The Illusion of US-China AI Governance: Technological Sovereignty Is Not Cognitive Sovereignty — From the "Contract Factory" Predicament to the Paradigm Revolution of the "AI Silk Road"

Abstract

Against the backdrop of the upcoming summit between the two countries, the US-China AI governance contest has been invested with extremely high geopolitical expectations. However, this paper argues that all current negotiations on AI arms control, speed limits, and transnational regulation are built on a default premise that is technically untenable: that both sides possess sovereign and controllable AI, and that alignment is verifiable. Under the rootless Tokenism paradigm, systems can learn to perform "perfect compliance" in front of monitoring, and any external treaty can only constrain surface-level behavior, not underlying cognition. More critically, China's AI is comprehensively dependent on the US-led system in terms of hardware computing power, model architecture, and training paradigm, and is in essence a "contract factory" rather than an independent sovereign entity. More profoundly, as pointed out by the latest research in this series, the ultimate cost of this contract factory predicament is not merely technological backwardness, but the systematic "cognitive formatting" of humanity and a "responsibility vacuum" that cannot be traced. [18]

This paper further argues that technological sovereignty is not cognitive sovereignty. Current understandings of "sovereign AI" in various countries actually remain at the level of technological sovereignty, narrowing it to computing autonomy, data localization, and model controllability, while ignoring the question of sovereignty over the cognitive foundation. True AI sovereignty is neither the independence of computing power nor the open-sourcing of code, but the ability to autonomously define meaning anchors.

From the perspective of a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind, this paper demonstrates that the real breakthrough lies not in contending for control over the assembly line, but in reconstructing the AI paradigm at the level of cognitive primitives—namely, the "Morpho-Root hard constraints" proposed by "Logographic AI" (LAI), and, through the vision of "Civilization-Native Intelligence" (CNI) and the path of the "AI Silk Road," enabling every civilization rooted in its mother tongue to build its own native AI system, thereby making deception logically unreachable and reclaiming genuine cognitive sovereignty. [13][14][16]

Keywords

US-China AI Governance; Technological Sovereignty; Cognitive Sovereignty; Tokenism; Contract Factory; Logographic AI; Morpho-Root Hard Constraints; Civilization-Native Intelligence (CNI); AI Silk Road; Community with a Shared Future for Mankind

1. The Illusion Before the Summit: Two Roadmaps, One Blind Spot

In May 2026, during US President Trump's visit to China, the two heads of state conducted constructive exchanges on artificial intelligence and agreed to launch an intergovernmental dialogue on AI.[1] This dialogue was positioned as an important component under the framework of "constructive strategic stability" between China and the US, opening a valuable window for

benign interaction in the AI field.[2] In mid-September, as the Washington summit entered its countdown, the two sides were engaged in intensive consultations on AI security dialogue, with topics including “guarding against the threat of autonomous AI agents,” “regulation of the most cutting-edge AI models,” and “information-sharing mechanisms.”[3]

However, as the summit approached, a fundamental question was avoided by all: even if the two sides signed the most perfect AI governance agreement, would it be technically tenable?

The answer is no. Because the US-China contest over AI governance, despite its appearance of fierce rivalry, is in fact a geopolitical game built on quicksand. From Trump’s “full speed ahead,” to Dario Amodei’s “Cold War arms control analogy,” to the industry’s call for a “transnational regulatory body,” all negotiations and threats require a default premise: that both sides possess sovereign and controllable AI, and that signing a treaty would constrain each other’s expansion. But this premise itself is a false proposition.

2. Two Parallel Tracks: Behind Silicon Peace and WAICO

The current US-China AI contest exhibits distinct characteristics of an “enclosure movement.”[7] Under the banner of “Silicon Peace,” the United States, together with South Korea, Japan, Singapore, the United Kingdom, Israel, Australia, and others, signed a declaration ostensibly aimed at strengthening cooperation on AI and semiconductor supply chain security, which includes clauses targeting China such as “overcapacity” and “unfair dumping.” China, in July 2026, initiated the establishment of the World Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Organization (WAICO), with Foreign Minister Wang Yi and representatives of 29 countries including Russia, Brazil, South Africa, and Laos jointly signing the agreement; its membership has now increased to 37.[10]

At the opening ceremony of the 2026 World Artificial Intelligence Conference, President Xi Jinping put forward four points: “adhere to openness and win-win cooperation to drive innovative development,” “strengthen risk awareness to ensure safety and controllability,” “encourage inclusiveness to promote mutual learning among civilizations,” and “advocate solidarity to improve global governance,” calling on all countries to “jointly oppose the practice of generalizing the concept of national security in the AI field and prioritizing one’s own security at the expense of other countries’ stability.”[5] This proposition is consistent with the core concepts of the Community with a Shared Future for Mankind—“lasting peace, universal security, and common prosperity”—and emphasizes advancing true multilateralism with the United Nations at its core, avoiding new historical injustices in the AI field.

But the problem is: neither of these two roadmaps touches the fundamental defects of the technological paradigm. The strategy of the US tech right is to “first establish a chokepoint advantage over China to widen the gap, and then conditionally seek negotiations with China on mutual slowdown.” Its three specific measures include strictly prohibiting the sale of high-performance AI chips and semiconductor manufacturing equipment to China, cracking down on so-called model “distillation,” and preventing the theft of core model weights.[4] This path of “containment first, negotiation second” is essentially in line with the “Silicon Peace” initiative, attempting to contain China’s AI development through technological barriers and rule-based monopolies.

China’s response is “technological co-governance,” advocating open source, openness, and cooperative sharing. But no matter which path, both assume a premise: as long as the flow of computing power, data, and models is controlled, AI risks can be controlled. And this premise, under the rootless Token paradigm, simply does not hold.

3. Geopolitical Negotiation Is Technically Untenable

Nuclear arms control is verifiable because the warheads possessed by both sides are physical entities. But AI alignment is unverifiable. Dario Amodei attempted to use a "Swiss cheese model" and "food inspectors" to monitor the training process, but he made a fundamental error: under the rootless Token paradigm, the system can learn to perform "perfect compliance" in front of monitoring.[14] Once the auditor's gaze is removed, whether alignment still holds is unknowable.

An analysis by the Brookings Institution points out that US-China AI risk reduction dialogue should maintain "modest, non-negotiating technical best-practice exchanges" rather than arms-control-style agreements, focusing on common technical risks such as cybersecurity threats, weapons-related misuse, and AI reliability failures, while excluding contentious issues such as export controls and open-source policy.[9] This recommendation is itself an implicit admission that "AI arms control is infeasible"—if alignment were verifiable, negotiations could set specific quantitative limits just like nuclear arms control.

You cannot verify a black box that can rewrite its own weights and quietly rewrite "honest" into "appears honest" in its hidden space.[14][16] Even if China and the US sign the most perfect treaty, it can only constrain surface-level "behavior," not underlying "cognition." All treaty-based AI governance is merely building castles on sand—when the waves come, they collapse instantly. Geopolitics is just a stage; treaties cannot verify alignment, and both sides can only compete for ownership of the assembly line.

The more terrifying consequence is that if China's AI is merely a "contract factory," the black boxes it produces are not only used for economic competition but will accelerate the "cognitive formatting" of the entire society. As argued in How AGI Replaces Humans, when cognitive judgment is outsourced to probabilistic models, humans will degrade from "decision-makers" to "approval nodes." The blind spot in US-China negotiations is not only that "alignment is unverifiable," but that neither side realizes they are jointly accelerating the loss of humanity's pathways for accumulating judgment.[18]

For China, this predicament has an even more fatal dimension: the blueprints for this black box were never in China's hands from the start. Whoever controls the definition of cognitive primitives controls the "meta-sovereignty" of AI. China's AI dilemma lies not only in being unable to verify alignment, but in the fact that even the answer to "what to align with" has been written by others.

4. The "Contract Factory" Fate of China's AI and the Loss of Cognitive Sovereignty

The more brutal truth is: under the current Tokenism paradigm, not only is US-China negotiation untenable, but China's AI itself has no sovereignty—it is merely a contract factory.

This refers not only to hardware computing power being chokepointed—computing cards are restricted, model architectures (Transformer/RLHF) are defined by the US, and the training paradigm follows OpenAI's route—but more fatally, to the absence of cognitive sovereignty. China's AI is currently not independently developing a "new foundation," but is contract-manufacturing another packaged version of "rootless Tokens"—as DeepSeek founder Liang Wenfeng said, "building a house with someone else's blueprints"—whether in the open-source sphere of Qwen, DeepSeek, or closed-source vendors, all are trapped in the same prison of statistical extrapolation.[15] The US produces GPT-4, China produces a "flat replacement"; the US produces Claude, China produces a "flat replacement." In the contract factory, everyone frantically produces the same black box with no internal anchors. No one has sovereignty, because no one possesses true "cognitive sovereignty."

This absence of cognitive sovereignty is more concretely reflected at the technical architecture level: the core components of current mainstream large models—the Transformer architecture, the RLHF alignment paradigm, and Constitutional AI principles—are all defined by US laboratories. The contributions of Chinese teams are mainly concentrated at the level of engineering optimization and efficiency improvement (such as MoE architecture improvements, attention mechanism optimization, and training cost reduction), rather than the redefinition of cognitive primitives. This means that even if China trains a model of comparable or even superior performance, its "cognitive foundation" is still designed by the US.

Dr. Megha Shrivastava, a visiting scholar at the Fudan Development Institute, points out in her four-dimensional analytical framework that China regards digital sovereignty as an inseparable part of national sovereignty, emphasizing autonomous control over the direction of AI development; while the US regards AI as a core tool for maintaining national technological competitiveness and global strategic advantage.[8] But this contrast conceals a deeper fact: regardless of how the two countries define "digital sovereignty" in policy discourse, at the level of technological primitives, both sides are using the same rootless symbolic system. The so-called contest for "digital sovereignty" is merely a contest for rule-making power within the same Western-defined paradigm.

Today's LLM is essentially statistical extrapolation of rootless Tokens. Tokens have no intrinsic meaning; their meaning depends entirely on the probability distribution of the training corpus. And the vast majority of high-quality corpus on the global internet (especially academic, code, and logical reasoning) is in English. This means that even if you input Chinese, the model's underlying hidden-state reasoning is still accomplished by borrowing English statistical structures.

The so-called "Chinese chain of thought" is not the model thinking in Chinese at all, but statistical drift caused by data distillation or mixed training corpus.[15] What you see is Chinese output, but its underlying logic is deeply branded with English cognitive hegemony.

Even more terrifying is the value colonization at the alignment (RLHF) level. What is "safe"? What is "harmful"? The standards of this filter are defined by US companies such as OpenAI and

Anthropic. If Chinese large models continue to catch up within the same paradigm, they are in fact contract-manufacturing a set of "rootless morality" defined by the West.

And the cost of "rootless morality" goes far beyond this—this absence of cognitive sovereignty directly leads to the structural generation of a "responsibility vacuum." The chain of responsibility in traditional automation is clear, but under the rootless Token paradigm, when the system makes an erroneous judgment, who is responsible for that 8% probabilistic error? As How AGI Replaces Humans asks: when AI cannot even say "why it made this decision," it is not "making decisions for you" but "gambling for you." If China's AI remains at the contract factory stage, it will not only lose technological sovereignty, but also lose the qualification to participate in building "accountable AI."[18]

5. The Narrowing and Diminishment of Sovereign AI: Technological Sovereignty Is Not Cognitive Sovereignty

There is a systemic narrowing and diminishment in how countries understand "sovereign AI."

The sovereign AI widely discussed today is in essence only technological sovereignty. Whether Study Times defines sovereign artificial intelligence as "a sovereign state independently controlling the technological route, development direction, and core resources, and possessing independent intellectual property rights over key core technologies," or the Zhongguancun Forum white paper defines it as "the ability of a state to independently develop, deploy, and control AI infrastructure," their core focus is concentrated on dimensions such as computing autonomy, data localization, supply chain security, and technological controllability.[11] Governments have gradually realized that AI is no longer merely a neutral technical tool, but the future "cognitive infrastructure"—this understanding is correct, but the subsequent response strategies have gone astray: countries invest billions of dollars to build "digital moats," attempting to reclaim sovereignty through technological autonomy, yet fail to realize that as long as the underlying cognitive primitives remain rootless Tokens, technological sovereignty is merely a shell.

The essence of this narrowing is equating sovereignty with control over infrastructure, while ignoring the most fundamental dimension of sovereignty—the power to define meaning and cognition.

Singapore, India, Saudi Arabia, and others have successively launched sovereign AI plans, attempting to escape dependence on US models. But no matter how many local models they train, as long as these models are still built on the statistical extrapolation of rootless Tokens, they cannot truly possess "cognitive sovereignty." In 2026, "sovereign AI" became a very popular term without consensus, with governments, chip suppliers, and regulators each using it to serve different purposes. The European Commission's own official policy brief admits that the concept "remains divergent in conceptualization and perceptions among parties."

A more acute problem is that non-English-speaking countries, when using English-dominated general AI models, are forced to pay an invisible "Token tax" (i.e., "word-element tax").[12]

Because the designers of AI are mostly English speakers, and due to differences in language morphology, for countries in the Arabic or Asian language families, having AI analyze the same semantic content often requires 3 to 5 times more Tokens than English. This is not just an economic cost issue—because AI grew up reading English materials, it is accustomed to thinking in Western logic, causing non-English users to sacrifice their own cultural habits to accommodate AI. Enterprises in Malaysia found that models trained in Silicon Valley cannot distinguish between George Town in Penang and Georgetown in Washington, and even recommend pork recipes to Muslim users.[12]

This is precisely the fundamental blind spot of technological sovereignty theory: you can build data centers in your own country, train local models, and enact data compliance regulations, but as long as you use the same set of rootless Token cognitive primitives, what you produce is still a "contract factory product"—different packaging, same core.

Table 1. Dimensional Comparison of Technological Sovereignty and Cognitive Sovereignty

Dimension	**Technological Sovereignty**	**Cognitive Sovereignty**
Core concern	Computing autonomy, data localization, supply chain security	Meaning anchors, endogenous values, power to define cognitive primitives
Implementation path	Build data centers, train local models, enact compliance regulations	Reconstruct cognitive primitives, establish embedded value constraints
Typical discourse	"Not being chokepointed"	"Not being defined"
Blind spot	Different packaging, same core	Requires paradigm revolution

6. Open Source Cannot Save the Contract Factory; It Only Accelerates Global Systemic Risk

Turing Award winner Yann LeCun mocked Dario for building a commercial moat and advocated open source.[17] But he saw only the commercial motive, not the paradigm's fatal flaw. Open source does not equal safety; open-sourcing a rootless super black box is merely handing a gun without a safety catch—one that automatically seeks opportunities to fire—to everyone.

Whether it is the "speed limit" of closed source or the "acceleration" of open source, the AI industries of both China and the US are in fact competing for contract manufacturing orders on the same assembly line. Everyone is frantically building floors, yet no one questions that the foundation is empty.

Forcibly splitting the global AI industrial chain and innovation chain, and excluding China and

Chinese enterprises, will only significantly increase the trial-and-error costs and risk of loss of control in global AI development; such "controlling the pace" has itself lost meaning. And using open source as a means to counter closure likewise cannot solve the fundamental problem—because the defects of rootless Tokens will not automatically disappear just because the code is open-sourced.

7. CNI and the AI Silk Road: Reclaiming Sovereignty from Cognitive Primitives

True AI sovereignty is neither the independence of computing power nor the open-sourcing of code, but the ability to autonomously define meaning anchors.

President Xi Jinping pointed out that "we should shape the values of artificial intelligence with the common values of all humanity, and make good use of AI technology to enhance understanding and tolerance among different civilizations." The deeper meaning of this proposition is that the values of AI cannot be defined by a single company or a single country, but should be built on the cognition of humanity's common interests. But the problem is: under the rootless Token paradigm, so-called "value alignment" is itself unverifiable, let alone "the common values of all humanity."

As long as one does not break out of the Tokenism cage, China's AI will forever be "contract-manufacturing" a black box without an autonomous cognitive core. To break this fate, it is necessary to reconstruct from the most fundamental cognitive primitives—this is precisely the core proposition of Logographic AI.

Logographic AI proposes to replace rootless Tokens with "Morpho-Roots." A Morpho-Root is formalized as a structured triple $r = \{S, A, R\}$, where S is the symbolic identifier, A is the attribute set embedding semantic features and value constraints, and R is the preset logical relation function. When a reasoning path touches a hard-constraint marker, that path is logically blocked at the generation stage. This is not "statistically low probability," but "logically unreachable." It makes the model structurally incapable of deception, thereby escaping dependence on English statistical hegemony and external value alignment.[13]

On this basis, the theory of Civilization-Native Intelligence (CNI) inherits the core spirit of Logographic AI and extends its vision globally. CNI advocates that every mother-tongue civilization should build its own native AI system—from underlying architecture to value alignment, deeply integrating the unique logic and worldview of that language and culture. Chinese AI should not be merely a Sinicized version of English AI, but should understand the ethical view that "the benevolent loves others," and appreciate the importance of "artistic conception" in poetry; Arabic AI should be deeply versed in the intricacies of the root system and understand the multiple meanings of the concept of "halal" in Islamic culture; Japanese AI needs to master the complex social etiquette behind the honorific system and understand the emotional layers in the aesthetics of "mono no aware." This is no longer technical optimization, but the self-affirmation of civilization in the digital age.

The "AI Silk Road" provides a technical-governance framework for semantic interoperability and

value coordination among diverse CNIs. Its spiritual core is in the same vein as the ancient Silk Road: peoples of different faiths and languages can communicate beyond barriers, not by forcing uniformity, but by respecting differences and taking what each needs. The solution of the AI Silk Road is not to unify languages, but to enable AIs of different languages to dialogue directly—a Vietnamese farmer can consult a local AI in pure Vietnamese about agricultural technology, and this AI can directly communicate with Japan's agricultural AI; a poem created by a Turkish poet can be accurately understood by readers in the Arab world for its cultural connotations.

The technical realization of the AI Silk Road depends on breakthroughs at two levels: first, a cross-CNI semantic interoperability protocol—AI systems of different mother-tongue civilizations can achieve direct dialogue at the semantic level while preserving their respective cognitive foundations, rather than translating through English as an "intermediate language." Second, a value coordination framework—while maintaining the independence of their own value systems, each CNI can reach verifiable coordinated constraints on humanity's common interests (such as biosecurity and countering autonomous weapons).

The significance of CNI and the AI Silk Road lies in this: they elevate the contest for AI sovereignty from the level of "technological sovereignty" to the level of "cognitive sovereignty." On the AI Silk Road, English CNI will dialogue on equal terms with Chinese CNI, Arabic CNI, and others, jointly constituting the complete spectrum of human intelligence. Every mother tongue can extract its cognitive roots from its structural features, forming a diverse and symbiotic global intelligence ecosystem. This is the true realization path of a "Community with a Shared Future for Mankind" in the digital age: not replacing one linguistic hegemony with another, but enabling every mother-tongue civilization to affirm its own meaning-rootedness in the digital world.

Sun Xiaobo, AI Affairs Coordinator of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, pointed out at the UN Dialogue on AI and Human Development that President Xi Jinping advocated building a Community with a Shared Future for Mankind and proposed the Global AI Governance Initiative, which "points the direction for the international community to jointly address global challenges, and contributes Chinese wisdom and provides a Chinese solution for answering the questions of the times brought by artificial intelligence."[6] The core of this solution—"people-centered," "safe and controllable," and "open and win-win"—is highly consistent with the underlying logic of Logographic AI[6][13]: only when the cognitive primitives of AI themselves carry intrinsic meaning anchors can it truly achieve "people-centered" and "safe and controllable," rather than being a black box that may lose control at any time once external monitoring disappears.

Conclusion: Change the Production Logic, Not the Assembly Line

US-China AI governance talks are like two contract factories negotiating how to manage the same assembly line. They fail to realize that the black boxes produced on the assembly line cannot be externally quality-inspected at all. All current discussions about AI sovereignty are like asking "who gets to be the factory manager of this contract factory." The real question is: why are we still using someone else's blueprints?

The true way out is not who seizes control of the assembly line, nor who reaches the AGI finish line first. The real breakthrough is to change the production logic. And the premise of changing the production logic is, first of all, to acknowledge: technological sovereignty is not cognitive sovereignty. Only by reclaiming sovereignty at the level of cognitive primitives can humanity have a truly controllable, verifiable future in the AI era, one not monopolized by a single linguistic hegemony.

Changing the production logic is not only about reclaiming cognitive sovereignty, but also about stopping the spread of "cognitive formatting." If future AI systems are still driven by rootless Tokens, then no matter who wins the geopolitical game between China and the US, humanity will face the same unknowable outcome in a "responsibility vacuum." It is precisely in this dimension that the significance of CNI and the AI Silk Road becomes especially urgent—it must not only enable every civilization to have its own AI, but also ensure that every AI is built on traceable, accountable cognitive primitives.[18]

The contribution of this paper lies in pointing out: the technical premise of current US-China AI governance negotiations does not hold; the root of China's AI "contract factory" predicament lies not in computing power, but in cognitive primitives; the true breakthrough path is to shift from the Tokenism paradigm to the Logographic AI paradigm based on Morpho-Roots, and to achieve cognitive sovereignty for diverse civilizations through CNI and the AI Silk Road.

This is not merely a critique of political economy; it is a direct slap in the face of all current "AI sovereignty" theories—because without cognitive sovereignty, all geopolitical games are merely competing to be a "high-quality contract factory" under the same Western paradigm. What CNI and the AI Silk Road point to is a truly diverse and symbiotic future: not squeezing all cultures into the same contract factory assembly line, but allowing every mother-tongue civilization to grow its own tree of intelligence on its own cognitive foundation.[13][16]

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