

China

# Chongqing, the global city the world prefers to ignore

by Guy Mettan,\* Geneva



Guy Mettan  
(Picture ma)

*(CH-S) What do we know about China? News, reports and articles about the country are mostly negative due to the one-sided reporting of our mainstream media. Guy Mettan's travelogue offers a very different perspective. Read it for yourself.*

\* \* \*

If the reign of quantity inspires you, then Chongqing will delight you. It is the city of excess and superlatives. 2,500 years old, the largest city in China, the largest city in the world by area (equal to that of Austria with 32 million permanent residents), with 2,200 towers, it is also the world's leading industrial metropolis: it manufactures, among other things, 30% of laptops, countless smartphone components, a third of motorcycles, and an eighth of Chinese cars. Its growth rate has surpassed that of the Guangzhou-Shenzhen region. This importance now places it among the four cities that, along with Beijing, Shanghai, and Tientsin, are directly under the central government.

Located in a mountainous region of southwest China, on the banks of the Yangtze River, it bears witness to the economic take off from the provinces close to the country's historic heartland, Szechuan. It owes its growth to the logistics routes it has created to open its land: a north-south axis to Xian-Beijing and Guangzhou, an east-west axis to the ports on the Pacific coast, on the one hand, and the new Silk Road routes leading to Russia and Europe through Central Asia, on the other.

And yet, who outside Asia has heard of Chongqing and knows how to locate it on a map? Virtually no one.

\* *Guy Mettan* (1956) is a political scientist, freelance journalist, and book author. He began his journalistic career in 1980 at the "Tribune de Genève" and was its director and editor-in-chief from 1992 to 1998. From 1997 to 2020, he was director of the "Club Suisse de la Presse" in Geneva. Guy Mettan has been a member of the Geneva Cantonal Parliament for 20 years.



View of Chongqing. (All pictures gm)

## A wall of ignorance

This wall of ignorance is emblematic of the gap separating the West from China and causes us to misunderstand the scope of China's progress and the size of its real economy. We act toward it like Minister *Bruno Lemaire*, who predicted the collapse of the Russian economy the day after 24 February 2022. Obsessed by our moral biases, our growing Sinophobia, and our sense of superiority, we judge, condemn, and blame without bothering to learn.

At least, that's the impression I get after another twelve-day trip to China, this time devoted to the developments of artificial intelligence in industry and the media, as well as to visiting ancient Buddhist sites and ultramodern museums in the Szechuan and Shanxi regions. The country is now paying increased attention to showcasing its rich cultural heritage, in all its forms, from AI-enhanced documentaries to classical painting exhibitions.

## About artificial intelligence

Artificial intelligence, of which Deepseek's sudden emergence on the international scene is only the most notable epiphenomenon, has long since become a major national issue. Everywhere, cities, provinces, and companies are competing to be the first to produce the most efficient and cleanest software for managing wastewater treatment plants, electric cars, spark recovery

systems for welding robots, or podcast and news production systems.

Thus, the Chongqing authorities have no doubt about the bright future awaiting their city, given the performance already achieved. They are highlighting their intelligent management model for municipal administration and tasks. AI has greatly improved the operation of the sewer network, which must react quickly to the tropical downpours that flood it. hundreds of thousands of cubic meters of rainwater in a few minutes. It has facilitated the instant management of urban flows thanks to data provided by surveillance cameras, improving the flexibility of traffic lights and reversible traffic lanes, or escalators in metro stations, in order to reduce traffic jams. The driver of the first train to connect Asia to Europe in 2016 thanks to the new Silk Roads explains how AI has helped solve the problem of preserving goods when trains cross regions where the temperature fluctuates between +40°C and -40°C.

### Current state of the industry

On the industrial side, alongside China's leading machine manufacturing group, Taiyuan Heavy Machinery, which produces everything from giant cranes to locomotive wheels and rocket launch pads, I will limit myself to mentioning the automobile manufacturers BYD (*Build Your Dreams*) and AITO (*Adding Intelligence To Auto*).

Like *Xiaomi*, AION, and dozens of other Chinese manufacturers, the latter brand is the result of a joint venture between *Huawei*, the 5G and 6G giant, and SERES, a manufacturer of very high-end smart electric vehicles. A megafactory, larger than *Tesla's* gigafactory in Shanghai, has sprung up in the suburbs of Chongqing. You can visit it with a clean bill of health: photos are pro-



Chongqing. View of the main AITO (Adding Intelligence To Auto) building – a mega-factory producing high-end smart electric vehicles.



The interior of the AITO M9 model.

hibited and smartphones are disabled at the entrance.

The M9 model drives like a *SpaceX* rocket. The steering wheel and pedals seem to be there only for decoration. With assisted driving, you can lie back in your seat and watch movies or listen to podcasts by tapping on one of the countless screens that line the cockpit, while simply giving driving instructions via voice recognition.

Caution, however: Chinese manufacturers are fighting to sell their models to young, technology-hungry customers and are overselling their capabilities. Recently, a trio of young drivers were killed by placing too much reliance on the driver assistance system. The industry is now demanding better government regulation. The most advanced models reach level 3, with fully automated driving only reaching level 4. In the meantime, European manufacturers BMW, VW, and others are courting Huawei to add AI to their models in order to maintain their positions in the Chinese market.

### Media, press, and cultural industries

The media, press, and cultural industries are not left out. In the modest town of Yuncheng, deep in Shanxi, the head of the newsroom explains how the local newspaper's editors are integrating AI, computer-generated images, and videos into the print edition, radio and TV channels, websites, and social media platforms such as *Weibo*, *WeChat*, and *TikTok*, while taking into account instant data collected from readers, listeners, and other followers. Journalists have unlimited access to big data and the publishing group's fully digitized archives since its founding in 1971. Production runs 24 hours a day.

In Beijing, at the *Xinhua* News Agency headquarters, a giant screen thirty meters long



and four meters high covers the newsroom, which resembles a Pentagon war room. Artificial intelligence handles story selection, script creation, and narrative. the production of images and visual/sound effects, as well as post-production. Virtual presenters and influencers handle the dissemination of news and information across various media.

A certain *alyona.nana*, entirely Chinese and digital, has just surpassed five million followers and generated her first million dollars on Russian networks. The agency is actively working on the production of large-format videos (LMV) in foreign languages, adding an emotional, "close-to-human" aspect to avoid the impression of artificiality produced by computer-generated images and characters. Amazing!

### **The largest national linguistic market of internet users**

It is obviously difficult to describe in words activities that are entirely related to digital technology, sound, and image. But a visit to Tsinghua University, which ranks among the world's best universities and whose Faculty of Journalism and Communication has just been ranked among the best in Asia according to the "Times Higher Education" rankings (yes, really!), allows us to better appreciate the scope of Chinese efforts in this field. One of its founders points out that China has the largest national linguistic market of internet users, with 1.1 billion people connected, far more than the number of native English speakers. The wealth of data and collective intelligence available to researchers is therefore unparalleled.

This explains the success of *Huawei*, which has managed to manufacture microchips, enable 6G, and develop GPS satellite networks, surpassing the American majors on their own turf despite US sanctions. The same will be true of artificial intelligence, which is at the heart of the next technological battle. The fate of LLMs (*large language models*) depends on the number of players available. China now intends to embark on the creation of a *New Digital Silk Road*.

### **New Digital Silk Road**

Our professor recalls that about fifteen years ago, the country sought to imitate the West by



*Yuncheng. The head of the newsroom explains how editors at the local newspaper integrate AI, computer-generated images and videos into print editions, radio/TV channels, websites and social media.*

copying it, following the CNN model, by developing global media such as CCTV in English and by multiplying cultural promotion programs. Noting the limitations of this strategy in the face of competition from American platforms, China decided in 2018 to change its strategy, focusing not on developing content but on global platforms and technologies focused on national culture (of which *TikTok* and *Deepseek* are the most well-known examples).

It has moved from producing films such as *Wolf Warriors*, modeled on *Captain America*, to films that owe nothing to American models, such as the series *Wandering Earth* (No. 1 on *Netflix* in 2019) and *Black Myth: Wukong* (2024), whose Monkey King, the superhero of the story, is inspired by the classic epic novel *Journey to the West*. In short, the country has freed itself from its dependence on Hollywood and intends to rely on its own cultural resources.

### **An exciting future**

More than ever, the medium and technology are the message! We'll see if Chinese soft power, once it has integrated foreign languages into the online distribution of its works, will succeed in matching the United States in terms of globalized cultural production. For the time being, Beijing insists it wants to avoid a "cultural cold war" at all costs, so as not to add another layer to the battle over customs tariffs. In any case, the duel is underway and it promises to be fascinating.