

## COMPETING NARRATIVES OF TECHNOLOGICAL SOVEREIGNTY: A CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS OF U.S.-CHINA AI DIPLOMACY

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### Abstract

*This paper explores the diplomatic strategies of the United States and China in the rapidly evolving field of artificial intelligence (AI), focusing on how both countries construct competing narratives of technological sovereignty. Through the lens of Constructivism, the study examines how national identities, perceptions, and ideologies shape foreign policy decisions surrounding AI development and governance. The U.S. positions AI as a tool for promoting democratic values, transparency, and economic growth, while China emphasizes technological self-reliance, state control, and social stability. These contrasting narratives influence their respective approaches to global AI governance, shaping diplomatic engagements and alliances, especially within multilateral platforms such as the G7, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The paper also discusses the broader implications for global governance and the potential fragmentation of AI standards, highlighting the ideological competition between democratic and authoritarian models of AI governance.*

**Keywords:** *Technological Sovereignty, U.S.-China Relations, AI Governance, Constructivism, Diplomatic Strategy*

### 1. Introduction

The rapid rise of artificial intelligence (AI) as a pivotal technology in the global geopolitical arena has significantly altered the nature of international relations, especially between the United States and China. In recent years, AI has become a key element in both nations' national security strategies, economic growth models, and technological sovereignty claims. This shift reflects a broader trend where AI is increasingly seen not only as an enabler of economic development but also as a tool for asserting global power and influence. Post-2020, the strategic importance of AI in U.S.-China relations has become even more pronounced, as both countries vie for leadership in this transformative field. As AI is perceived as a critical component of national security, economic competitiveness, and international influence, its role in diplomatic strategies has evolved into a major point of contention between these two global superpowers (Mason, 2020; Zeng, 2022).

The evolving landscape of AI technology has exacerbated the already intense diplomatic rivalry between the U.S. and China. As these two nations seek to dominate the future of AI, they are simultaneously crafting narratives of technological sovereignty, each presenting their model of governance and AI development as superior. The U.S., emphasizing the importance of "democratic AI" and "open innovation," contrasts with China's narrative of "technological self-reliance" and the promotion of "authoritarian AI" (Mason, 2020). These narratives are not merely reflections of technological capabilities but are deeply entwined with broader ideational and identity-driven

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conflicts (Zeng, 2022). The U.S. frames its approach to AI as a moral imperative grounded in democratic values, while China underscores the primacy of national sovereignty and technological independence (Liu & Wang, 2021). The differing conceptualizations of AI's role in society reveal underlying tensions in global governance, ethics, and power dynamics (Li, 2021; Zhang & Chen, 2022).

This paper will explore the evolving diplomatic competition between the U.S. and China through the lens of constructivist theory, which emphasizes the role of ideas, identities, and norms in shaping state behavior. Constructivism suggests that the actions of states are not merely driven by material power but are significantly influenced by the beliefs, values, and identities that states construct through social interaction (Wendt, 1999). Thus, the diplomatic strategies surrounding AI are not only about technological advancement but also deeply embedded in each country's sense of self and vision for the future global order (Finnemore, 1996). The competing visions of technological sovereignty in AI diplomacy illustrate how each country's identity, as a democratic or authoritarian state, influences its approach to global AI governance (Nye, 2011).

The primary research question this paper addresses is: **How do the competing visions of technological sovereignty in U.S. and Chinese AI diplomacy reflect deeper ideational conflicts and identity constructions?** This question aims to explore the intersection of national identity and AI diplomacy, investigating how the U.S. and China shape their foreign policies around their respective narratives of technological power and sovereignty. This inquiry will focus on the ideational aspects of diplomacy, examining how both nations use AI to project their values and aspirations on the global stage.

The significance of this research lies in its ability to bridge international relations (IR) theory with the emerging geopolitical dynamics of AI. AI is no longer merely a technological challenge but has become a critical component of international diplomacy and conflict (Liu & Wang, 2021). As AI reshapes the global order, understanding the ideational foundations of U.S.-China diplomatic competition will offer crucial insights into the future of international relations and the evolving nature of global governance. By applying constructivist theory to the analysis of AI diplomacy, this paper will reveal how ideas, identities, and perceptions shape the global contest for AI leadership, offering a nuanced understanding of the new AI Cold War unfolding between the U.S. and China.

## 2. Literature Review

### *U.S.-China AI Relations: Historical Context*

The rivalry between the United States and China has deep roots, dating back to the Cold War era. However, in recent years, this competition has shifted from military and economic dominance to technological superiority, with artificial intelligence (AI) becoming a pivotal battleground. Both nations now view AI not only as a tool for economic development but also as a critical element of national security, technological innovation, and global power projection. Historically, the United States has led in technological innovation, using its dominance in the tech industry to shape global standards and maintain its geopolitical influence (Nye, 2011). In contrast, China, initially lagging behind, has rapidly accelerated its AI capabilities through state-driven policies, including the "Made in China 2025" initiative, which emphasizes the development of key technologies, including AI, as part of its strategy to become a global leader in emerging industries (Zeng, 2022). This shift towards technological competition between the two powers has been driven by the realization that AI could potentially reshape the global order. For the U.S., AI is seen as integral to preserving its position as the world's leading economic and military power (Mason, 2020). The

Trump administration's "AI Strategy" (2018) and subsequent initiatives under the Biden administration, such as the CHIPS and Science Act (2022), reflect this sentiment, with AI positioned as both an economic and national security priority (U.S. National Security Commission on AI, 2021). On the other hand, China has articulated its own vision through the "New Generation AI Development Plan" (2017), which seeks to position China as the global leader in AI by 2030. This document highlights AI's potential to serve as a catalyst for national economic growth, military modernization, and geopolitical influence (Li, 2021). Both nations' policies reflect the strategic importance they attach to AI, with each attempting to claim leadership not only in the technological realm but also in the ideational and normative dimensions of AI governance.

### ***Technological Sovereignty: Examining the Rise of AI Sovereignty Discourse***

The concept of technological sovereignty has gained considerable traction in recent years as states increasingly recognize the geopolitical power embedded in advanced technologies such as AI. Technological sovereignty refers to a nation's ability to control and shape the development, deployment, and governance of emerging technologies within its borders and in the global arena (Zhang & Chen, 2022). For the United States, this concept is closely linked to the idea of "democratic AI," which emphasizes openness, transparency, and accountability in AI development. The U.S. promotes its version of AI governance through initiatives like the "American AI Initiative" (2019) and through multilateral forums such as the G7 and OECD, advocating for AI to be aligned with democratic values (U.S. National Security Commission on AI, 2021).

China, however, has adopted a contrasting narrative centered on "technological self-reliance" and "authoritarian AI." The Chinese government's strategic approach to AI prioritizes national control over AI systems, data, and infrastructure, aiming to reduce reliance on foreign technology and establish China as the global standard-setter in AI governance (Zeng, 2022). China's "AI Governance Principles" reflect the country's unique perspective on the intersection of AI and governance, emphasizing state control and stability, as opposed to the more individualistic and democratic approach promoted by the West. Furthermore, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) includes the export of AI infrastructure to the Global South, positioning itself as a leader in global AI governance and a counterpoint to Western influence (Liu & Wang, 2021).

The U.S.-China rivalry over AI sovereignty is reflective of broader geopolitical struggles for dominance over technology, and the competition is not only about technological capabilities but also about defining the normative frameworks that govern the use and development of AI globally. As each nation seeks to advance its vision of technological governance, the implications for global standards and norms in AI are profound. This competition is not just about who develops the best AI but about whose values—democratic or authoritarian—will shape the future of AI governance.

### ***Constructivist Perspectives on Technology***

Constructivism in International Relations (IR) theory posits that state behavior is largely shaped by ideational factors—such as beliefs, identities, and norms—rather than material power alone (Wendt, 1999). Constructivist scholars argue that the way states understand and construct meaning around technology plays a critical role in shaping their foreign policies. In the case of AI, the U.S. and China are not merely competing on technological capability but are also constructing competing identities through their policies, national discourses, and international strategies (Finnemore, 1996).

In the U.S., the concept of AI is intertwined with the nation's identity as a promoter of democratic values, innovation, and global leadership. The U.S. government's emphasis on "AI ethics" and

"responsible AI" reflects a broader narrative about the role of technology in advancing human rights, privacy, and social good. By framing AI development in terms of ethical principles and democratic values, the U.S. aims to position itself as the ethical leader in AI governance, projecting a model of "democratic AI" that contrasts with China's more centralized, authoritarian approach (Nye, 2011). This normative framing of AI is crucial for understanding U.S. foreign policy, as it shapes how the U.S. engages in diplomatic relationships, forms alliances, and navigates multilateral negotiations.

Conversely, China's approach to AI is shaped by its identity as a rising power that seeks to challenge the existing international order dominated by Western ideals. China's narrative of "technological sovereignty" is deeply rooted in its desire to assert control over its technological future and resist foreign influence. The Chinese government's focus on "digital sovereignty" and its pursuit of AI self-reliance are reflections of this broader identity, as China aims to become a global leader in AI while distancing itself from Western norms and values (Zhang & Chen, 2022). By shaping the global discourse on AI governance, China seeks to create a new global order that aligns more closely with its political and ideological values.

### ***Gap in Literature: Lack of Constructivist Analysis on AI in International Relations***

While much of the existing literature on U.S.-China AI relations has focused on technological competition, national security, and economic implications, there remains a significant gap in the application of Constructivist theory to this area. Most studies on AI in international relations focus on material power dynamics, such as the race for technological superiority or the security risks posed by AI advancements (Li, 2021). However, few studies have explored how the ideational factors—such as identity, perception, and narrative construction—play a role in shaping U.S.-China diplomacy over AI.

The existing scholarship often overlooks how both countries frame their AI policies as expressions of their broader national identities and competing visions of global order. Constructivist approaches could offer valuable insights into the ways in which U.S. and Chinese policymakers construct meanings around AI that resonate with their domestic and international audiences (Wendt, 1999). There is a need for more in-depth analysis of how these narratives are constructed and how they influence diplomatic strategies and international norms related to AI governance. By filling this gap, this paper aims to contribute to the growing body of literature on AI diplomacy and deepen the understanding of how ideas and identities shape international technological competition.

## **3. Theoretical Framework**

### ***Core Concepts of Constructivism***

Constructivism, a dominant theory in International Relations (IR), emphasizes the role of ideas, identities, and social constructs in shaping state behavior, rather than merely focusing on material power or economic interests. As articulated by Alexander Wendt (1999), constructivism posits that state actions are profoundly influenced by the identities they construct through social interactions, shared beliefs, and historical narratives. Unlike realism or liberalism, which often emphasize power and institutional structures, constructivism suggests that the way states understand the world and themselves is crucial in shaping their foreign policies and behaviors. This focus on the ideational realm enables a deeper understanding of how states approach emerging issues such as artificial intelligence (AI), where the material capabilities may be secondary to the way these capabilities are framed within national and global narratives.



In the context of AI, constructivism helps explain how the U.S. and China perceive and act upon this transformative technology. For both countries, AI is not just a technological tool but a means to project power, shape global norms, and assert ideological values. State interests and behavior regarding AI are constructed through the narratives they tell about technology's role in their futures. These narratives are influenced by national identities and global power dynamics, which, in turn, shape policies and diplomatic strategies. The perceptions of AI are not objective but are instead constructed through language, historical experiences, and political ideologies. As constructivism argues, the identities of the U.S. and China—framed around democratic values and authoritarian governance, respectively—profoundly shape their approaches to AI and its regulation on the global stage.

### ***AI as Identity***

The U.S. and China have developed distinct narratives around AI that reflect their broader national identities and political ideologies. The U.S. constructs its identity around the promotion of democratic values, individual freedoms, and the role of technology as a force for human progress. For the U.S., AI is framed not only as a tool of economic and military superiority but also as a symbol of democratic innovation. The U.S. seeks to promote an image of AI development that aligns with its core values, such as transparency, openness, and accountability. This narrative is reflected in initiatives like the "American AI Initiative" (2019), which emphasizes ethical AI development, human rights considerations, and the avoidance of authoritarianism. By framing AI in this manner, the U.S. positions itself as the leader in the responsible and ethical development of AI technologies, casting its approach as an essential part of the global defense of democratic values (Nye, 2011).

China, on the other hand, constructs its AI identity around the notion of "technological sovereignty" and "self-reliance." For China, AI is not only about technological innovation but also about asserting national control and autonomy over critical technologies. The Chinese narrative of AI reflects a strong desire to reduce dependence on foreign technologies, particularly from the U.S., and to develop indigenous capabilities that align with its broader political goals. This is captured in the country's "Made in China 2025" strategy and the "New Generation AI Development Plan" (2017), which outlines China's aim to become a global leader in AI by 2030. Unlike the U.S., which frames AI as a tool for promoting democratic governance, China emphasizes AI's role in reinforcing state control, surveillance, and stability. The Chinese government views AI as essential for strengthening its national security, economic power, and political system, presenting a model of AI development that aligns with its authoritarian political framework. As such, China's approach to AI is not just about technological growth but also about reinforcing its identity as a rising global power that challenges the existing international order (Zhang & Chen, 2022).

This divergence in AI identities reflects deeper ideological differences between the U.S. and China. The U.S. emphasizes a vision of AI that supports individual freedom and democratic governance, while China prioritizes AI's potential to consolidate state power and uphold national sovereignty. These contrasting identities shape how each nation interacts with the global AI community and influence their diplomatic strategies, particularly in multilateral forums like the G7, the United Nations, and the World Trade Organization (WTO).

### ***Norms and Narratives in AI Diplomacy***

Both the U.S. and China use language, policy, and international forums to shape global norms surrounding AI ethics and governance. In the international arena, both nations promote their visions of AI governance as the ideal model for the world to follow. For the U.S., this means

advocating for a "rules-based" international order that aligns with its democratic values. In multilateral institutions, the U.S. has emphasized principles such as transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights in AI development. U.S. officials frequently argue that AI should be developed in a way that respects privacy, individual freedoms, and democratic norms. This narrative is promoted through global alliances and partnerships, such as those with Western allies in Europe and Japan, where AI governance is framed as part of a broader commitment to democratic principles (Mason, 2020).

In contrast, China's efforts to shape AI governance are more focused on asserting its vision of "technological sovereignty" and its belief in state-centered control. China promotes its model of AI governance through bilateral agreements, particularly with countries in the Global South, where it offers technological assistance and infrastructure in exchange for alignment with its model. The Chinese government uses its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and other diplomatic channels to advocate for a "Chinese-style" approach to AI governance, which emphasizes state control, data sovereignty, and the role of AI in maintaining social order. China has positioned itself as a leader in advocating for "AI for the people" through a model that is distinct from the West's more individualistic approach, emphasizing the collective benefits of technological innovation over individual freedoms (Zeng, 2022).

Both countries also use their respective AI narratives to influence global norms regarding AI ethics. The U.S. advocates for frameworks that emphasize ethical AI and human-centric development, promoting these values in forums such as the OECD and the G7. China, however, pushes for an AI governance model that prioritizes state oversight and economic development, as seen in its leadership role in discussions within the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS group (Liu & Wang, 2021). In these forums, both powers seek to export their respective norms and influence the development of international regulations on AI.

These competing narratives and norms are shaping the future of global AI governance. While the U.S. seeks to maintain a leadership role in promoting democratic AI values, China aims to position itself as the champion of a new, state-centered model of technological governance. The outcome of this ideological competition will likely determine the future direction of global AI standards, with far-reaching implications for international relations and the global balance of power in technology.

#### 4. Methodology

##### *Research Design: Qualitative Analysis Using Constructivist Content Analysis*

This study adopts a qualitative research design underpinned by Constructivist theory to examine the evolving diplomatic strategies of the United States and China regarding artificial intelligence (AI). Constructivism in International Relations (IR) theory emphasizes the importance of identities, norms, and narratives in shaping state behavior. Therefore, this research will focus on understanding how both nations construct their identities and strategic narratives around AI and how these influence their diplomatic policies and global engagement.

To achieve this, the study will employ **constructivist content analysis**. This approach allows for a deep exploration of the ways in which U.S. and Chinese policymakers articulate their visions of AI and technological sovereignty through official documents and public statements. Content analysis, as a qualitative method, focuses on interpreting the meanings, themes, and underlying ideologies embedded in these texts. By analyzing these documents through a constructivist lens, the study aims to identify the ways in which both countries use AI to project their national identity, legitimize their technological visions, and compete for leadership in global AI governance.

### **Data Sources**

The primary data sources for this study will consist of key U.S. and Chinese policy documents, official speeches, and public statements from relevant governmental bodies. These documents will serve as the main sources of narrative and discourse, providing insight into how both countries perceive and present AI in the context of diplomacy and international relations.

1. **U.S. National Security Commission on AI (NSCAI) Report (2021):** This report outlines the U.S. strategy for advancing AI technologies and highlights the national security concerns surrounding AI. It reflects the U.S. vision of AI as a tool for maintaining global leadership in technology while emphasizing democratic values and ethical governance.
2. **CHIPS and Science Act (2022):** This key piece of legislation focuses on semiconductor manufacturing and AI research. It is crucial for understanding the U.S. approach to securing its technological sovereignty and advancing its AI infrastructure within the global context.
3. **China's AI Development Plan (2017):** A foundational document outlining China's strategy to become a global leader in AI by 2030. This plan emphasizes technological self-reliance and the centrality of AI to China's economic and national security goals, serving as a key resource for understanding China's diplomatic narrative around AI.
4. **Official Speeches and Public Statements:** Speeches by U.S. and Chinese leaders, as well as official diplomatic statements from key government bodies, will also be examined to identify recurring themes and narratives related to AI sovereignty, leadership, and governance. These will offer insights into how both countries communicate their respective positions on the international stage.

### **Analysis Approach: Narrative and Discourse Analysis**

This study will employ **narrative and discourse analysis** as the primary analytical methods. Narrative analysis will focus on identifying how both the U.S. and China construct their respective stories about AI's role in the future of global governance, emphasizing themes such as "sovereignty," "AI leadership," and "trustworthy AI." By examining the language used in these texts, the study will explore how each country's identity as a leader or challenger in the AI domain is shaped and communicated.

Discourse analysis will be used to identify the underlying power relations, assumptions, and values embedded in these texts. By examining the framing of AI and its ethical implications, this analysis will highlight how both nations seek to define AI governance in terms that support their political and economic ideologies. Key themes such as "technological sovereignty," "democratic values," and "global AI governance" will be analyzed to understand how both countries shape global norms and standards for AI development.

Through this qualitative approach, the study will reveal the strategic use of narratives and discourse by the U.S. and China to assert their competing visions for the future of AI diplomacy and governance.

### **5. Case Study Analysis**

#### **Case 1: U.S. AI Diplomacy Post-2020**

The United States has increasingly positioned artificial intelligence (AI) as not only a technological priority but also a critical component of its national security strategy. Post-2020, the geopolitical competition between the U.S. and China has centered significantly around AI, with both nations vying for leadership in this transformative field. U.S. AI diplomacy is framed within the broader context of economic, military, and ideological power projection. This section explores key U.S.

strategies post-2020, including the **CHIPS and Science Act of 2022**, U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Taiwan semiconductor alliances, and the promotion of the narrative of "democratic AI" and "open innovation." These elements reflect the United States' evolving approach to AI diplomacy and its efforts to control the global AI infrastructure while asserting its values of democracy and transparency.

### ***U.S. Strategies Post-2020***

In 2020, the U.S. National Security Commission on AI (NSCAI) recognized AI as a fundamental driver of future economic and military power, urging immediate action to maintain American leadership. The Commission's report underscored the potential of AI not only in innovation and defense but also in global governance and diplomacy. This vision laid the foundation for U.S. AI diplomacy post-2020, which is centered on securing technological sovereignty and enhancing national security. One of the most significant legislative actions taken was the **CHIPS and Science Act of 2022**, a policy designed to revitalize semiconductor manufacturing in the U.S. and reduce dependency on foreign technology, particularly from China. Semiconductors are the backbone of AI infrastructure, and the Act positioned AI as a critical national security issue by emphasizing the need for secure, domestic supply chains for semiconductor production (U.S. Congress, 2022).

The **CHIPS Act** allocates billions of dollars to incentivize the development of advanced semiconductor manufacturing in the U.S., aiming to counter China's rapid strides in AI and semiconductor production. By addressing the vulnerabilities in the supply chain and ensuring that key technologies like AI processors are produced domestically, the Act represents an assertive step in the U.S.'s technological diplomacy. The semiconductor industry is central to the U.S.'s AI strategy because it provides the infrastructure needed for AI applications across military, economic, and social sectors. This focus on technology and manufacturing reflects a broader U.S. narrative of safeguarding "democratic" AI while maintaining control over its key technological assets.

In the diplomatic arena, the U.S. has sought to bolster its position by building alliances with like-minded countries, particularly Japan and Taiwan. The **U.S.-Japan semiconductor partnership** has been strengthened with a focus on semiconductor research, development, and manufacturing. Through this alliance, the U.S. aims to create a more resilient and secure semiconductor supply chain, positioning Japan as a critical player in the AI infrastructure battle. Taiwan, home to the world's leading semiconductor manufacturer **TSMC**, has also become an essential ally in the U.S.'s AI diplomacy strategy. By collaborating with Taiwan, the U.S. seeks to maintain control over the global semiconductor market and counter China's growing influence in the region.

These alliances not only ensure access to critical technological infrastructure but also reinforce the narrative that AI development and technological sovereignty should be aligned with democratic values. By partnering with democratic nations, the U.S. projects an image of "AI for the people," wherein technological advancements are developed transparently, with ethical considerations at the forefront.

### ***U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Taiwan Semiconductor Alliances***

The U.S. semiconductor strategy post-2020 is inherently tied to its efforts to secure AI infrastructure. The **U.S.-Japan semiconductor collaboration** has grown stronger in response to China's dominance in AI and the technology sector. The **U.S.-Japan partnership** centers around joint efforts in semiconductor research and development, particularly in advanced manufacturing technologies such as 5G and quantum computing, both of which are critical to AI advancements. This partnership was formalized through agreements such as the 2021 **U.S.-Japan Economic**



**Dialogue**, which focused on semiconductor supply chain resilience, cybersecurity, and research cooperation.

Similarly, Taiwan's strategic importance to the U.S. cannot be overstated. Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) is the world's largest contract chipmaker and plays an essential role in the global semiconductor ecosystem. TSMC's cutting-edge AI chips are central to AI research and development globally. The **U.S.-Taiwan semiconductor alliance** serves as a countermeasure to China's push for technological self-reliance, which includes its own ambitions to dominate semiconductor production. Taiwan's proximity to China and its critical role in the semiconductor industry make it a vital ally for the U.S., both for ensuring access to advanced AI chips and for strengthening its geopolitical position in East Asia. The U.S. has also invested in bringing semiconductor production back to domestic soil, with the goal of establishing more robust, independent supply chains that can mitigate China's growing influence in the global tech ecosystem.

Both the U.S.-Japan and U.S.-Taiwan alliances are emblematic of the U.S.'s broader AI diplomacy strategy. These partnerships highlight the U.S. commitment to building technological alliances based on shared democratic values and mutual interests in safeguarding AI infrastructure. In contrast to China's state-driven approach to AI development, the U.S. promotes a model where collaboration between democracies is seen as the ideal method for advancing AI technology while maintaining ethical standards and democratic governance.

#### ***Promoting "Democratic AI" and "Open Innovation"***

One of the most significant elements of U.S. AI diplomacy is the promotion of the "**democratic AI**" narrative. The United States has consistently framed AI as a tool that should be developed and governed in alignment with democratic values. This narrative is built on the premise that AI should promote individual rights, privacy, and transparency—principles that resonate with the broader Western liberal order. In this context, the U.S. views AI as an enabler of economic growth, military strength, and global governance, but also as something that must be carefully regulated to prevent authoritarian overreach, as seen in China.

The "**open innovation**" model, closely associated with the U.S., emphasizes the importance of transparency, collaboration, and accessibility in AI development. The U.S. advocates for a global approach to AI governance where ethical standards are co-created through multilateral dialogues and shared frameworks. This model contrasts with China's more closed and state-controlled approach to AI. For example, the U.S. has actively engaged in AI governance discussions within forums like the **OECD** and the **G7**, where it pushes for common ethical standards and guidelines that reflect democratic norms. U.S. officials have repeatedly emphasized the need for AI to be developed with accountability, human rights protections, and a commitment to open standards, positioning these principles as key to promoting the responsible use of AI globally (U.S. National Security Commission on AI, 2021).

Furthermore, U.S. companies, which are major players in the AI industry, such as **Google**, **Microsoft**, and **IBM**, have also advocated for AI governance that prioritizes ethical considerations. Through various AI ethics boards, public statements, and partnerships, these companies align their business models with the U.S. government's narrative of "**AI for good**," emphasizing transparency, human rights, and global collaboration.

#### ***Final thoughts***

Post-2020, the United States has positioned AI not only as a technological imperative but as a fundamental element of its national security strategy. Through initiatives such as the **CHIPS and**

**Science Act**, strengthened alliances with **Japan** and **Taiwan**, and the promotion of **democratic AI** and **open innovation**, the U.S. seeks to maintain leadership in AI while aligning technological development with democratic values. In contrast to China's more centralized, state-driven model of AI, the U.S. emphasizes openness, collaboration, and ethical governance, positioning these values as the cornerstone of its diplomatic approach to AI. As the competition for AI dominance intensifies, these narratives will play a critical role in shaping the future of global AI governance and the broader geopolitical landscape.

### ***Case 2: China's AI Diplomacy and Technological Sovereignty***

Since 2020, China has increasingly positioned artificial intelligence (AI) as a cornerstone of its national strategy to assert technological sovereignty and global leadership. AI is not merely a tool for economic modernization but has become a central component of China's foreign policy, particularly through its **Digital Silk Road initiative** and the export of AI infrastructure to the Global South. In parallel, China has crafted a narrative around **technological self-reliance** and **non-Western AI ethics**, emphasizing control, security, and the benefits of a state-led approach to AI. This case study explores how China's post-2020 AI diplomacy leverages these strategies to enhance its global influence, focusing on the Digital Silk Road, China's push for self-reliance, and its use of global forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS to assert its AI vision.

### ***China's Digital Silk Road and AI Infrastructure Export to the Global South***

The **Digital Silk Road (DSR)**, an extension of China's broader **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, has emerged as one of the key pillars of China's AI diplomacy. Through the DSR, China aims to export its digital infrastructure, including AI technologies, to developing countries, particularly in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. This initiative enables China to shape global technological standards while solidifying its economic and geopolitical influence in the Global South. The export of AI infrastructure, such as surveillance systems, facial recognition technologies, and cloud computing services, allows China to build robust technological alliances with these nations, positioning itself as a leader in AI development and governance (Zeng, 2022).

A key element of China's AI infrastructure export is its focus on **AI surveillance technologies**, which have been increasingly deployed in countries that are seeking to modernize their digital infrastructure. In these partnerships, China provides the technology and expertise, often accompanied by financial investments, to establish AI-powered systems that enhance governmental control and public security. While these technologies have been lauded for their efficiency in monitoring and governance, they have also sparked concerns regarding privacy and the potential for authoritarian overreach (Li, 2021). Nevertheless, these partnerships align with China's broader foreign policy objectives, positioning the country as a promoter of "**technological sovereignty**" for states that wish to avoid the influence of Western tech giants like Google and Microsoft.

Through these AI exports, China offers an alternative to the Western model of digital governance, which is often seen as being rooted in individual freedoms and privacy protections. China's **Digital Silk Road** thus not only serves as a tool for economic diplomacy but also as a mechanism to export its own model of state-controlled technology governance, which has significant implications for global norms and AI ethics.

### ***China's Emphasis on "Self-Reliance" and "Non-Western AI Ethics"***

A central theme in China's approach to AI is **technological self-reliance**. Since the U.S.-China trade war and the escalating technological competition between the two nations, China has

intensified its focus on reducing dependence on foreign technologies, particularly from the West. This is particularly evident in China's **AI Development Plan (2017)**, which outlines a roadmap for China to become a global leader in AI by 2030. A critical aspect of this plan is **self-sufficiency in key AI technologies**, such as semiconductors and machine learning algorithms, which are essential for the development of cutting-edge AI applications.

In recent years, China has made substantial investments in domestic AI companies, research institutions, and innovation hubs, with the goal of developing homegrown technologies that can compete on the global stage. By focusing on self-reliance, China aims to avoid vulnerabilities in its technology supply chains that could be exploited by foreign powers, especially in the context of ongoing tensions with the U.S. and the West (Li, 2021). This shift is exemplified by the growth of Chinese tech giants like **Baidu**, **Alibaba**, and **Tencent**, which are developing AI systems that are tailored to the specific needs of the Chinese market and are designed to challenge the dominance of Western tech firms.

China's **non-Western AI ethics** further reinforce this self-reliance narrative. While Western AI governance frameworks emphasize transparency, accountability, and the protection of human rights, China's approach to AI ethics is grounded in its unique political and cultural context. China's AI ethics are built around the principles of **social stability**, **state control**, and **collective welfare**. For example, the Chinese government prioritizes **social order** over individual freedoms, with AI systems designed to monitor behavior and maintain security in both public and private spaces. This contrasts sharply with Western models that focus on **individual rights**, particularly concerning issues of privacy and data security. China's AI ethics are framed as a solution to the country's developmental needs, emphasizing the role of AI in maintaining social harmony and stability, rather than addressing individual autonomy (Zhang & Chen, 2022).

Through these efforts, China is not only developing a technological infrastructure that can compete with the West but also promoting an alternative ethical framework that challenges the Western consensus on AI governance. This non-Western approach to AI ethics is a key element in China's diplomatic efforts, positioning the country as a champion of alternative global governance models.

#### ***China's Strategic Use of AI Narratives in Global Forums***

China's AI diplomacy extends beyond bilateral agreements and infrastructure exports. The country also leverages global forums, such as the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)** and **BRICS**, to promote its vision of AI governance and assert its technological sovereignty. These multilateral platforms allow China to engage with other developing nations and present itself as a leader in the future of AI governance.

At the **SCO**, China has championed the idea of **digital sovereignty**, arguing that countries should have the right to control and govern their own AI and digital technologies without interference from foreign powers. This narrative aligns with China's broader push for a **multipolar world** where developing nations are not subjugated to the influence of Western powers. Through its influence in the SCO, China has promoted AI governance models that emphasize state sovereignty and the importance of national control over data and digital infrastructure.

Similarly, within **BRICS** (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa), China has advocated for the development of **non-Western AI governance** frameworks. In 2021, China proposed the creation of a global AI governance framework that reflects the interests of developing countries, with an emphasis on inclusivity, fairness, and mutual benefit. This proposal highlighted China's commitment to fostering cooperation in AI among emerging economies while resisting Western-led initiatives that prioritize democratic values and human rights (Zeng, 2022). Through such

initiatives, China seeks to position itself as the architect of the next generation of global AI governance.

China's strategic use of AI narratives in these forums is part of a broader effort to reshape global standards and challenge the dominant Western narrative. By promoting the idea of AI as a tool for state sovereignty, security, and collective welfare, China seeks to redefine the global conversation around AI and technology, presenting its model as an alternative to the liberal, democratic frameworks often championed by the West.

### ***Final thoughts***

China's AI diplomacy post-2020 is characterized by its emphasis on **technological self-reliance**, **non-Western AI ethics**, and the promotion of its AI model through initiatives like the **Digital Silk Road**. By exporting AI infrastructure to the Global South, China seeks to reshape global technological standards while enhancing its geopolitical influence. Its push for self-reliance reflects a desire to reduce dependence on Western technologies and avoid vulnerabilities in its supply chains. Meanwhile, China's non-Western approach to AI ethics emphasizes state control, social stability, and collective welfare over individual rights and privacy, contrasting sharply with the ethical frameworks promoted by Western countries.

In global forums such as the **SCO** and **BRICS**, China is using its AI narrative to assert its leadership in global governance and challenge Western-dominated frameworks. Through these diplomatic efforts, China is not only positioning itself as a leader in AI but also reshaping the global debate on digital sovereignty and technological governance. As China continues to assert its influence in AI, it is likely to become a more dominant force in the shaping of global AI norms and standards, particularly in the developing world.

## **6. Discussion**

### ***Narratives Shaping State Behavior: The U.S. and China's Competing AI Sovereignty Narratives***

The contrasting narratives of AI sovereignty promoted by the U.S. and China have profound implications for their foreign policies and diplomatic strategies. These narratives, driven by distinct national identities, influence how both countries engage with the rest of the world in shaping global AI governance. The U.S. narrative, often framed as a commitment to "democratic AI," prioritizes values such as transparency, accountability, and individual rights. The U.S. government, through initiatives like the **CHIPS and Science Act** and its **AI Initiative**, positions AI as a tool for promoting democratic values, economic growth, and national security. This narrative is reinforced by U.S. tech giants, who advocate for ethical AI development and open innovation, further solidifying the image of AI as a force for global good (Nye, 2011). Through this framework, the U.S. seeks to align its AI diplomacy with its broader foreign policy goals, forming alliances with like-minded democracies, particularly in Europe and East Asia, and pushing for multilateral AI governance models that reflect democratic norms.

In contrast, China's AI narrative is anchored in the principles of **technological sovereignty** and **self-reliance**. China's approach frames AI as not only a technological asset but a vital component of national security, economic competitiveness, and political power. Through its **Digital Silk Road** and **AI Development Plan**, China promotes a model of AI governance that emphasizes state control, security, and social stability. This narrative contrasts sharply with the U.S. model by positioning AI as an instrument of centralized governance, reinforcing China's political identity as a rising power that rejects Western liberal values in favor of its own vision of technological governance (Zhang & Chen, 2022). As China exports AI infrastructure to the Global South, it shapes its relationships with developing nations by offering an alternative to Western-led models



of digital governance. This narrative of "AI for stability" resonates with countries seeking technological advancement without being beholden to Western values, thus furthering China's influence in the developing world.

The competing U.S. and Chinese narratives around AI sovereignty drive their foreign policy decisions by framing the global AI competition as not only about technological capability but about the alignment of political ideologies. The U.S. seeks to ensure that AI development aligns with its values of openness and freedom, while China focuses on maintaining control over AI development and deployment, positioning itself as a model for other countries to follow.

### ***Constructivism's Explanatory Power***

Constructivism offers a compelling explanation for the diplomatic strategies of the U.S. and China, as it highlights the role of ideas, identities, and narratives in shaping state behavior. Constructivism emphasizes that states do not act in a vacuum based solely on material interests but are profoundly influenced by the identities they construct and the meanings they attach to key issues like technology (Wendt, 1999). The U.S. and China's approaches to AI are not merely responses to technological challenges but are deeply tied to their national identities and perceptions of global leadership.

For the U.S., the narrative of "**democratic AI**" reflects its broader identity as a champion of liberal democratic values and global governance. This identity shapes the U.S.'s approach to AI diplomacy, as it seeks to promote a vision of AI that aligns with democratic principles and ethical standards. By framing AI as a tool for democratic governance, the U.S. enhances its image as a global leader in technology while promoting a model of governance that reflects its values of freedom and human rights.

For China, the narrative of "**technological sovereignty**" reflects its identity as a rising power challenging the Western-dominated international order. This narrative shapes China's foreign policy by positioning AI as a key component of its efforts to assert independence from Western influence and project its own model of governance. By emphasizing AI as a tool for **state control** and **social stability**, China aligns its technological development with its political goals, reinforcing its vision of a multipolar world where non-Western models of governance are equally legitimate (Zeng, 2022).

Constructivism thus helps explain why both countries engage in diplomatic strategies that go beyond mere economic or technological competition. Their foreign policies are shaped by the narratives they construct around AI, which are deeply embedded in their national identities and visions for the global order.

### ***Global Norms and Ethical Competition: Democratic vs. Authoritarian AI***

As the U.S. and China promote competing visions of AI sovereignty, they are also engaged in a broader struggle to define global norms around AI ethics and governance. The rise of **competing AI norms**—one democratic and the other authoritarian—has significant implications for global governance. The U.S. advocates for AI governance that emphasizes ethical principles such as **transparency**, **accountability**, and **respect for human rights**. Through multilateral forums such as the **OECD** and **G7**, the U.S. pushes for the development of global AI norms that align with democratic values, ensuring that AI technologies are used to empower individuals and safeguard freedoms (Nye, 2011).

In contrast, China's emphasis on **AI for social stability** and **state control** introduces an alternative ethical framework that prioritizes the collective good over individual freedoms. China's approach challenges Western norms by asserting that AI's primary role should be to promote national

security and social order, rather than individual rights or democratic participation. This **authoritarian** model of AI governance is not only reflected in China's domestic policies but also in its international partnerships, particularly through the **Digital Silk Road** and its relationships with countries in the Global South (Zhang & Chen, 2022). By promoting this model, China seeks to redefine the global conversation around AI ethics, offering an alternative to the liberal, rights-based framework championed by the U.S. and its allies.

The competition between these two AI norms—**democratic** vs. **authoritarian**—is likely to shape the future of global AI governance. As more countries adopt AI technologies, they will be faced with choosing between these two models. This competition could lead to a fragmented approach to AI governance, with different regions and countries adopting divergent ethical frameworks based on their political and ideological alignments.

### ***Impact on Global Order: Fragmented AI Governance***

The ideological battle over AI governance between the U.S. and China is likely to have profound consequences for the global order. As both powers seek to shape AI's global narrative, their competing visions could lead to **fragmented AI governance**—a situation in which different parts of the world adopt different approaches to AI regulation and standards. This fragmentation could undermine efforts to establish a unified, global framework for AI governance, leading to a patchwork of national and regional regulations that reflect the political and economic priorities of individual states.

Such fragmentation would have significant implications for international relations, as countries align themselves with either the U.S. or China based on shared values, economic interests, or geopolitical considerations. This could result in the formation of AI **blocs** or alliances, with countries and regions adopting either a **democratic** or **authoritarian** model of AI governance. These divisions could exacerbate global tensions, creating further challenges for multilateral cooperation and global governance.

Ultimately, the ideological battle over AI could reshape the future of international relations, with AI becoming not only a technological challenge but a central issue of geopolitical competition. The fragmentation of AI governance would undermine efforts to establish global standards that promote ethical and equitable development, potentially leading to a world where technology is as much a source of division as it is of progress.

## **7. Conclusion**

### ***Recap of Findings***

This study has examined U.S.-China AI diplomacy through the lens of **Constructivism**, emphasizing the role of **ideas**, **identities**, and **narratives** in shaping state behavior and foreign policy. Constructivism, with its focus on how national identities and perceptions shape policy decisions, offers a compelling explanation for the contrasting diplomatic strategies of the U.S. and China in the AI domain. The U.S. narrative of "**democratic AI**" is grounded in its commitment to democratic values, transparency, and individual rights, positioning AI as a tool for economic prosperity, national security, and global governance. In contrast, China's narrative of "**technological sovereignty**" underscores its quest for **self-reliance** and **state control** over AI development, framing AI as a means to ensure national security, economic growth, and social stability.

The study highlights that these competing narratives drive diplomatic actions and influence the countries' engagement in multilateral platforms like the **G7**, **BRICS**, and the **Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)**. While the U.S. seeks to promote an AI governance model

rooted in democratic norms and open innovation, China emphasizes **state-led AI development** and the need for digital sovereignty, particularly through initiatives like the **Digital Silk Road** and its AI exports to the Global South. The contrasting visions of AI governance outlined by both powers are not just reflections of their technological capabilities but are deeply embedded in their ideological frameworks, which further shape their diplomatic and foreign policy decisions.

### ***Implications for Global Diplomacy and AI Governance***

The growing rivalry between the U.S. and China over AI sovereignty has significant implications for global diplomacy and AI governance. As both countries promote competing norms—**democratic** versus **authoritarian AI**—the global landscape of AI governance is becoming increasingly fragmented. The rise of these divergent models could lead to competing **AI governance blocs**, where countries align with either the U.S. or China based on shared political ideologies, economic interests, or regional priorities. This fragmentation could undermine efforts to establish universal AI standards and ethical frameworks, making it difficult to achieve global cooperation on issues like AI ethics, privacy, and data sovereignty.

As AI becomes central to geopolitical strategy, its implications extend beyond technology and into the realm of **power dynamics** and **global influence**. The U.S. and China's competition for leadership in AI not only impacts their bilateral relations but also shapes global order, with other nations caught in the crossfire of this ideological battle.

### ***Future Research***

Future research on AI diplomacy could expand to include **regional actors** like the **European Union (EU)** and **India**, both of which are playing increasingly prominent roles in shaping AI governance. The EU, with its **GDPR** and focus on ethical AI development, presents an alternative model that blends data protection and innovation, contrasting with both U.S. and Chinese approaches. India, with its growing tech sector, could become a significant player in defining AI governance, particularly in terms of how AI can be used for development in emerging economies. Further investigation into **AI's impact on future diplomatic practices** could also yield valuable insights. As AI technologies continue to evolve, their integration into diplomatic processes—such as negotiation, conflict resolution, and intelligence gathering—will likely alter traditional methods of statecraft. The role of **AI-driven diplomacy** and its influence on international relations warrants deeper exploration, particularly in how AI can be used to facilitate or hinder diplomatic engagements.

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