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China's Artificial Intelligence Ambitions

*Since Artificial Intelligence (AI) was written into China's national strategy in March 2017, the AI industry has rapidly progressed. It has nurtured a new generation of information technology focussing on high-end equipment, biological medicine, new energy vehicles, new materials, and other emerging industries, writes Prof. Dr. **Dingding CHEN** of Jinan University's Institute for 21st Century Silk Road Studies in Guangzhou. Dingding will be one of the speakers at the upcoming [stars China symposium 2019](#).*

In reporting in China on the country's "Two Sessions," a new anchorwoman "Xin Xiaomeng" was seen. She is a virtual anchor created through the application of artificial intelligence technology. "She" is the first artificial intelligence virtual female anchor in the world, with real anchor of Xinhua News Agency Qu Meng serving as her prototype. She was jointly created by China's Xinhua News Agency and Sogou. "Her" partner, "Xin Xiaohao," upgraded from "sitting upright" to "standing upright," broadcast the content of the Two Sessions with gestures and other body language.

The extensive use of AI virtual anchors in the reporting on the "Two Sessions" exactly reflects the importance attached by the Chinese government to the application of artificial intelligence technology and the support of the AI industry.

This year marked the third time that Chinese Premier Li Keqiang has mentioned the development of the AI industry in his government report during the "Two Sessions." Compared with the expressions of the previous two years, we saw the inclusion of statements such as "speed up the artificial intelligence technology research and transformation" and "strengthening the research and development of a new generation of artificial intelligence application."

This year's government work report is putting more emphasis on deepening research and the application of big data and artificial intelligence industries to nurture a new generation of information technology that includes high-end equipment, biological medicine, new energy vehicles, new materials, and other emerging industries.

The report also focused on the upgrading of intelligent manufacturing and traditional industries separately, emphasizing the expansion of AI to enable the transformation of the manufacturing industry. In general, Li's government work report adhered to the principle of innovation-led development and emphasized the reform, innovation, and research and development of science and technology and industrial application mechanisms. Such positioning is in line with China's strategic plan on AI since 2017.

The National People's Congress (NPC) standing committee also included legislative items closely related to artificial intelligence in its five-year legislative plan, such as the digital security law, the personal information protection law, and the revision of the law on scientific and technological progress. It also included legislation on artificial intelligence in research projects and conducted in-depth investigations and demonstrations on relevant legal issues.

Chinese tech giants who had representatives at the “Two Sessions” have submitted proposals related to the smart industry in their respective fields of focus. Liu Qingfeng, deputy to the NPC and the Chairman of Xunfei, believes that 2019 is the year for the large-scale application of artificial intelligence, and that it is necessary to promote the construction of artificial intelligence infrastructure and build an open platform for the world.

Robin Li, chairman and CEO of Baidu and a member of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC) national committee, said a coordinated intelligent transportation system should be built, an electronic medical record management system should be improved, and artificial intelligence ethics should be strengthened. Wang Xiaochuan, a member of the CPPCC national committee and CEO of Sogou, proposed to focus on artificial intelligence and medical care to unleash the potential of digital family doctors. Zhou Hongyi, a member of the CPPCC national committee and chairman and CEO of 360 Group, has brought three proposals this year. Security issues are still the focus of his attention, mainly involving the construction of a national network security brain, intelligent vehicle network security, artificial intelligence security risks, and other hot topics.

Two points can be taken from all this. First, leading enterprises in the development of artificial intelligence in China are focusing on different AI applications and have less direct competition with each other. Second, these enterprises are promoting the overall soundness of China's AI industry by promoting the development of their fields of concern.

In March 2017, AI was written into the 2017 Government Work Report for the first time, officially entering the national strategy. In July of the same year, the state council issued a development plan for a new generation of artificial intelligence, which clearly defined AI as an important national development strategy in the future and defined the strategic goal of “three steps.” The 2018 government work report proposed to “make emerging industrial clusters bigger and stronger, implement the big data development action, and strengthen the research and application of the new generation of artificial intelligence.” Based on the importance and focus of AI in the 2019 government report and its emphasis by NPC and CPPCC deputies, China is increasingly and firmly practicing its AI strategy. The application of AI technology should become a new way to improve people's livelihood, rather than a means of strategic competition.

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This article, in a slightly different form, co-authored by Hengyi YANG, has first been published on 18 March 2019 on [THE DIPLOMAT](#).

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