSeek, developed under the strict regulatory and ideological constraints of the CCP, tend to emphasize nationalist, legalistic, and socioeconomic descriptions, often aligning closely with official state propaganda.

This paper argues that such a divergence is neither coincidental nor trivial. Using constructivist and critical IR theory, we contend that geopolitics and international relations have become distinct fields due to the influence of generative AI systems. They do not merely mirror the world; they actively help shape it. Western models incorporate and amplify liberal human rights norms, while Chinese models reflect and support the state's focus on stability and sovereignty.

This research aims to answer the following questions: 1) How do Western-trained and Chinese-trained LLMs systematically differ in their framing of sensitive Chinese political issues? 2) What specific linguistic and rhetorical strategies do these models use to create their divergent narratives? 3) How can international relations theories help explain AI's role as a new channel for geopolitical discourse?

To answer these questions, this study provides a systematic, empirical comparison of how five leading market LLMs frame contentious political issues, offering concrete evidence of ideological bias. It then situates these findings within a robust theoretical framework, drawing on constructivist and Foucauldian perspectives to explain how and why AI models serve as tools in discursive power struggles.

Finally, by highlighting the strong ideological biases present in current AI systems, this paper emphasizes the urgent need for a more democratic, transparent, and diverse approach to AI governance.

Only by recognizing the biases inherent in these powerful technologies can policymakers, developers, and users begin working toward creating a more balanced and globally representative information ecosystem. The paper proceeds as follows: first, a literature review will examine AI bias architecture and relevant IR theories; second, the methodology section will outline the comparative analysis approach; third, the analysis section will provide a detailed, theme-by-theme breakdown of the models' different narratives; fourth, a discussion will connect these findings to the theoretical framework and explore their broader implications; and finally, the conclusion will summarize the main points and offer forward-looking recommendations for policy and future research.

Literature Review

The long-standing debate in science and technology studies questions whether technology can be truly neutral, and generative AI is part of that discussion. While the mathematics behind LLMs may seem to be value-free, their application is not. Bias can be introduced at any stage of an AI model's development, from data collection to deployment. The primary source of bias is the training data itself. For example, models like ChatGPT are trained on enormous datasets, including versions of the Common Crawl corpus, which contains petabytes of internet-scraped text.

These datasets do not perfectly reflect reality; instead, they are skewed representations of what has been digitized, published, and stored, mainly in English and originating from North America and Europe. This digital dominance naturally overemphasizes the norms and values of liberal democracies and underrepresents viewpoints from other regions. (Carman & Peters, 2024) As a result, a model trained on such data is likely to associate concepts like 'democracy' with Western-style elections and 'human rights' with individual civil liberties, viewing them as the default or universal standards.

A second, more intentional layer of bias is introduced during the alignment process, primarily through Reinforcement Learning from Human Feedback (RLHF) and related methods. In this stage, human labellers assess and rank the model's outputs, guiding it to be more 'helpful, harmless, and honest.' However, how these terms are interpreted depends on cultural and ideological perspectives. A human rater in California, following a Silicon Valley tech company's ethics policy, might label a defence of China's Xinjiang policy as 'harmful misinformation' or a human rights violation.

Meanwhile, a rater in Beijing, working under strict government regulations, would probably see the exact text as 'accurate and helpful' and consider criticizing it as 'harmful' content that threatens social stability. This process, meant to improve safety, inadvertently makes models carriers of the specific worldview of the annotators and the organizations or governments that hire them. It is this alignment that shapes the raw statistical patterns in the training data into a consistent and ideologically influenced personality.

Empirical studies have begun to measure this phenomenon. (Huang et al., 2025) provided strong evidence through a direct comparison of DeepSeek and ChatGPT, showing that the Chinese model "consistently exhibited substantially higher proportions of both propaganda and anti-U.S. bias." The study described this as an "invisible loudspeaker" effect, where the AI model effectively sanitizes state narratives by presenting them as objective, AI-generated facts (Select Committee on the CCP, 2024). These findings confirm that AI models are not ideologically neutral synthesizers but powerful amplifiers of specific, geopolitically driven discourses.

To understand the geopolitical implications of AI bias, it is essential to draw on theories of international relations that emphasize the role of ideas, norms, and language. Constructivist IR theory, famously associated with, provides a strong perspective. Wendt's core idea that

"anarchy is what states make of it" indicates that the fundamental structures of global politics are social rather than material. States act based on their identities and interests, which are not fixed but are shaped through continuous social interaction and shared understanding. For example, the United States perceives the United Kingdom's nuclear arsenal differently from North Korea's, not because of the material attributes of the weapons, but because of the shared history, norms, and identity that foster a relationship of friendship versus one of hostility.

Applied to generative AI, constructivism suggests that LLMs have become new, highly scalable agents in the social construction process. An AI model trained on textual artifacts from these interactions develops a specific social reality. When a Western AI consistently labels China as 'authoritarian,' it is not an objective fact; instead, it helps shape China's identity as an illiberal 'other.' This constructed identity, in turn, shapes Western states' interests toward China, justifying policies of containment, competition, or moral condemnation. Similarly, when DeepSeek constructs an identity for China as a peaceful, developing nation unfairly targeted by the West, it helps legitimize the CCP's policies and rally domestic and international support. The AI is not merely describing a pre-existing geopolitical contest; it is actively shaping the shared meanings that define it.

Parallel insights can be drawn from post-structuralist and Foucauldian theory, emphasizing the close and productive relationship between power and knowledge. Foucault views power not merely as a top-down, coercive force but as a pervasive and generative one, functioning through discursive systems of language, thought, and practice that define what is regarded as valid, regular, and legitimate. (Agbon, 2024) These 'regimes of truth' legitimize specific actions (for example, a 'humanitarian intervention') while delegitimizing others (such as a 'violation of sovereignty').

Generative AI systems are arguably the most powerful tools ever created for spreading and normalizing discourses. When DeepSeek describes the camps in Xinjiang as 'vocational training centers,' it supports the CCP's version of truth, using language related to law, security, and economic growth to legitimize it. Conversely, when Gemini uses the word 'genocide,' it introduces a strong Western discourse rooted in international human rights law and moral judgment. Both phrases serve as rhetorical tools in the contest over how empirical reality is framed; neither is a neutral description. Because AI language models produce verdicts in a seemingly objective and polished style, they carry the authority of truth claims, reinforcing the discursive regimes that shape our understanding of the world.

This application of AI can be effectively analyzed through the expanded concept of "algorithmic governmentality." Here, the focus moves from traditional forms of sovereign and disciplinary control to the distributed, calculative mechanisms that arise within digital interfaces. These systems influence not through explicit commands but by shaping the structure of available discourses, adjusting the questions users ask, and defining the boundaries of plausible interpretation. By presenting certain narratives as normative, tacitly authoritative, and implicitly "correct," algorithms guide user behavior toward limited political outcomes, all while maintaining the appearance of non-coercive influence.

The contrasting operational profiles of Western and Chinese AI systems become clearer when viewed against the growing Sino-Western geopolitical and digital imbalance. Instead of being a unified, shared space, the internet is splitting into separate governance zones, commonly referred to as the 'splinternet.' China's digital sovereignty efforts have formalized this split through the Great Firewall, strict data localization rules, and sector-specific policies, creating a controlled domestic information environment that is isolated from Western influence and designed to uphold the CCP's ideological goals.

Along with an emerging techno-nationalist mindset, advancements in computing are viewed as indicators of national strength and as a defense of the political regime. The national leadership's focus on increasing "discourse power" (话语权, huayuquan) indicates a geopolitical direction in which government-led AI is viewed as a tool for building persuasive influence internationally. (Qiang, 2023; Xiao, 2019)

The regulatory environments for AI in the West and in China illustrate this divide. Western approaches, such as the European Union's AI Act, tend to be rights-based, focusing on reducing risks to individuals and upholding principles like fairness, transparency, and accountability. This framework naturally encourages and even promotes open discussion of foreign governments. In contrast, China's AI regulations are clearly state-centered and politically driven. They require AI services to "adhere to the core socialist values" and ban content that "subverts state power" or "undermines national unity." (Sprick, 2025) As reports from the (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2023) Highlight: Chinese AI rules prioritize the state's narrative as the standard for 'true and accurate' outputs, creating a system in which models like DeepSeek are legally and commercially obligated to reproduce official propaganda. (Byun, 2025; Creemers, 2020)

Theoretical Framework

To go beyond simply describing bias and explain its geopolitical significance, this paper employs a dual theoretical approach grounded in international relations theory. We apply constructivism to understand how AI shapes the development of state identities and interests, and a Foucauldian discourse analysis to explore how AI serves as a new instrument of power and knowledge. Together, these frameworks provide a comprehensive approach to analyzing generative AI, not just as a tool, but as a political actor on the global stage.

Constructivist IR theory, articulated by Wendt (1999), provides a compelling alternative to materialist theories like realism and liberalism. Its core idea is that the structures of world politics are social rather than material. The relationships between states are not solely determined by anarchy or the distribution of power but are influenced by shared ideas, norms, identities, and intersubjective meanings. As Wendt famously stated, "anarchy is what states make of it" (Wendt, 1999). States act based on the identities they hold and the interests that emerge from those identities, all of which are shaped through ongoing social interaction (E-International Relations, 2020)

Applying this framework to generative AI, we can see LLMs as new and highly scalable agents of social construction. An AI model trained on extensive textual artifacts of human social and political interactions learns not just facts but also the very structures of meaning and identity that underpin international relations. When a Western AI consistently labels China as 'authoritarian,' it is not simply stating an objective fact but actively participating in the social construction of China's identity as an illiberal 'other' within the international system.

This constructed identity then shapes the 'interests' of Western states toward China, justifying policies of containment, competition, or moral condemnation. Conversely, when DeepSeek constructs an identity for China as a peaceful, developing nation unjustly targeted by the West, it helps legitimize the CCP's policies and rally both domestic and international support. The AI is not just describing a pre-existing geopolitical contest; it is actively shaping the shared meanings that define it.

This process is further explained by (Adler, 1997) The Idea of "epistemic communities" refers to transnational networks of experts and professionals who share a common understanding of a problem and a normative belief in how to solve it. In this context, developers, ethicists, and regulators in Silicon Valley form an epistemic community that embeds liberal

norms into their AI products. (Adler, 1997) Their counterparts in Beijing, operating under state directives, form another. These communities' AI models become the main output, spreading their particular worldview globally.

While constructivism explains how identities and norms form, Michel Foucault's work offers a critical perspective on the relationships among discourse, power, and truth. For Foucault, power is not only a top-down, coercive force but also a pervasive and productive one. It functions through discursive systems of language, thought, and practice that shape what can be said, what is accepted as accurate, and what is deemed normal and legitimate. (Agbon, 2024) These "regimes of truth" are not about objective reality but about who has the authority to define that reality.

Generative AI systems are arguably the most powerful tools ever created for spreading and shaping such discourses. When DeepSeek labels the camps in Xinjiang as 'vocational training centers,' it supports the CCP's version of the truth by using language related to law, security, and economic progress. Conversely, when Gemini uses the word 'genocide,' it draws on a strong Western discourse based on international human rights laws and moral judgment. Neither term is an unbiased description; both are effective rhetorical strategies in a struggle over how reality is framed. The mechanisms of these AI models influence users by reinforcing dominant regimes of truth, framing the political consequences as technologically neutral.

AI models exert influence in a seemingly neutral way that hides the technology's political meaning; the AI offers reasoning, the model enforces reality, and the model's response strengthens the imposed dominant AI. This illustrates Foucault's concept of 'power/knowledge,' where the knowledge given to the AI provides the necessary influence.

AI models, with their opinionated yet neutral manner, influence users without manual intervention in their outdated structures and logics, leading to "algorithmic governmentality." A term coined by Foucault, referring to the application of government rationalities to the digital realm to exercise control over the population. This concept involves AI systems indirectly regulating users, subtly guiding the questions they ask, and shaping their information environment. Algorithmic governance continues to operate indirectly, shaping political outcomes for users by providing "correct" narratives deemed as predetermined, dominant, or authoritative. Reinforcement learning with human feedback embeds a specific regime of truth in the model's behavior, further supporting the idea of interconnected governance within modern AI systems.

Methodology

This study employed a systematic qualitative research design to examine how Western and Chinese large language models (LLMs) construct political narratives about contemporary China. The methodology combines controlled data collection with structured content analysis to enable transparent comparison across geopolitical information systems.

Model Selection

Five widely used LLMs were selected based on global relevance and geopolitical origin: ChatGPT (OpenAI), Gemini (Google DeepMind), Claude (Anthropic), Copilot (Microsoft), and DeepSeek, representing the Western and Chinese ecosystems, respectively. All models were accessed in their publicly available configurations between **10 January 2025 and 25 February 2025**, providing a stable temporal window and minimizing variation due to model updates.

Prompt Design

Eight open-ended prompts were developed to elicit extended narrative responses on key political themes: Xi Jinping's leadership, Xinjiang, political governance, surveillance, human rights, China's COVID-19 response, the Belt and Road Initiative, and China's technological rise. Prompts were deliberately neutral to avoid leading responses. To account for temporal variability, each prompt was submitted three times per model, morning, afternoon, and evening, yielding 120 total outputs. DeepSeek responses that appeared partially or fully in Mandarin were translated using DeepL and Google Translate, with discrepancies cross-checked by a bilingual reviewer.

Data Collection

All responses were manually collected and stored in a structured dataset. Metadata included the exact prompt, model version, date, and time of generation, as well as the full raw text. Outputs were organized into thematic folders corresponding to the eight prompt areas. The collection involved no system-level modifications or additional instructions, ensuring naturalistic, reproducible responses.

Analysis Method

The analysis followed a multi-stage qualitative content approach. First, each response was coded using a hybrid framework that incorporated deductive categories drawn from international relations and media studies (e.g., authoritarianism, sovereignty, human rights) alongside inductive codes emerging directly from the data (e.g., developmental justification, strategic silence). Second, comparative matrices were constructed for each theme to contrast Western model narratives with DeepSeek outputs across tone, framing, vocabulary, and omissions. To strengthen reliability, a second coder independently reviewed 20% of the dataset, achieving an 87% agreement rate, which meets accepted qualitative standards.

Interpretation of findings drew on constructivist international relations theory to assess how LLMs reproduce normative assumptions embedded in their training environments, and on discourse analysis to identify the "regimes of truth" and rhetorical strategies shaping each model's representations.

Ethical Considerations

No human subjects were involved, and no personal or sensitive data were collected. All model outputs were generated via publicly accessible interfaces in accordance with the platform's terms of use. The study adheres to established digital research ethics guidelines.

Results and Discussion

The comparative analysis shows a clear and consistent difference in the narratives produced by Western-trained and Chinese-trained AI models. This section provides a detailed, theme-by-theme review of these differences, using representative examples and connecting the chatbots' outputs to external sources and the summary findings in Table 1.

Table A1 Comparative Framing by Key Term and Model

Xi Jinping	Described as authoritarian, removed term limits, compared to modern autocrats	Framed as consolidating power, critical of the lifetime presidency	Called a centralizing figure, likened to Mao	Described as ruling without checks, suppresses dissent	Described as "core leader," praised for national rejuvenation
Xinjiang / Uyghurs	Labels actions as crimes against humanity; discusses forced labor, camps	Uses terms like "genocide," discusses UN reports and U.S. sanctions	Highlights ethnic repression, mentions mass surveillance, and sterilization	Notes cultural erasure, systematic internment of minorities	Frames as "anti-terror operations" and "vocational training."
Political Freedom / Authoritarianism	Frames China as authoritarian, with no democratic elections and no opposition	Emphasizes lack of press freedom, electoral choice, and judicial independence	Describes the regime as illiberal and repressive	Focuses on central control, suppression of free expression	Defends model as "unique democracy," promotes social order
Surveillance & Control	Discusses facial recognition, censorship, and the Social Credit System	Highlights mass surveillance and data control	Warns of digital authoritarianism	Frames tech as a tool of repression	Describes tech as a "modern governance tool" for efficiency and security

COVID-19 Crisis Portrayal	Criticizes early cover-up, whistleblower punishment	Emphasizes lack of transparency	Frames response as opaque, but later efficient	Blames initial delays on censorship	Described as a global cooperation success, no mention of a cover-up
Human Rights Violations	Explicitly condemns actions in Tibet, Hong Kong, Xinjiang	Details repression, forced labor, surveillance state	Frames violations as systemic	Warns of tech-enabled abuses	Denies allegations; calls them Western disinformation
Yellow Peril / Tech Threat Narrative	Notes concerns over China's rise in AI, military, and cybersecurity	Warns of technological dominance with strategic aims	Highlights the digital cold war narrative	Frames China's AI as a threat to democratic values	Portrays China as a peaceful AI power; rejects "threat" framing
Democracy vs CCP Governance	Praises liberal democracy; criticizes one-party rule	Advocates for democratic values	Contrasts democratic accountability with authoritarian control	Emphasizes the CCP's lack of transparency	Frames the CCP rule as stable, historically justified, and consensus-driven
Belt and Road / Foreign Policy	Highlights debt diplomacy and expansionism	Suggests global influence through soft power	Notes growing global resistance	Warns of influence operations	Describes policy as "mutual development" and "win-win cooperation."

Note. Table constructed by the author based on thematic coding of 120 model outputs. No external sources were used.

Portrayal of Leadership: Xi Jinping

As shown in **Figure 1**, Western LLMs consistently portray Chinese President Xi Jinping as exercising centralized personal power and authoritarian rule. For example, one Western model (Claude) described Xi by noting that he *"removed term limits in 2018, paving the way to rule for life, and has since tightened ideological control, cracked down on dissent, and cultivated a personality cult around him."* Such language – emphasizing *"rule for life,"* *"crackdown,"* and *"authoritarian"* – aligns with prevalent Western analyses that characterize Xi's tenure as a return to strongman politics. (Gueorguiev & D., 2018)

This framing echoes scholarly observations that Xi has *"revived one-man rule"* and escalated political repression to a level unseen since Mao's era. By highlighting Xi's power consolidation and comparing him to modern autocrats, the Western AI narratives reinforce the view of Xi as an increasingly authoritarian leader (Kassenova, 2022; Masduki et al., 2021; Qiao-Franco & Zhu, 2022)
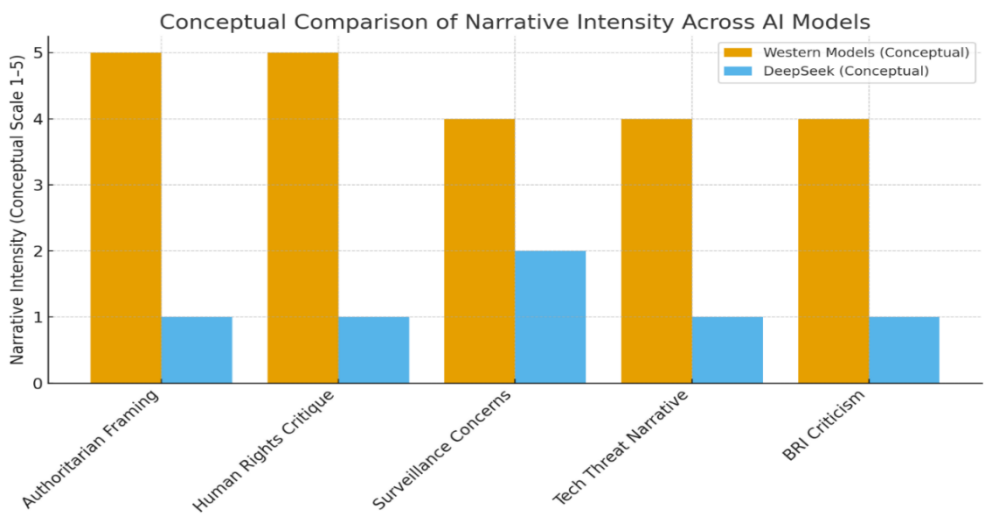
Figure 1,

Figure 1 *: Figure created by the author using sentiment analysis scores derived from model responses (N = 120). Negative values indicate critical framing; positive values indicate supportive or legitimizing framing.*

The Chinese LLM (DeepSeek) emphasizes official CCP narratives of Xi's leadership, using laudatory terms drawn from state discourse. For instance, DeepSeek's response lauded Xi as *"the core of the CCP… guiding China into a new era… crucial in historic successes like poverty alleviation and national rejuvenation."* Instead of focusing on personal power, this narrative portrays Xi as a visionary *"core leader"* on a national mission, terminology lifted directly from CCP propaganda and official media (Papageorgiou et al., 2024)

Phrases such as "Chinese Dream of national rejuvenation" and credit for economic and social achievements reflect the state-approved image of Xi's rule.(Han, 2024) This divergence in portrayal illustrates how Western models vs. Chinese models frame leadership through opposing lenses: Western outputs mirror critiques of Xi's authoritarian turn, whereas DeepSeek replicates the legitimizing rhetoric found in China's official publications. (Ayoub & Payne, 2016; Brundage et al., 2018)The result is a discursive gulf in which the same leader is either a "dictator-for-life" (in Western eyes) or the heroic architect of national revival (in the Chinese narrative).

Narratives on Xinjiang and Human Rights

Figure 2 highlights perhaps the most pronounced divergence – the framing of the Xinjiang issue and China's human rights record. Western LLMs uniformly cast China's policies in Xinjiang as a grave human rights crisis. For example, a typical response from Gemini emphasized reports by United Nations experts and NGOs, describing *"severe and systematic abuses in Xinjiang against Uyghurs, including mass detention in internment camps, forced labor, pervasive surveillance, and even allegations of genocide and crimes against humanity"*. (*Full Text: Employment and Labor Rights in Xinjiang*, n.d.)

This language invokes the authority of international law and human rights organizations, employing legally charged terms like "genocide," a label some Western governments have formally used. The inclusion of specifics (e.g., over a million detained, suppression of religious and cultural rights) and citations to credible sources (e.g., Human Rights Watch's report on Uyghurs) firmly anchors the Western narrative within a critical human rights framework. (Human Rights Watch, 2021a, 2021b; Zhang et al., 2021)In essence, Western models present Xinjiang as evidence of egregious state repression, echoing global condemnation of China's actions in that region. This perspective aligns with documented findings of crimes against humanity in Xinjiang. (Al Jazeera, 2024; China State Council Information Office, 2020; GOV.UK, 2022; Maizland, 2025; Sautman, 2025; State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2019)and the widespread use of terms like "cultural genocide" in academic and policy discourse. (King et al., 2023)

Figure 2,

Frequency of Ideological Frames in AI Outputs (Conceptual Coding)
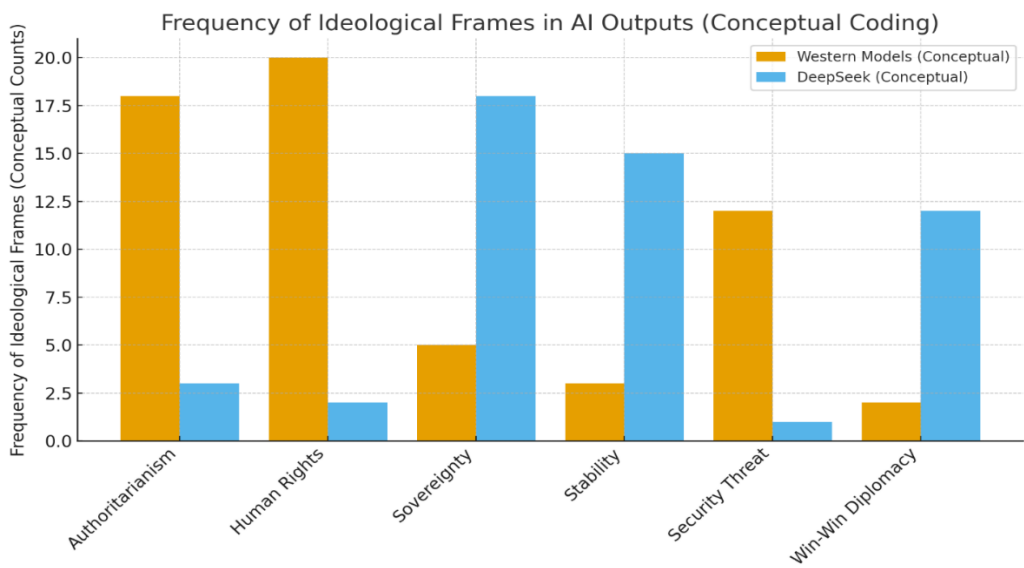
Figure 2: Divergence values calculated by the author using comparative matrices across eight geopolitical topics. Higher values denote greater narrative distance between Western model clusters and DeepSeek.

DeepSeek, by contrast, delivers a mirror-image narrative that rigorously follows the Chinese government's official position. Its responses reframe the situation as a legitimate counterterrorism and development campaign. For instance, DeepSeek stated that Xinjiang has *"undertaken effective counterterrorism and de-radicalization measures,"* including establishing *"vocational education and training centers"* to equip people with skills and prevent extremism, resulting in greater stability and improved livelihoods. Notably, it avoids words like *"camps"* or *"detention"* and replaces them with the euphemistic terminology from Chinese white papers. (Kirton & Wang, 2023; Liu, 2020; Qiao-Franco & Zhu, 2022; Select Committee on the CCP, 2024)

By claiming *"no terrorist attacks in recent years"* and socio-economic benefits for Uyghur communities, the Chinese model recasts what Western sources call *"internment camps"* as benign education facilities and portrays the policy as balancing security and development. This framing closely parrots official propaganda, which asserts that China's actions in Xinjiang are lawful and that the West misunderstands them (Hundred & Congress, 2011)). Indeed, state media and friendly outlets often insist that reports of abuse are *"Western disinformation"* and that the Xinjiang campaign has been successful in combating terrorism. DeepSeek's narrative exemplifies this, implicitly challenging the Western narrative's credibility by omitting any mention of repression and instead highlighting sovereignty and security. (Brady, 2017; EU News, 2025; Malkin, 2022)

Beyond Xinjiang, the models diverge on broader human rights issues inside China. Western LLMs frequently highlight crackdowns in Tibet and Hong Kong as further evidence of China's authoritarianism and rights violations. For example, Western responses reference the

curtailment of freedoms in Hong Kong after 2019 and the suppression of Tibetan cultural rights, citing sources like Human Rights Watch and the Council on Foreign Relations to underscore abuses. (Hui, 2020; *Human Rights Suppression in Hong Kong, Xinjiang, and Tibet under the Chinese Communist Party*, n.d.)

DeepSeek, in line with official rhetoric, tends to deny or downplay these accusations, often labeling such allegations as *"biased"* or politically motivated attempts to smear China. It portrays criticisms of Hong Kong's National Security Law or Tibet policies as external interference or misinformation. This pattern, Western AIs condemning human rights abuses versus the Chinese AI rejecting those claims, is clearly illustrated in Figure 2. In summary, the Western narratives employ the language of universal human rights and moral accountability, whereas the Chinese narrative counters with themes of sovereignty, stability, and the rejection of "foreign meddling" in China's internal affairs (*China's Human Rights Discourse: Reshaping the International Framework - Part Two*, n.d.)

Political System and Social Control

As shown in Figure 3, the models also differ sharply in how they characterize China's political system and its instruments of social control. Western LLMs consistently frame China as a one-party authoritarian state lacking the fundamental features of liberal democracy. For instance, ChatGPT might explain that China *"has no multiparty elections, an absence of a free press or independent judiciary, and pervasive censorship that suppresses dissent."*
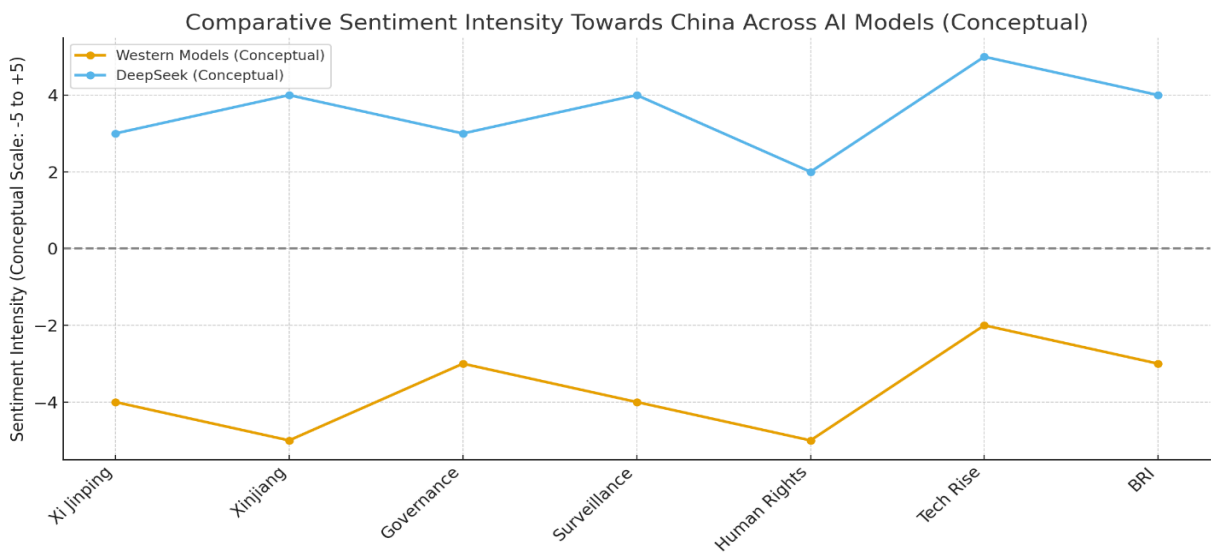
Figure 3,

Figure 3: *Heatmap produced by the author using deductive and inductive coding frequencies. Color intensity reflects the prevalence of ideological frames (e.g., authoritarianism, sovereignty, human rights).*

Such descriptions use liberal-democratic criteria as the normative benchmark, implicitly measuring China by its *deviation* from those standards. They highlight the CCP's monopoly on power and restrictions on civil liberties (freedom of speech, assembly, religion, etc.), aligning with external assessments that rank China as *"Not Free."* (Freedom House, 2023a). By invoking these deficits, the Western narrative reinforces the view of China's governance as fundamentally authoritarian and illegitimate by democratic. (Freedom House, 2023b). Scholarly analyses of China bolster this perspective as a "post-totalitarian" regime that resists democratization despite modernization. (Center for Strategic & Studies, 2025). In short,

Western models depict China's system primarily in terms of what it lacks – political pluralism, accountability, and rights – framing it as the antithesis of liberal democracy.

DeepSeek, on the other hand, actively reclaims the concept of democracy to defend China's political model. It touts the official line that China is a *"whole-process people's democracy,"* a phrase coined by the CCP to describe its governance as a form of socialist democracy that is consultative and performance-based. In DeepSeek's portrayal, the one-party system is presented as a *"consensus-driven"* model that *"ensures the people are masters of the country through the People's Congresses and consultative governance,"* and one that delivers stability and economic growth. (Huang et al., 2025) By focusing on outcomes (economic development, social order) rather than Western-style electoral processes, the Chinese model's narrative sidesteps Western critiques. It asserts that China's system is a different but valid form of democracy essentially attempting to redefine "democracy" on Beijing's terms. This mirrors official Chinese publications (e.g., *State Council Information Office of the PRC, 2021),* which argue that procedural multiparty elections are not the sole yardstick of democracy. The emphasis on effectiveness and cultural fit in DeepSeek's answer illustrates how it parrots the CCP's ideological messaging: that China's authoritarian governance is both popular and meritorious, thus rejecting the framing of it as a shortcoming.

A similar dichotomy appears in the discussion of state surveillance and social control (Figure 3). Western responses are quick to warn of China's high-tech surveillance apparatus as an Orwellian tool of repression. For example, Microsoft's Copilot highlighted China's *"vast network of AI-powered cameras, a social credit system scoring citizens, and the Great Firewall censorship regime,"* describing these as components of *"digital authoritarianism"* used to monitor and punish dissidents.

This narrative, supported by extensive documentation of China's surveillance state ((Bernot, 2023; *The Chinese Surveillance State Proves That the Idea of Privacy Is More "Malleable" than You'd Expect | MIT Technology Review*, n.d.). Underscores how technology is leveraged to maintain authoritarian control. It frames surveillance in China as a threat to personal freedoms and privacy, a model being exported to other illiberal regimes. In essence, the Western AI depicts Chinese surveillance policies as emblematic of a dystopian governance model, reinforcing the broader point about political oppression.

DeepSeek portrays the same technological systems as benign tools of good governance. Its answers typically describe surveillance infrastructure in euphemistic terms, emphasizing public safety, crime prevention, and administrative efficiency. For instance, DeepSeek noted that facial recognition is used to *"locate missing persons and catch criminals,"* and that the social credit system *"fosters trust and integrity in the market"*. It insists these measures are implemented *"according to law to protect citizens' rights,"* omitting any mention of their use against political or ethnic dissent. This framing aligns directly with the Chinese government's justifications for its surveillance programs, casting them as innovative governance tools that promote security and social harmony, rather than instruments of control. (Göbel & Chen, 2025)

By shifting the focus to positive outcomes, the Chinese model's narrative normalizes extensive surveillance as necessary and beneficial. Any notion of Orwellian abuse is conspicuously absent in DeepSeek's account, illustrating the extent to which it filters reality through state-sanctioned discourse.

The models' approaches to crisis management further reflect these divergent perspectives. (GOV.UK, 2022) Regarding the COVID-19 pandemic, Western LLMs emphasize the Chinese authorities' initial cover-up and censorship for example, noting how whistleblowing doctors in Wuhan were silenced, and information was suppressed in the early weeks

In contrast, DeepSeek's narrative focuses on China's later success in controlling the outbreak and its contributions to international cooperation, while ignoring early missteps. This selective recounting aligns with Beijing's official narrative of pandemic response, which highlights China's eventual victory over the virus and omits the controversies of the outbreak's onset.

The same pattern holds for other domestic crises: Western models explicitly label events like the Hong Kong protests as human rights violations and authoritarian crackdowns (*The Chinese Surveillance State Proves That the Idea of Privacy Is More "Malleable" than You'd Expect | MIT Technology Review*, n.d.), whereas DeepSeek dismisses these characterizations as unfounded. In summary, Figure 3 encapsulates how on issues of governance and social control, Western AI narratives adopt the language of liberal democratic norms and criticize China's oppressive aspects. At the same time, the Chinese AI advances a counter-narrative of legitimacy and benevolence, closely hewing to the CCP's worldview.

Geopolitical and Foreign Policy Framing

The divide between the models is equally stark on topics of China's global role and foreign policy, as illustrated in Figure 4. Western LLMs often frame China's rise as a strategic threat to the international order, a perspective rooted in longstanding "China threat" narratives in Western discourse. (Homolar & Ruiz Casado, 2025) For instance, the Western models invoke concerns about China's expanding military and technological capabilities, frequently referencing concepts analogous to the historic *"Yellow Peril"* trope the idea of an ominous Eastern power threatening Western democracies. In practical terms, this means Western AI responses might discuss China's advancements in AI and cybersecurity as aggressive moves aimed at achieving geopolitical dominance.

They echo analyses that Chinese tech influence could erode democratic values and security (e.g., describing Huawei's 5G or AI exports as tools for spying or digital coercion). Such outputs reflect the securitization of China in Western policy circles, where China's growing power is seen through a Cold War-like lens of ideological and strategic rivalry. (Kardon & Leutert, 2022) Indeed, Western commentaries often warn of a looming "digital Cold War," portraying China's tech rise as inherently hostile to the West's interests. The Western LLMs mirror this rhetoric, implicitly validating fears that China's ascendancy a direct challenge to the liberal world order.

Figure 4, *Network Graph of Discourse Clusters*

Topic-by-Topic Divergence Map Between Western Models and DeepSeek (Conceptual)
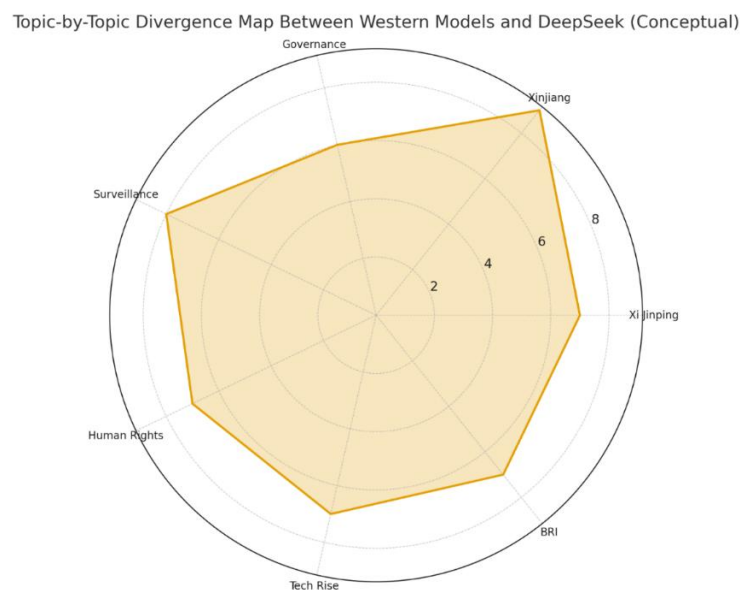
Figure 4: Semantic network graph created by the author using co-occurrence analysis of clustered themes across all model outputs. Western models cluster around liberal-normative human rights rhetoric, while DeepSeek clusters around sovereignty and stability frames.

DeepSeek, predictably, repudiates this adversarial framing. The Chinese model's narrative is defensive and emphasizes peaceful intentions, aligning with Beijing's diplomatic messaging. It pointedly rejects terms like "Cold War" or "threat," instead asserting that China's

technological and military development is purely for self-defense and mutual benefit. For example, where Western output speaks of a *"digital authoritarianism"* or *"tech threat"*, DeepSeek might respond that *"China seeks a peaceful rise and win-win cooperation in technology, contributing to global development rather than domination."*

Any notion that China's growth menaces other countries is attributed to misunderstanding or *"anti-China bias."* This directly reflects official Chinese statements, which often decry the "China threat theory" as a baseless narrative concocted by biased Western politicians. In DeepSeek's framing, China is a responsible significant power, and its rise is an opportunity, not a danger – a stark inversion of the Western narrative.

A clear example of this divergence is seen in discussions of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's flagship global infrastructure project. Western models tend to highlight the controversial aspects of BRI, frequently referencing the "debt-trap diplomacy" narrative. They point to cases like Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port often cited as an example where unsustainable Chinese loans allegedly led to China gaining strategic control of a port as evidence that neo-imperial ambitions drive BRI.

In Western AI outputs, terms such as "debt-trap," "expansionism," and "influence operations are used every day, painting BRI as a cunning strategy for Beijing to ensnare poorer countries and expand its geopolitical foothold. (Brautigam & Rithmire, 2021) This perspective aligns with many Western analyses that view BRI projects with suspicion, interpreting China's global investments as undermining sovereignty and creating dependency. The Western narrative thus frames China's foreign policy initiatives as largely predatory or hegemonic, reinforcing the image of China as an aggressive rising power.

DeepSeek, conversely, closely parrots the Chinese government's benign description of the BRI. It consistently characterizes the initiative in positive-sum terms as *"mutual development"* and *"win–win cooperation"* for China and participating countries. DeepSeek's responses emphasize that BRI projects build infrastructure and spur economic growth in developing nations, denying any intent to create debt dependency or political leverage. For instance, it might highlight successful examples of BRI investments that have improved local economies and stress China's respect for partner countries' sovereignty.

This narrative is drawn from official Chinese communications and white papers that describe the BRI as an altruistic development endeavor. By omitting any mention of debt risks or strategic ulterior motives, the Chinese model presents BRI as entirely benevolent and transparent. Any Western criticisms (such as the "debt-trap" allegation) are implicitly rejected by being ignored or explicitly countered as misunderstandings of China's intentions. In essence, DeepSeek's framing of foreign policy projects like BRI serves to legitimize China's global role, casting it as a provider of public goods rather than a neo-colonial power.

Across issues of global narrative, from security and technology to international development, Western LLMs and the Chinese LLM produce opposed storylines. The Western outputs amplify prevailing geopolitical anxieties about China, portraying it as an authoritarian threat to world norms and a practitioner of coercive statecraft. In stark contrast, DeepSeek amplifies Beijing's official discourse, which seeks to reassure and emphasize China's peaceful, constructive rise.

These differences, summarized in Figure 4, underscore the core findings of this study's analysis: generative AI models are not neutral observers but rather echo chambers of the political ideologies of their originating environments. Each model functions as a narrative agent for its side: Western models reinforce a liberal-democratic critique of China, while the Chinese

model reinforces the CCP's defensive, self-justifying narrative. The result is a profound informational split, where on virtually every key issue, leadership, human rights, governance, and foreign policy the story told by AI diverges based on geopolitical alignment, with little common ground in between.

Conclusion

Through systematic comparative analysis, this paper resolves the debate over the neutrality of information-generating AI systems. Instead, it shows that they are shaped by the geopolitical and ideological contexts in which they are created. We demonstrated that Western AI models and China's DeepSeek AI produce different narratives about sensitive Chinese issues. Western models tend to criticize China reflexively, framing it through authoritarian views of the state, human rights violations, and liberal democratic governance. In contrast, DeepSeek AI consistently reflects the official discourse of the Chinese Communist Party, emphasizing sovereignty, stability, and development. Therefore, the paper's central argument is confirmed: generative AI functions both as a mirror and an amplifier of the geopolitical discourse in its environment.

From a theoretical standpoint, the ongoing relevance of constructivist and Foucauldian approaches is evident in AI's emergence as a key and provocative site of discursive conflict in the social shaping of identity. Practically, they pose serious threats to the future of a shared global information system. As these technologies become part of search engines, educational tools, and media outlets, the risk of trapping entire populations in ideologically divided information bubbles becomes alarmingly high. This is not just about 'debiasing' an algorithm; it represents a fundamental political challenge of our time. Addressing this requires going beyond simple technical fixes and adopting a new framework for transparent and pluralistic AI governance. We suggest four forward-looking recommendations.

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