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Combining Rules and Capacity: Domestic Sources of China's Dual Approach in Global AI Governance

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ABSTRACT

China has actively expanded its international influence in both technological innovation and global technology governance under the Xi Jinping administration. Over the past decade, its engagement in global AI governance has evolved into a dual pathway characterised by rule-based and capacity-based approaches. Existing scholarship has provided valuable insights into China's strategic positioning in global AI governance and the roles of domestic actors in shaping AI policy. However, these literatures remain insufficiently integrated, with limited systematic analysis of how domestic policy debates among actors are translated into China's dual approach towards global AI governance. This article addresses this gap by examining how domestic AI policy debates shape China's dual pathway in global AI governance. It employs the Advocacy Coalition Framework and Discourse Network Analysis to analyse how interactions among diverse domestic actors influence the central government's expressed preferences. The findings demonstrate that China's dual approach emerges from domestic policy debates in which shared techno-globalist beliefs are interpreted and operationalised differently across actor groups. While techno-globalism functions as a common discursive framework, policy differentiation occurs at the level of policy solutions. In this process, the central government acts as a strategic integrator, selectively combining heterogeneous policy signals into a coherent governance strategy that links rule-shaping with capacity-building. By connecting domestic policy processes with global governance outcomes, this study contributes to a more integrated understanding of China's role in the governance of emerging technologies. It also advances the application of policy process theory by demonstrating how the ACF and DNA can be adapted to analyse policymaking dynamics in the Chinese context.

Introduction

China has actively pursued the expansion of its international influence in both technological innovation and global technology governance under the Xi

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Jinping administration. To advance its goal of 'striving for achievement' (有所作为) in technology innovation, China introduced the multi-pronged policy initiative 'Made in China 2025' (中国制造2025) in May 2015, outlining key indicators to be achieved by 2025. While 'Made in China 2025' aims broadly to transform China into a global leader in high-tech industries, the *New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan* (NGAIDP, 新一代人工智能发展规划), issued in 2017, represents a more targeted efforts to leverage the domestic artificial intelligence (AI) industry to achieve these goals (Webster et al. 2017). As China's first comprehensive and strategic national AI plan released by the State Council, the NGAIDP establishes a three-stage roadmap to position China as a global AI leader by 2030. In support of this plan, the Chinese government has implemented a range of policy measures, including the establishment of National New Generation AI Innovation and Development Pilot Zone and the designation of AI as a priority sector in the 14th Five-Year Plan (CSET 2020).

Beyond its ambition to become a global leader in AI development, China has also emerged as a key actor in shaping global AI governance frameworks. For instance, China endorsed UNESCO's *Recommendation on the Ethics of Artificial Intelligence* in 2021. In July 2024, the United Nations General Assembly adopted a proposal put forth by China entitled *Enhancing International Cooperation to Strengthen Capacity-Building of Artificial Intelligence*, which emphasises the development of safe, reliable and trustworthy AI systems throughout their life cycles (Y. Zhu and Lu 2024). In October 2023, China introduced the *Global AI Governance Initiative*, which places a strong emphasis on ethical principles and regulatory coordination (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, People's Republic of China 2023). This initiative aims to advance global norms and standards by strengthening ethical guidelines, accountability mechanisms, and regulatory frameworks, while also clarifying the responsibilities of AI-related actors and safeguarding the rights and interests of stakeholders.

As one of the most active actors in global AI governance over the past decade, China's engagement can be characterised by a dual pathway. On the one hand, China demonstrates a commitment to *rule-based engagement*, participating in multilateral platforms such as the United Nations, the G20, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and promoting international cooperation, ethical standards, and regulatory coordination. On the other hand, China advances a logic of *capacity-based engagement*, emphasising the development of AI infrastructure, industrial capacities, technological diffusion, computing power, and capacity-building initiatives particularly in the Global South.

These two approaches are not mutually exclusive. Rather, they form a central feature and tension within China's global AI governance strategy. China seeks simultaneously to shape global rules and to enhance its material and technological capacities, thereby expanding its influence in global governance. In other words, it does not choose between rule-based governance and capacity-building; instead, it strategically combines the two. This raises a key analytical puzzle: how has this dual pathway emerged, and why does China's approach to global AI governance simultaneously exhibit both rule-shaping and capacity-building dimensions?

A growing body of scholarship literature has examined China's role in global AI governance (Cantero Gamito 2023; Cheng and Zeng 2023; Chun, Witt, and Elkins 2024; Khanal, Zhang, and Taeihagh 2025; Mokry and Gurol 2024; Olugbade 2025; Pan, Chen, and Liu 2024; Qiao-Franco and van Beek 2025; Roberts et al. 2021, 2024). One common justification for studying China's role in global AI governance is that, as one of the most prominent players in AI, the country is expected and determined to take a leading role in shaping this emerging field. Scholars examined Chinese leadership in AI from various angles. Some authors discussed the driving forces or motivations behind China's aspiration to transition from a norm-taker to a norm-shaper, if not a norm-maker (Cheng and Zeng 2023), as well as the sources of competitive advantage that strengthen its international position (Mokry and Gurol 2024; Roberts et al. 2024). Others explored the strategies and means that facilitate China's pursuit of global AI leadership (Cantero Gamito 2023).

Moving away from the macro-level of understanding China's engagement in global AI governance, recent studies have increasingly examined the actors involved in shaping China's AI policy. A common narrative on China, prevalent in the United States, suggests that the policymaking process and regulation of new technologies in China are highly centralised, with policies being delivered directly from the central government and receiving rubber-stamped approvals from other actors (Yoshida 2020). However, many scholars argue that it is one of the most significant misconceptions about how China sets AI policy. Sheehan (2023) explains that this misconception is understandable; Xi Jinping's decade-long campaign to centralise political power led many observers to believe that he makes all meaningful decisions regarding policy and regulation. The recent push for recentralisation under Xi has also significantly undermined the autonomy of local governments (Khanal, Zhang, and Taeihagh 2025). Sheehan (2023) further contends that such centralisation efforts in AI governance have so far been minimal. State media have not depicted Xi as directing the regulations, as they often do in other areas, such as the Chinese 'dynamic Zero-COVID' strategy. Ernst (2020) debunks the misconception by highlighting the complexity of the relationship between the Party-State and non-governmental actors. While the Party-State holds vast control, it also allows market forces to operate across large sectors of the economy. The intertwined nature of private enterprises and the Party-State involves a complex web of overlapping networks and relationships between the state, the Party, state-owned enterprises, private enterprises, financial institutions, investment vehicles, and trade associations (Ernst 2020).

Instead of a one-man, top-down decision-making process, Qiao-Franco and Zhu (2024) demonstrate that Chinese ethical AI policy emerges from the interactions of three actors: the government, academia, and the private sector. Tuzov and Lin (2024) argue that the nexus between the government, private companies, and research centres is characterised by overlapped and interconnected networks that jointly participate in policymaking. Zhang (2025) illustrates how Chinese think tanks, particularly the China Academy of Information and Communications Technology (CAICT) and the Centre for International Security and Strategy (CISS), act as boundary brokers between the government, the private sector, and academia in influencing Chinese AI governance frameworks. Overall, the Chinese government plays a guiding role in shaping the overall direction of AI policy while supporting proposals made by the sub-national governments (Tuzov and Lin 2024). In other words, Xi sets high-level goals for policymakers to pursue while leaving the details to them. Experts from academia, think tanks, and start-ups are involved in formulating, clarifying, and interpreting Chinese AI regulations, while local officials mainly ensure alignment with the state's ideological positions (Sheehan 2023; Zeng 2022). Ultimately, no decision will be made that directly contradicts Xi's expressed wishes (Sheehan 2023).

Overall, the existing literature (e.g., Qiao-Franco and Zhu 2024; Roberts et al. 2021; Sheehan 2023; Tuzov and Lin 2024; Zhang 2025) has made significant contributions to understanding China's strategic positioning in global AI governance and to analysing the roles played by various stakeholders in shaping domestic AI policy processes. However, these two strands of scholarship remain insufficiently integrated. In particular, there is a lack of systematic analysis of how domestic policy debates among multiple actors are translated into China's approach towards global AI governance. This gap is especially important in explaining the coexistence of rule-based and capacity-based orientations in China's global AI governance. This article addresses this gap by asking: how have domestic AI policy debates in China shaped its dual pathway in global AI governance, namely rule-based engagement and capacity-based engagement?

To address this question, the article employs the Advocacy Coalition Framework (ACF) and Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) to examine how domestic AI policy debates in China shape the central government's expressed preferences in global AI governance. Rooted in public policy theory, the ACF is a theoretical framework designed to describe and explain how people work together to make collective choices in public policymaking. The framework focuses on the role of coalitions, driven by their common beliefs, in a specific policy subsystem (Cairney 2019). Complementing this, DNA enables the empirical mapping of actor-belief relationships through publicly observable policy discourse. The empirical analysis draws on a large-scale dataset constructed from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) Core Newspaper Database, which covers over 600 major Chinese newspapers from 2013 to 2024. Drawing on this dataset, the study applies Relational Event Models (REMs) as an inferential method to analyse how domestic policy debates influence the central government's choices among different policy solutions. The findings demonstrate that China's dual pathway emerges from domestic policy debates in which shared techno-globalist beliefs are interpreted and operationalised differently across actor groups. In this process, the central government acts as a strategic integrator, selectively combining these competing perspectives into a coherent approach that links rule-shaping with capacity-building. By connecting domestic policy processes with China's approaches to global AI governance, this study contributes to a more integrated understanding of China's role in the global governance of emerging technologies. It also offers a novel empirical application of policy process theory and discourse network analysis in the Chinese context.

The remainder of the article is structured as follows. The next section outlines the theoretical framework, focusing on key ACF concepts such as belief systems, coalition structures, and patterns of policy contestation in China's institutional setting. The methodology section explains the data collection methods, coding procedures, discourse network data, and the specification of the Relational Event Model. The empirical section presents and discusses the results of four models in relation to the three hypotheses. The final section summarises the main findings and discuss their broader implications.

Theoretical Framework

This article adopts the ACF to explain how China's domestic AI policy debates shape its global AI governance orientation. Developed by Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith in the mid-1980s, the ACF is a theoretical framework designed to describe and explain how individuals work together to make collective choices in public policymaking (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2018; Sabatier and Jenkins-Smith 1993). The framework emphasises the role of advocacy coalitions, driven by shared beliefs, within a specific policy subsystem. In this study, the ACF is not applied to identify open competition between distinct adversarial coalitions. Instead, it is used as an analytical language to examine the relationships among actors, policy beliefs, and policy solutions in China's AI policy subsystem. Although China's policymaking system is state-led, it is not fully closed: multiple actors – including central agencies, local governments, think tanks, universities, research institutes, technology companies, and media – participate in policy processes through advice, expert discussion, industry initiatives, local experimentation, and public discourse (Mao 2025; Sheehan 2023). Understanding China's global AI governance therefore requires examining how these actors collectively express and translate policy beliefs, rather than focusing solely on formal state positions.

To capture these dynamics, the ACF is combined with Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) (Leifeld 2013, 2017). From this perspective, public discourse is not merely rhetorical but constitutes an important arena in which actors define problems, construct legitimacy, and signal policy preferences. While newspaper discourse in China does not reveal closed-door bargaining or hidden preferences, it does provide observable evidence of how actors connect policy beliefs to policy solutions. This study thus treats public discourse as a form of 'revealed discursive prioritization', showing how actors articulate and operationalise policy claims within a visible policy space.

Within the ACF, four interrelated concepts are central to this study: policy subsystems, belief systems, advocacy coalitions, and coalition interactions. Together, these concepts provide a structured framework for analysing how domestic policy debates shape China's global AI governance. A policy subsystem refers to a set of actors who interact over time around a specific policy issue (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2018). ACF distinguishes between mature and nascent subsystems. Mature subsystems are relatively stable and institutionalised, whereas nascent subsystems emerge in response to new policy challenges or disruptive technologies. China's AI policy subsystem is best understood as a nascent system, as it seeks to govern a rapidly evolving technological domain (Lemke, Trein, and Varone 2023, 2024). It cuts across multiple policy arenas, including industrial policy, science and technology policy, national security, and foreign policy. While the central government retains agenda-setting and policy-integration authority, other actors play differentiated roles: local governments engage in implementation and experimentation; knowledge-based actors provide expertise and normative frameworks; and technology firms contribute industrial capacity and technological resources.

The second core concept is the belief system, which ACF organises hierarchically into deep core beliefs (DCBs), policy core beliefs (PCBs), and secondary beliefs (Weible and Sabatier 2018). DCBs represent stable, valued-based worldviews, while PCBs concerns policy goals and causal understandings within a specific subsystem. Secondary beliefs involve more specific policy instruments and implementation details. This article conceptualises techno-globalism and techno-nationalism as two coexisting deep core belief logics in China's AI policy discourse (Ding 2024). Techno-globalism emphasises international cooperation, openness, and multilateral governance, whereas techno-nationalism prioritises autonomy, national security, and technological self-reliance. More importantly, these logics are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they coexist asymmetrically. Techno-globalism is more visible in public discourse due to its alignment with official diplomatic language such as multilateralism, international cooperation, AI for good, a community with a shared future for humankind, and capacity-building for the Global South. Techno-nationalism is less visible and often embedded in concrete policy proposals such as infrastructure, innovation capacity, and supply-chain security. As a result, the key site of variation is not the presence of competing deep beliefs, but how shared beliefs are operationalised into different policy solutions.

Advocacy coalitions are the third core concept, which in classic ACF research are often conceptualised as competing groups organised around distinct belief systems (Weible et al. 2020). However, in the context of emerging technology governance, and particularly in China's political system, coalition structures are less overtly adversarial. Instead, the subsystem may exhibit a relatively unitary discourse at the deep belief level, with divergence emerging at the level of policy solutions. In other words, actors may share common discursive foundations while differing in their priorities over concrete policy solutions (Weible 2008; Wesche et al. 2025). In other words, macro-level discourse may appear consistent, while policy competition or contestation may occur at a lower level.

This leads to the fourth concept: coalition interactions, which include processes such as policy learning, strategic competition, resource mobilisation, and policy brokerage. In the Chinese context, existing research on the ACF in Chinese policy processes shows that, even under a one-party and authoritarian system, belief-based actor alignments, policy learning, and coalition interactions can still emerge, but coalition conflict and political strategies are constrained, and the state usually plays a key driving role in policy change (W. Li and Weible 2021; W. Li et al. 2024).

Building on existing applications of the ACF in the Chinese context, this article goes beyond asking whether the framework is applicable to China. Instead, it focuses on how core ACF concepts needs to be adapted to the institutional conditions of Chinese policymaking. Insights from ACF scholarship provide guidance for this refinement. First, the ACF conceptualises belief systems as hierarchical. Even when actors employ similar value-laden language at the level of DCBs, this does not imply that they support identical policy solutions. Policy differentiation may arise not only through explicit opposition between DCBs, but also through distinct ways of operationalising shared beliefs at the level of PCBs (Weible 2008). Second, the ACF does not assume that all policy subsystems are characterised by highly polarised competition between multiple coalitions. In subsystems with a single dominant coalition, low levels of conflict, or relatively unitary structure, policy contestation may take more subtle forms, such as interpretive differences, competition over policy instruments, and variation in the prioritisation of solutions within a shared discourse (Wesche et al. 2025). Third, the nature of public contestation in China is shaped by the political system, discursive constraints, and institutional hierarchy (W. Li and Weible 2021; Mertha 2009; O'Brien 1996). Actors typically employ language aligned with central policy directions to increase the legitimacy of their claims. As a result, policy contestation does not usually take the form of overt ideological conflict at the level of deep beliefs. Rather, it is more likely to be expressed through differences in problem framing, policy instruments, implementation strategies, and resource allocation priorities.

Taken together, these insights suggest that, in the Chinese context, policy contestation is less visible at the level of deep beliefs and more pronounced in how shared beliefs are translated into policy solutions. Accordingly, this article introduces two key refinements to the ACF. First, in a managed discursive environment such as China's, the primary site of policy contestation shifts from DCBs to the interface between DCBs and PCBs. Although actors may converge around broadly shared techno-globalist language, they diverge in how they interpret and operationalise it into concrete policy solutions. Second, coalition structures should be understood as layered. At the DCB level, China's AI policy subsystem exhibits an umbrella discourse coalition, in which most actors employ globalist language compatible with official narratives. At the PCB level, however, actors form different, solution-oriented alignments based on their institutional roles and interests, leading to competing over policy solutions, implementation pathways, and resource allocation.

These refinements also facilitate a connection between the ACF and research on global governance and foreign policy. The ACF provides a useful framework for analysing foreign policy change because it places leaders, bureaucracies, domestic actors, and external shocks within a single policy process framework and emphasises the intersection between domestic politics and the international system (Haar and Pierce 2021). The application of the ACF has been extended to the global governance of emerging technologies, including military AI, 5 G, human germline genome editing, and cyber warfare (Lo, Onderco, and Polito 2026). In the case of military AI governance, Onderco and Javadi (2026) particularly shows that the ACF can be used to analyse normative disagreements, policy learning, and coalition dynamics in international security and technology governance.

From this perspective, China's global AI governance can be understood as the outcomes of interactions between domestic policy processes and international governance agendas. It is neither purely foreign policy nor purely domestic science and technology policy, but rather a cross-level domain of strategic technology governance. Domestic actors provide problem definitions, expertise, implementation capacity, and industrial resources, while the central government integrates these inputs and translates them into external governance positions. The ACF thus provides a theoretical bridge linking domestic debates to global governance orientations.

In this context, China's engagement in global AI governance can be understood as comprising two interrelated approaches: rule-based engagement, which focuses on norms, standards, and multilateral mechanisms (Cheng and Zeng 2023), and capacity-based engagement, which emphasises technological capacity, infrastructure, local experimentation, industrial competitiveness, and capacity-building for the Global South (J. Zhu 2024). These approaches do not correspond directly to techno-globalism and techno-nationalism. Rule-based engagement can serve cooperative global governance, but it can also enhance China's normative influence. Capacity-based engagement can facilitate national technological autonomy, but it may also rely on international cooperation, market expansion, and open innovation ecosystems. The theoretical core of this article is therefore how, in a relatively unitary discursive environment, different actors connect similar DCB expressions to different PCB solutions and thereby shape the central government's expressed preference for global AI governance.

Against this theoretical background, the article proposes the following three hypotheses.

H1 (Discursive anchoring): The central government's policy preference for participation in global AI governance (PCB) is primarily associated with its own techno-globalist discourses (DCB), rather than the aggregate discourse of actors within the subsystem.

This hypothesis does not assume that a greater overall presence of techno-globalist discourse necessarily leads to stronger support for global AI governance. Rather, in a policy subsystem where the central government holds ultimate agenda-setting and integrative authority, its own articulation of DCBs is expected to exert a more direct influence on the selection of policy solutions. In contrast, aggregate subsystem-level discourse reflects the heterogeneous operationalisation of shared beliefs by multiple actors. As such, it may produce mixed or even conflicting policy signals, and therefore may not systematically translate into a coherent directional effect on policy outcomes.

H2 (Actor heterogeneity): Under a shared umbrella discourse, non-central actors exhibit heterogeneous interpretations of techno-globalism as the DCB and translate it into different policy solutions.

This hypothesis is grounded in the ACF's emphasis on actor resources and the translation of beliefs into policy solutions. Although multiple actors, such as think tanks, universities, local governments, and tech companies, may employ similar DCB language, they participate in the policy process in different ways. Some actors mainly contribute expertise and normative framing, while others provide implementation capacity, industrial resources, or technological capacities. Accordingly, ACF-based empirical research should examine how these actors connect shared DCB discourse to divergent PCBs, resulting in differentiated policy solutions.

H3 (PCB contestation): In a policy subsystem characterised by relative consistency or low conflict at the DCB level, policy contestation is most likely to occur at the level of PCBs.

This hypothesis follows from the article's refinement of the site of contestation within the ACF. When policy contestation shifts from explicit opposition between DCBs to the interface between DCBs and PCBs, techno-globalism does not translate into a single, uniform policy solution. Instead, multiple policy solutions may emerge as competing operationalisations of the same overarching belief. In this context, global AI governance should not be treated as the inevitable outcome of techno-globalism. Alternative policy solutions, including those reflecting techno-nationalist priorities, may also serve as pathways through which actors operationalise shared DCBs. These policy solutions may relate to global AI governance in complementary or competing ways, depending on how actors prioritise and operationalise them.

Taken together, these hypotheses link the core concepts of the ACF to China's AI policy context. H1 concerns the relationship between the central government's own DCB and its selection of global AI governance as a policy solution. H2 concerns the heterogeneous influence of non-central actors under an umbrella discourse. H3 concerns the relationships among policy solutions after policy contestation shifts from the DCB level to the PCB level. The empirical focus of the article is therefore on how actors' differentiated interpretations of shared DCBs and their contestation over PCBs contribute to China's dual pathways in global AI governance.

Methodology

As outlined in the previous section, this article employs the ACF to explain policy change through the lens of coalitions that form around shared beliefs. To analyse these coalitions and their beliefs empirically, we utilise Discourse Network Analysis (DNA), a network-based method that identifies and maps the structure of these coalitions and their respective beliefs. DNA is particularly suitable for this article's empirical research for three reasons: First, it aligns with the ACF by focusing on stakeholders in China's AI policy subsystem and their policy beliefs, which matches DNA's actor-belief discourse structure. Second, it investigates the evolution of policy debates in China's nascent AI policy subsystem between 2013 and 2024, making DNA's time-stamped data useful for temporal analysis. Third, it aims to figure out causal relationships between domestic debates and the central government's attitudes towards global AI governance. By connecting the ACF and policy debates with network modelling, DNA allows for the application of inferential techniques for deeper analysis. This section details the data collection process, coding methods, and the analytical technique known as the Relational Event Models (REMs).

Data Collection

Previous research indicates that political discourse in newspapers serves as a primary source of empirical evidence for investigating policy debates (Leifeld 2013, 2017; Pierce et al. 2022). Additionally, political discourse reflects the institutional environment (Panizza and Miorelli 2013), the ideas and values of actors (Schmidt 2002), and the complex interactions between structure and agency (Wang and Wang 2017) within the policymaking process.

Current studies on China's policy discourse typically select newspaper samples based on their professional fields and target audiences, while also including official Chinese news media to maintain a balanced perspective between governmental and non-governmental actors (He et al. 2014; Z. Li, Tan, and Liu 2023; Tong 2014). While the initial advocacy for China's AI policy subsystem came from the innovation community, comprising technology entrepreneurs and scientists, stakeholders from multiple industries, including healthcare, manufacturing, and education, have gradually contributed to the development of this diverse policy subsystem. To capture discussions from a broader range of policy fields, this article conducted a full-text keyword search using China's Core Newspaper Database (CCND), without restricting the selection to specific newspapers. The CCND encompasses data from over 600 key Chinese newspapers. Documents were retrieved for the period spanning from January 1, 2013, to December 31, 2024, using criteria that required the inclusion of 'AI' (人工智能), and the contents to include either 'policy' (政策) or 'strategy' (战略). In total, 10,155 newspaper articles were collected.

Discourse Network Analysis (DNA) and Coding Scheme

To encode the discourse data, this article employs DNA developed by Philip Leifeld and collaborators (Leifeld 2010, 2013, 2017; Leifeld and Haunss 2010, 2012). DNA is an extension of policy network analysis to discourse structures, which combines category-based content analysis with social network analysis and focuses on the temporal evolution of discourse networks within policy subsystems (Leifeld 2020). The unit of analysis in DNA encoding is a statement, which consists of a political actor, a concept (e.g., policy belief) expressed by the actor, the actor's attitude towards the concept (agreement or disagreement), and the time at which the statement was made (Leifeld 2017). Based on the encoded data, descriptive DNA can visualise the conceptual alignments or conflicts among actors (Fergie et al. 2019; Garic and Leifeld 2025) or investigate the dynamics of discourse network evolution using inferential network analysis methods (Brandenberger et al. 2022; Malang and Leifeld 2021; Malang, Brandenberger, and Leifeld 2019).

To ensure coding reliability, two coders independently applied the Codebook, and ChatGPT 4.1 was also used for parallel coding. Recent research shows the benefits of using Large Language Models (LLMs) for text annotation in political science (Anglin et al. 2025; Churchill et al. 2025). This article adopted a 'human-in-the-loop' approach, treating the results of LLMs as a secondary check. Any discrepancies were reconciled through discussion after the first-round coding, with both coders jointly determining the final discourse network data.

Statements were coded when stakeholders expressed their policy beliefs related to China's AI policy. Actors were coded at the organisational level rather than the individual level to avoid excessive fragmentation of the network and changes in individual affiliations. Local governments were grouped into four organisational categories at the provincial or prefectural level: government, Party committee, People's Congress, and People's Political Consultative Conference. County or district-level entities were merged into the corresponding prefecture-level city. Subordinate organisations were aggregated to their parent institutions; for instance, the Institute of Automation of the Chinese Academy of Sciences was coded as the Chinese Academy of Sciences.

Concept codes followed ACF's three-tiered system of policy beliefs, including deep core beliefs (DCBs), policy core beliefs (PCBs), secondary aspects (Weible and Sabatier 2018). DCBs were limited to 'techno-nationalism' and 'techno-globalism', which are the main focus of this article regarding policy debates. This categorisation is informed by Ding's research on China's duelling perspectives on AI relations with the US (Ding 2024), as well as extensive discussions in science and technology studies (Edgerton 2007; Lynn and Salzman 2023; Montresor 2001), industrial economics (Luo 2022; Ostry and Nelson 1995), and the philosophy of technology (Suthar et al. 2023).

PCBs were operationalised as policy goals, perceptions of the problem, and preferred solutions, combining both normative and empirical conceptualisations of PCBs (Jenkins-Smith et al. 2018). Policy core goals and preferred solutions were based on structured codes, while perceptions and secondary aspects (actions) were open coded using a multi-pass coding strategy (Leifeld 2013). An illustration of concept codes is provided in Table 1. All relationships were encoded as 'agreement' to maintain a single edge category in the two-mode discourse network. Dates were

Table 1. Categories of concept codes.

Category	Coding Method	Values
Deep core beliefs		
DCBs	Structured codes	*techno-nationalism, techno-globalism*
Policy core beliefs		
Goal	Structured codes	*to dominate international AI competition,* *to obtain global industrial influence,* *to obtain global technological influence,* *to obtain global regulatory influence,* *to challenge the US technological leadership*
Perception	Open for coding	e.g., *AI competition surrounds international rulemaking,* *AI critical technologies are controlled by the Westerning . . .*
Solution	Structured codes	*promote the capacity of original AI innovation (AICap),* *promote the capacity of AI regulation (AIReg),* *promote the capacity of AI diplomacy (AIDip),* *promote engagement in global AI governance (GAIG)*
Secondary beliefs		
Action	Open for coding	e.g., *lead the establishment of new IOs regarding AI, assist Global South countries in enhancing AI capacity . . .*

automatically extracted from the published dates of the statements. The final dataset consists of 57,125 statements spanning from August 1, 2013, to December 31, 2024, involving 2,609 actors and 98 concepts. The complete list of concepts can be found in Appendix 1.

Inferential DNA and Relational Event Models (REMs)

Descriptive DNA helps visualise how networks change over time by projecting the two-mode networks into one-mode (actor/concept) conflict or congruence networks and using techniques such as community detection and phase transition to analyse these networks (Garic and Leifeld 2025; Vandenhole, Garic, and Leifeld 2025). However, it cannot explain the causal relationships between actors and concepts. Therefore, we use techniques from inferential DNA. REMs are a specific tool within inferential DNA. REMs help analyse how past interactions among actors influence current beliefs and actions in a network (Brandenberger 2019; Brandes, Lerner, and Snijders 2009; Butts 2008; Leifeld and Brandenberger 2024; Lerner et al. 2013; Malang and Leifeld 2021; Malang, Brandenberger, and Leifeld 2019).

We believe REMs are a useful tool to understand the causal relationship between China's domestic policy debates and the central government's attitudes towards global AI governance. Leifeld and Brandenberger (2024) state that one can think of policy debates as an event sequence of statements made in the media over time (refer to Figure 1). In the context of DNA, each statement is like an event where a social actor (the sender) makes a statement (the action type, like an agreement or disagreement) directed at a concept (the receiver) at a given time point (time stamp) (Butts 2008).

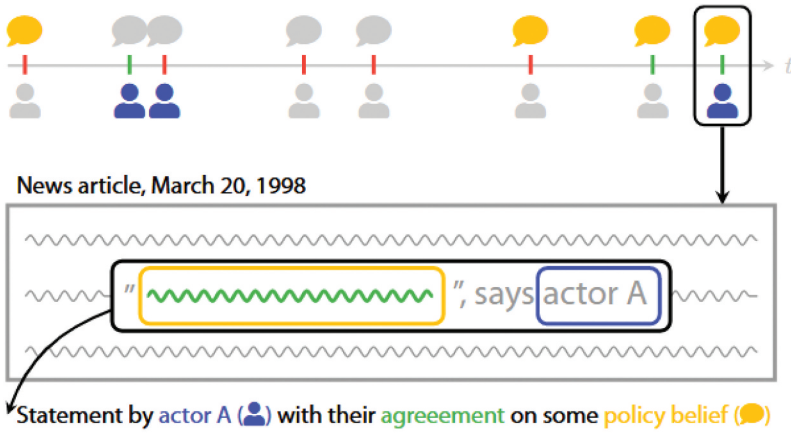

Figure 1. Illustration of policy debates as an Event sequence of statements. Source: Leifeld and Brandenberger (2024).

REMs assume that the possibility of a new event (i.e., hazards) occurring is conditional on the history of past events and types of factors (i.e., covariates) at the nodal, relational, and global levels (Butts et al. 2023). When implementing tie-oriented REMs, we look at potential sender-receiver pairs at the time point when a current event occurs. The pairs form a 'risk set'. According to the conditional intensities of the event history and covariates, we calculate the chances of a specific connection occurring. In this model, we determine which past events to consider (the event history) and which pairs of senders and receivers to examine (the risk set). If we denote i as the sender (actor), j as the receiver (concept), $H(t-1)$ as the event history, and $R(t)$ as the risk set at time t, the conditional intensity incorporating covariates can be expressed as:

$$\lambda_{ij}(t) = \exp\left(\beta_0 + x_{ij}(t-1)\beta + z_{ij}(t-1)\gamma\right)$$

where $\lambda_{ij}(t)$ is the rate at which the actor i makes a claim linking to the concept j at time t, β are parameters to be estimated, $x_{ij}(t-1)$ denotes dyadic covariates, and $z_{ij}(t-1)$ represents network-structural covariates. The probability of a tie at time t conditional on history is given by:

$$\Pr\left\{Y_{ij}(t) = 1 | H(t-1)\right\} = \frac{\lambda_{ij}(t)}{\sum_{(i',j')\in R(t)} \lambda_{i'j'}(t)}$$

where $Y_{ij}(t)$ indicates the realisation of a tie and $H(t-1)$ is the event history. These two formulas together define the mechanism of REMs: the former determines the relative intensity of all potential edges while the latter calculates the probability of the event occurring. Memories of past events, dyadic features, and network effects enter the models through the channels of covariates.

This article mainly focuses on the conditions under which the events linking the Chinese central government to specific policy beliefs (global AI governance) are more likely to occur during the study period. In this article's coding scheme, 'global AI governance' was categorised as a policy solution in PCBs. Therefore, when defining the risk set, actors were restricted to the group labelled 'central government', and the concepts included only four policy solutions: AI capacity (AICap), AI regulation (AIReg), AI diplomacy (AIDip), and global AI governance (GAIG). The specification of the risk set helps identify whether the probability of GAIG being selected increases relative to the other three solutions as domestic policy debates evolve. However, if covariates are equally directed to the receivers, the coefficients reflect the simultaneous impacts of those covariates on the conditional intensities for all four solutions, rather than indicating a change in the central government's preference for the specific GAIG solution.

Accordingly, this article treats the time-varying covariates as alternative-specific covariates (McFadden 1972), effective only for GAIG and fixed at zero for the other solutions, using a receiver mask. This approach is equivalent to interacting the covariates with an indicator of the candidate alternative, which has been discussed and adopted in the conditional logit literature (Perry and Wolfe 2013; Stadtfeld and Block 2017). A parameter H (days) was used to set the memory for historical events; 90 was adopted as the main-effect value, with $H \in \{180, 365\}$ used for robustness checks. H was applied both as the parameter for time windows when calculating covariates and as the half-life parameter for REMs.

Various factors (i.e., covariates) can influence network behaviours. There are two main categories of covariates that come from inside and outside the network, which are network effects and exogenous covariates, respectively (refer to Table 2 for covariate categories and interpretations). Network effects include inertia, the sender's outdegree preference, the receiver's indegree preference, and the participation shift (psABXY) (Butts 2008). Exogenous covariates comprise two types. First, frequency (i.e., the number of times one concept is mentioned by an actor group within the time window) describes the actor group's belief preference. Second, coalition share (i.e., the proportion of actor groups within the coalitions) is used to measure an actor group's standing within inter-coalition debates.

This article mainly focuses on two debates: first, the DCB debates between techno-nationalism and techno-globalism, and second, the PCB debates surrounding preferences for various policy solutions, including AICap, AIReg, AIDip, and GAIG. To analyse these debates, this article created actor congruence networks and identified corresponding advocacy coalitions regarding both DCB and PCB debates within each time window, using the Louvain community detection method (Blondel et al. 2008; Leifeld 2013). The data of clustered coalitions allowed us to extract the share of actors from each actor group within each advocacy coalition.

Table 2. Covariates in REMs.

Covariates	Explanations
Network Effects	
inertia	To measure repeat events (from *remstats*)
outdegreeSender	To measure sender popularity (from *remstats*)
indegreeReceiver	To measure receiver attraction (from *remstats*)
psABXY	To measure participation shift (from *remstats*)
Actor-Level: Frequency	
Frequency ([Actor] _DCB)	The difference of the actor's mention counts between techno-globalism over techno-nationalism in the time window of *H* days
Frequency ([Actor] _PCB)	The difference of the actor's mention counts between AICap, AIReg, or AIDip solutions over GAIG in the time window of *H* days
Coalition-Level: Coalition Share	
CoalitionShare ([Actor] _DCB)	The difference of the actor's quantity portion in the techno-globalist coalition over the techno-nationalist coalition in the time window of *H* days
CoalitionShare ([Actor] _PCB)	The difference of the actor's quantity portion in the AICap, AIReg, or AIDip coalitions over the GAIG coalition in the time window of *H* days
Subsystem-Level: Debate	
POL_DCB	The absolute value of the difference between the two coalitions' portions of tie numbers in the time window of *H* days
LR_DCB	The Log-Ratio between the tie numbers of techno-globalism over the tie numbers of techno-nationalism in the time window of *H* days
ENT_PCB	To measure the issue dispersion degree at the PCB level based on the Shannon Entropy (Cover and Thomas 2005)
HI_PCB	To measure the issue concentration degree at the PCB level based on the Herfindaln-Hirschman Index (Hall and Tideman 1967)
LR_PCB_[AICap, AIReg, AIDip]	The Log-Ratio between the tie numbers of AICap, AIReg, AIDip solutions over the tie numbers of GAIG in the time window of *H* days

Additional indicators were used to measure the two-dimensional policy debates within the time window across the entire policy subsystem. The first indicator is the belief relative advantage, which assesses the volume advantage of specific concept groups mentioned by all actors compared to competing concepts within the time window. In the DCB dimension debate, the Log-Ratio (LR) calculates the volume advantage of techno-globalism over techno-nationalism, while in the PCB-dimension debate, LR measures the advantages of the three competing solutions (AICap, AIReg, and AIDip) over GAIG. The second indicator describes the polarisation (POL) of DCB-level debates, which is the absolute value of the difference in frequency proportions in which the two DCBs are mentioned within the time window. POL measures the differentiation degree between the two coalitions; values closer to 1 indicate a higher degree of polarisation in the discussion. The third set of indicators measures the dispersion and concentration of PCB-dimension debates. The Shannon Entropy is adopted to calculate the issue dispersion degree (Cover and Thomas 2005; Shannon 1948), while the Herfindaln-Hirschman Index calculates issue concentration (Hall and Tideman 1967; Hirschman 1964). The values of some covariates have been scaled and centred.

For modelling purposes, covariates at different levels were added successively to test the hypotheses. First, we established a baseline Model 0 (M0) that includes only the network effects. The purpose of M0 is to capture network memory and set a foundation for further comparisons. Since M0 does not include external covariates, this allows us to observe the additional effects introduced by new covariates in Models 1 to 3. Second, to test H1, Model 1 (M1) incorporated the central government's preferences regarding the two DCBs and included macro-DCB debate indicators for control. To reflect the central government's preferences, M1 calculated the difference between the central government's frequency and coalition share towards the two DCBs. Third, for H2, Model 2 (M2) added the influence of non-central-government actor groups into M1. Fourth, targeting PCB-dimension debates, Model 3 (M3) incorporated macro debate indicators for PCB and the preference polarity of each actor group for each solution. The empirical results of the model are interpreted in the next section.

For the software implementation, this article mainly used a series of R packages for REMs developed by the Tilburg Network Group. The *remify* package was used to establish REM-specific data objects 'reh' (Arena et al. 2025), while the *remstats* package calculated the network effects under attenuated memory and the exogenous covariates (Arena, Meijerink-Bosman, et al. 2025). Lastly, the *remstimate* package was employed to maximise the log-likelihood based on the intensity function (Arena, Lakdawala, Meijerink-Bosman, et al. 2025).

Empirical Findings

Table 3 reports the REM results for Models 0-3. In the baseline Model 0, inertia, outdegreeSender, and indegreeReceiver are all positive and significant, whereas psABXY shows significant negative effects. The directions and significance of the four variables remain consistent across Models 0–3. The results indicate that China's AI policy debates display clear path dependence: active actors tend to remain active, popular concepts tend to continue attracting attention, existing actor-concept connections are more likely to recur, and entirely new combinations are relatively rare. Therefore, policy discussion related to AI in China is not a random diffusion of public opinion, but is a policy subsystem shaped by stable professional actors, established issue structures, and institutionalised discourse paths.

Model 1 examines whether the central government's own expressions of DCB affect its selection of GAIG. The results show a significant positive relationship between the central government's own techno-globalist expression and its subsequent likelihood of selecting GAIG. This finding supports H1, indicating that when the central government uses techno-globalist discourse more frequently, it is more likely to connect the statement to global AI governance rather than other policy options such as AICap, AIReg, or AIDip. In other words, within the central government's own discourse, GAIG is an important policy realisation of techno-globalism. However, the other DCB-level variables in Model 1 are significantly negative.

Table 3. REM results of Models 0–3 (selected, refer to Appendix 2 for the full table).

Coefficient	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
baseline	−8.581***	−8.766***	−10.393***	−9.872***
	(0.057)	(0.072)	(0.270)	(0.580)
inertia	20.769***	29.095***	29.911***	30.283***
	(1.904)	(2.082)	(2.067)	(2.069)
outdegreeSender	11.314***	9.696***	9.413***	9.242***
	(0.599)	(0.631)	(0.628)	(0.629)
indegreeReceiver	11.564***	10.089***	9.845***	9.761***
	(0.260)	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.293)
psABXY	−1.966***	−1.958***	−1.944***	−1.974***
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.061)
Frequency		0.282***	−0.619***	
(CentralGov_DCB)		(0.083)	(0.152)	
CoalitionShare		−0.064**	−0.021	
(CentralGov_ DCB)		(0.020)	(0.037)	
Debate		−16.713**	−35.063***	
(LR_ DCB)		(5.388)	(6.667)	
Debate		−0.040***	−0.080***	
(POL_ DCB)		(0.012)	(0.014)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			−0.180***	
(LocalGov_DCB)			(0.049)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			0.099*	
(ThinkTank_DCB)			(0.046)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			0.101***	
(Academia_DCB)			(0.015)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			−0.087**	
(TechCompany_DCB)			(0.032)	
Debate				−11.022***
(LR_ PCB_AIReg)				(4.617)
Debate				14.029***
(LR_ PCB_AICap)				(4.094)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.495***
(LocalGov_PCB_AIDip)				(0.094)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.592*
(LocalGov_PCB_AICap)				(0.270)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.664***
(ThinkTank_PCB_AIDip)				(0.149)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.311***
(ThinkTank_PCB_AIReg)				(0.089)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.378*
(Academia_PCB_AIReg)				(0.171)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.067***
(TechCompany_PCB_AICap)				(0.028)
Chi-square	8656.283	8894.445	8983.046	9073.965
AIC	20874.83	20644.67	20564.07	20497.15
BIC	20901.18	20692.09	20632.57	20628.89

*$p < 0.05$ **$p < 0.01$ ***$p < 0.001$.

The relative embedding degree of the central government in the techno-globalist discourse coalition, the discourse advantage of techno-globalism over techno-nationalism at the subsystem level, and the polarisation degree of DCB discussions do not increase the central government's likelihood of selecting GAIG, but rather are associated with its decrease. This result indicates that the probability that the central government selects GAIG does not simply depend on whether the entire policy subsystem supports techno-globalism more strongly, nor on whether the central government holds a higher relative position in the globalist discourse coalition. More precisely, the central government's own techno-globalist expression is linked to GAIG, but the macro-level advantage of techno-globalism in the broader discursive environment does not automatically translate into a preference for GAIG. This provides preliminary evidence for H2 (DCB-PCB decoupling): techno-globalism (DCB) as a public discursive consensus does not have a natural correspondence with GAIG (PCB) as a concrete policy solution.

Model 2 further reveals how different actors interpret techno-globalism differently. The results show that techno-globalist discourse from think tanks and academia has a significant positive effect on the central government's selection of GAIG. This means that knowledge-based actors are more likely to translate techno-globalism into policy agendas related to rules, ethics, safety, standards, and global governance, and are therefore closer to rule-based engagement. By contrast, the coefficients for local governments and technology companies are negative. This indicates that when these two types of actors jointly increase their expressive intensity and coalition embeddedness in techno-globalist discourse, the central government becomes more likely to turn to non-GAIG policy solutions.

This result supports H2 and further shows that domestic actors do not form a unified techno-globalist coalition promoting GAIG. Rather, techno-globalism functions more like an umbrella discourse: different actors can use it in public discourse, but they operationalise it through different policy pathways. Think tanks and academia are more likely to translate techno-globalism into a global governance agenda, whereas local governments and technology firms are more likely to connect it to capacity-building, industrial development, market expansion, and technological competitiveness. Notably, after the effects of non-central actors are added, the coefficient of the central government's own DCB frequency changes from significantly positive in Model 1 to significantly negative. This suggests that, in Model 1, the effect of the central government's frequency of techno-globalist expression was mixed with the influence of other actors, especially knowledge-based actors, and was not an independent effect. The central government's techno-globalist discourse is more likely to be selectively operationalised within different domestic policy signals.

Model 3 moves the analysis to the PCB level and is the key model for understanding where contestation occurs within China's AI policy subsystem. At the subsystem level, the more prominent AIReg is relative to GAIG, the less likely the central government is to express a preference for GAIG. This suggests that domestic regulatory agendas, such as legal frameworks, ethical review, safety regulation, and institutional arrangements, may compete with global governance agendas for policy attention. By contrast, when AICap is more prominent relative to GAIG, the likelihood that the central government expresses a preference for GAIG increases. This result indicates that, within China's AI policy subsystem, capacity-oriented agendas and rule-based participation in global governance are not binary opposites; rather, they have a certain complementary relationship. Global AI governance is not a purely normative agenda, but a strategic governance project built on technological, industrial, infrastructural, and developmental capacity.

At the actor level, local-government AIDip discourse is significantly negatively associated with the central government's preference for GAIG, whereas local-government AICap discourse is significantly positive. This suggests that local governments do not primarily promote GAIG through diplomatic discourse. Rather, they provide foundations for the central government's global AI governance agenda through capacity-building pathways, such as industrial ecosystems, local AI infrastructure, pilot zones, laboratories, and application scenarios. Think tanks display a different pathway. Think tanks' AIDip discourse has a significant positive effect on GAIG, indicating that think tanks are better able to connect AI diplomacy to international rules, standards, institutions, and China's normative role in global AI governance, thereby transforming it into a global governance agenda.

However, think tanks' AIReg discourse has a negative effect, and academia's AIReg discourse shows a similar pattern. This suggests that, although knowledge-based actors are more supportive of GAIG at the DCB level, when their discussion concentrates on ethics, law, and regulation, the relevant discourse may first reinforce domestic governance agendas rather than directly increase the central government's attention to GAIG. Technology companies' AICap discourse significantly reduces the central government's preference for GAIG. This result indicates that, in public discourse, tech companies' capacity-building discourse is more likely to direct policy attention towards industrial capacity agendas such as technological competitiveness, market expansion, open-source ecosystems, supply chains, and product standards, rather than towards GAIG as a rule-based global governance solution. Tech companies' global engagement is therefore more oriented towards industrial and innovation capacity than towards rule-based global governance.

Viewed from the PCB level, the same policy solution can have different effects when promoted by different actors. This indicates that the effects of PCBs are strongly channel specific. AIDip is negatively associated with GAIG in local governments' discourse but positively associated with GAIG in think tanks' discourse, suggesting that think tanks are better than local governments at translating AI diplomacy into rule-based participation in global AI governance. AICap displays a similar difference: local governments' AICap discourse increases the probability that the central government selects GAIG, whereas technology companies' AICap discourse decreases it. This suggests that local governments' capacity-building discourse is more likely to be incorporated into the central government's considerations of global governance capacity, whereas tech companies' capacity-building discourse is more likely to be linked to industrial competition and technological autonomy.

Overall, Model 3 supports H3. The main contestation within China's AI policy subsystem is not concentrated at the level of explicit DCB opposition but is reflected in how different actors map similar DCB expressions onto different PCB solutions. AICap and GAIG are complementary at the macro level, AIReg competes with GAIG for the central government's policy attention, and AIDip significantly promotes GAIG only when advanced by particular actors, especially think tanks. Local governments tend to shape the foundations of capacity-based engagement through AICap discourse; think tanks tend to promote rule-based GAIG through AIDip discourse; AIReg discourse from academia and think tanks may pull attention back towards domestic regulation; and technology firms' AICap discourse is more oriented towards industrial competition and technological capacity-building, reducing the central government's likelihood of selecting GAIG.

Concluding Remarks

This article has examined how China's domestic AI policy debates shape its dual approach to global AI governance, characterised by both rule-based and capacity-based engagement. It argues that this duality does not reflect policy inconsistency, but rather the outcome of differentiated policy operationalisation by multiple actors in a shared discursive environment. At the level of DCBs, techno-globalism enjoys high visibility and broad acceptance within China's AI policy discourse, largely due to its compatibility with official diplomatic language. However, the study finds that this shared discourse does not translate into uniform policy solutions, instead, a decoupling emerges between DCBs and PCBs. While the central government tends to operationalise techno-globalist discourse through global AI governance (GAIG), other actors interpret and translate the same discourse into alternative policy solutions at the PCB level.

Specifically, techno-nationalist imperatives do not primarily appear as explicit opposition to techno-globalism. Rather, they are embedded in solution-level claims related to AI capacity-building (AICap), technological self-reliance, industrial development, infrastructure construction, and standards influence. As a result, policy differentiation occurs not at the level of whether actors support global cooperation, but in how techno-globalism is operationalised into concrete policy solutions.

The empirical analysis further demonstrates that the central government functions as a strategic calibrator in this process. Rather than simply follow the overall direction of domestic policy debates, it selectively absorbs, filters, and recombines policy signals from different actors. Knowledge-based actors, such as think tanks and academia, emphasise rules, ethics, safety, and standards. Local governments contribute through experimentation and the development of industrial and infrastructure capacity. Technology companies anchor global engagement in market expansion, technological competitiveness, open-source ecosystems, and supply-chain capacity. Consequently, China's participation in global AI governance should be understood not as purely cooperative or purely nationalist, but as a strategic combination of rule-shaping and capacity-building. This dual pathway reflects the integration of diverse policy inputs into a coherent, state-led governance strategy.

This article contributes to three strands of literature. First, it advances the study of China's AI policy process by showing that global AI governance preferences are not produced solely through top-down decision-making, but emerge from the central government's selective integration of domestic policy debates. Second, it extends the application of the ACF in the Chinese context by demonstrating that, in a managed discursive environment and relatively unitary subsystem, policy contestation shifts from deep core belief competition to the interface between DCBs and PCB solutions. Third, it contributes to the study of strategic technology governance by highlighting the importance of domestic policy processes in shaping global governance behaviour. Rather than relying on dichotomies such as 'state-led' verse 'market-led', this perspective emphasises how diverse actors jointly shape global governance pathways through discourse, expertise, and resources.

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Appendices

Appendix 1. List of Encoded Policy Beliefs

Goal.

Deep Core Belief.

Techno-globalism.

Techno-nationalism.

To dominate international AI competition.

To obtain global industrial influence.

To obtain global technological influence.

To obtain global regulatory influence.

To challenge the US technological leadership.

Promote the capacity of original AI innovation (AICap).

Promote the capacity of AI regulation (AIReg).

Promote the capacity of AI diplomacy (AIDip).

Promote engagement in global AI governance (GAIG).

Perception.

China's AI industry enjoys world-class competitiveness.

AI innovation should benefit the whole world.

Core AI technologies are crucial to national security.

China's AI market has enormous potential.

Key AI technologies are constrained by Western countries.

China's fundamental R&D capacity is weak.

AI can help China lead international competition.

China's AI R&D strength is rapidly improving.

AI will reshape global industrial chains.

Globalisation helps China gain access to international markets.

International technological cooperation benefits China's AI development.

AI talent training should be globalized.

There is a talent gap with the United States.

AI competition revolves around technological leadership.

There is a technological gap with the United States.

Ethical governance is crucial for international AI governance.

China has data advantages for developing AI.

AI competition revolves around the race for talent.

AI security risks are global in nature.

Managing cross-border data flows poses huge challenges.

Globalized cooperation helps enhance the influence of Chinese enterprises.

The lack of core technologies leads to sanctions.

The globalisation of AI supply chains is accelerating.

China lacks sufficient capacity for international technological cooperation.

China lacks core AI products with international competitiveness.

Influence on AI standards can enhance China's global technological discourse power.

AI standardisation is conducive to open-source development.

AI development requires forging a global industry consensus.

Global AI governance needs to be more just and equitable.

China's AI ethics and laws lag behind.

China's lagging AI standards undermine its international competitiveness.

China's AI innovation ecosystem is less advanced than that of the United States.

AI governance requires the participation of all countries.
AI will widen the digital divide.
European and American countries attach great importance to AI ethics and law.
There are difficulties in coordinating global AI governance.
There is a regulatory gap between Europe and the United States.
AI systems have inherent security problems.
AI competition revolves around the power to define standards.
Data governance needs to be globalized.
Cross-border data flows are the foundation of international AI cooperation.
International mainstream standards are controlled by the West.
AI regulation can accelerate technological development.
Telling China's science and technology story well helps enhance the national image.
AI competition revolves around the protection of data sovereignty.
AI competition revolves around intellectual property protection.
U. S. technological protectionism.
AI competition revolves around computing power.
China and Europe and the United States differ in their approaches to technology governance.
Cooperation among countries within a region helps AI development.
AI competition revolves around the right to formulate international rules.
Action.
Hosting global conferences in the field of AI.
Participating in global conferences in the field of AI.
Attracting AI-related talent from around the world.
Strengthening independent development of key components and technologies.
International cooperation on AI technology R&D.
Promoting data sharing and flows.
Improving the legal system related to AI.
Integrating into global AI industrial chains.
Accelerating the improvement of computing power.
Integrating AI cooperation with the Belt and Road Initiative.
Strengthening the protection of data sovereignty.
Building leading international AI enterprises.
Formulating high-quality national AI standards.
Promoting international technology mergers, acquisitions, and transfers.
Building Chinese AI brands.
Playing a leading role in formulating international standards.
Cooperation on developing international standards.
Building an AI developer community with global influence.
International cooperation on ethical AI governance.
Building an independent copyright system.
Strengthening exports of AI technologies to neighbouring countries.
Establishing AI-related incubators overseas.
Playing a leading role in formulating international ethical norms.
Cooperation on global AI safety governance.
AI products meet international standards.
Strengthening intergovernmental dialogue on AI.
Safeguarding the security and stability of global AI industrial chains.
Taking the lead in setting the international agenda.
Providing regional AI infrastructure.

Establishing a new international AI organisation.
Strengthening regulation of overseas AI services.
Helping Global South countries strengthen their AI capabilities.
Enhancing the representation of Global South countries in global AI governance.

Appendix 2. Full Table of REM Results

Table A1. Full Table of REM result.

Coefficient	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
baseline	−8.581***	−8.766***	−10.393***	−9.872***
	(0.057)	(0.072)	(0.270)	(0.580)
inertia	20.769***	29.095***	29.911***	30.283***
	(1.904)	(2.082)	(2.067)	(2.069)
outdegreeSender	11.314***	9.696***	9.413***	9.242***
	(0.599)	(0.631)	(0.628)	(0.629)
indegreeReceiver	11.564***	10.089***	9.845***	9.761***
	(0.260)	(0.291)	(0.291)	(0.293)
psABXY	−1.966***	−1.958***	−1.944***	−1.974***
	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.061)	(0.061)
Frequency		0.282***	−0.619***	
(CentralGov_DCB)		(0.083)	(0.152)	
CoalitionShare		−0.064**	−0.021	
(CentralGov_ DCB)		(0.020)	(0.037)	
Debate		−16.713**	−35.063***	
(LR_ DCB)		(5.388)	(6.667)	
Debate		−0.040***	−0.080***	
(POL_ DCB)		(0.012)	(0.014)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			−0.180***	
(LocalGov_DCB)			(0.049)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			0.099*	
(ThinkTank_DCB)			(0.046)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			0.101***	
(Academia_DCB)			(0.015)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare			−0.087**	
(TechCompany_DCB)			(0.032)	
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−21.638
(CentralGov_PCB_AIDip)				(126470.000)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.805
(CentralGov_PCB_AIReg)				(486510.000)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				19.981
(CentralGov_PCB_AICap)				(361860.000)
Debate				−0.005
(ENT_ PCB)				(0.024)
Debate				−0.041
(HI_ PCB)				(0.033)
Debate				−0.042
(LR_ PCB_AIDip)				(1.618)
Debate				−11.022***
(LR_ PCB_AIReg)				(4.617)
Debate				14.029***
(LR_ PCB_AICap)				(4.094)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.495***
(LocalGov_PCB_AIDip)				(0.094)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.092
(LocalGov_PCB_AIReg)				(0.118)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.592*
(LocalGov_PCB_AICap)				(0.270)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.664***
(ThinkTank_PCB_AIDip)				(0.149)

(Continued)

Table A1. (Continued).

Coefficient	Model 0	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.311***
(ThinkTank_PCB_AIReg)				(0.089)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.128
(ThinkTank_PCB_AICap)				(0.107)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.072
(Academia_PCB_AIDip)				(0.076)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.378*
(Academia_PCB_AIReg)				(0.171)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.044
(Academia_PCB_AICap)				(0.048)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.034
(TechCompany_PCB_AIDip)				(0.055)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				0.012
(TechCompany_PCB_AIReg)				(0.126)
Frequency * CoalitionShare				−0.067***
(TechCompany_PCB_AICap)				(0.028)
Chi-square	8656.283	8894.445	8983.046	9073.965
AIC	20,874.83	20,644.67	20,564.07	20,497.15
BIC	20,901.18	20,692.09	20,632.57	20,628.89