

# ***“I’d Like to get you on a Slow Boat to China”***

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Listening to Trump’s tariff rants about China brought to mind this 1948 *Slow Boat* hit tune that I believe is applicable today. [Click here to play Slow Boat to China](#)

Said Trump,

“Since China’s entrance into the World Trade Organization in 2001, no one has manipulated better or taken advantage of the United States more. I will not say the word ‘cheated,’ but nobody’s cheated better than China, I will say that.”<sup>1</sup>

Instead of charging China with cheating, we would be far better served by analyzing why China is so far ahead of us in just about everything from artificial intelligence to electric cars, and figuring out what we can learn from them. Certainly, China has an absolutely miserable record on human rights, civil liberties and the environment, but why is Trump imitating the worst aspects of that society instead of borrowing what is useful?

## **A Different Kind of Socialism**

China has evolved a dual economic system where a socialist sector exists alongside of a capitalist sector, and instead of competing, the two sectors complement each other with the socialist sector seeming to be more at the service of the capitalist sector. Unlike western socialism which focuses broadly on human rights, labor and the planet, the Chinese socialist sector is about government economic planning, amassing investment capital for vital industries, subsidizing research and development, educating scientists and engineers, creating infrastructure and financing or building new industrial facilities. To those Americans who cling to a 19<sup>th</sup> century conception of capitalism, all this is cheating.

## **Stealing as Well?**

The other main charge against Chinese industries is that they have stolen our technology. Perhaps so, who knows, but one must still ask, if the technology is stolen how come China has gone so much further with it than the original owners? They must know something. Check out the new AI platform DeepSeek of which Reuters says, "Chinese startup DeepSeek's launch of its latest AI models, which it says are on a par or better than industry-leading models in the United States at a fraction of the cost, is threatening to upset the technology world order."<sup>2</sup> Reuters might have added, thanks to public investment and strategic planning.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.cnbc.com/2019/11/12/trump-says-china-cheated-america-on-trade-but-he-blames-us-leaders-for-letting-it-happen.html>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/technology/artificial-intelligence/what-is-deepseek-why-is-it-disrupting-ai-sector-2025-01-27/>

## The Critical Auto Industry

Forbes Magazine says that the American automobile industry is directly and indirectly responsible for eight million jobs. That's the population of New York City.<sup>3</sup> Given the importance of this industry, a comparison of how it is treated in the US and China is illuminating.

While China was investing heavily in electric vehicles, battery technology, and smart mobility, the Trump administration was pulling the U.S. in the opposite direction. Trump tried to eliminate EV tax credits, slashed federal funding for clean energy research, and rolled back fuel efficiency standards — all while China was using public subsidies, industrial planning, and infrastructure investment to build a globally dominant auto industry. Trump created regulatory confusion by attacking California's emissions rules, undermined supply chains with unpredictable tariffs, and failed to support the transition to green manufacturing. In effect, where China backed the future of transportation, Trump bet on the past — and American automakers have been paying the price.<sup>4</sup>

## Meet the Sea Lion



This Chinese EV gets 265 miles to a charge and sells around the world for about \$20,000. Even before Trump, Chinese cars have been banned in the US to protect domestic car manufacture, and no wonder. In 2024, Chinese sales of EVs and hybrids, domestic and exported, totaled 12.28 million vehicles<sup>5</sup> compared to 3.2 million for the US.<sup>6</sup> Clearly,

the US has something to learn from Chinese cheating, (ie. industrial policy.)

## Biden Showed the Way

President Biden began taking small steps toward a more active industrial policy, recognizing the success of China's model. The CHIPS and Science Act and the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) represent major shifts: both invest hundreds of billions of dollars in strategic industries like semiconductors, clean energy, and electric vehicles. Like China's approach, these laws combine subsidies, tax incentives, and direct

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.forbes.com/councils/forbestechcouncil/2024/10/09/how-the-auto-industry-predicts-and-shapes-the-us-economy/>

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/28/opinion/trump-car-industry-tariffs.html>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202501/1326817.shtml#:~:text=In%202024%2C%20NEV%20production%20and%20sales%20reached,9.3%20percentage%20points%20from%20the%20previous%20year.>

<sup>6</sup> <https://apnews.com/article/china-autos-evs-exports-3f5860634a1d146446dd0dd9e78c2abb>

funding to strengthen key manufacturing sectors. Trump is now undoing all of these accomplishments.

We Americans have a long history of doing just what President Biden started. From the Erie Canal in 1817 to the Transcontinental Railroad, the Interstate Highways, funding the agencies that developed the internet and space exploration, our federal and state governments have always subsidized research and infrastructure for the benefit of industry, agriculture and medicine. This idea, made in the USA, might be the most important thing that China has gotten from us. If Trump wants to get something back from China, this is it.