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* China Fortnightly, a segment of the CLAWS Newsletters, offers a concise overview of key developments in China, blending sharp analysis with expert insights.

China's latest fortnight reflects a consolidation phase across political discipline, economic recalibration and external positioning. Domestically, the tightening of anti-corruption scrutiny, extending to media actors, quasi-"naked officials", and think tanks, signals a renewed emphasis on political reliability ahead of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). Institutionally, Party education campaigns and legislative preparations reinforce governance centralisation and cadre discipline. Externally, Beijing is hardening its posture toward Japan and Taiwan while calibrating trade engagements with the United States, Canada and Germany. Economically, provincial revenue stress, yuan management measures, and GDP milestone messaging reveal a dual track of structural transition and stability maintenance. In science and technology, frontier gene-editing, polar research, vector biology and semiconductor controls underscore long-horizon strategic investments.

Internal Politics and Society

Internal Politics and Society saw intensified Party discipline through journalists' bail in a corruption probe highlighting media constraints, broadened anti-corruption targeting "quasi-naked" officials to curb overseas risks, think tank overhauls like CCIEE's absorption amid leadership scandals, Cai Qi-led governance education campaigns, Li Qiang's post-holiday alignments prioritizing silver economy and safety, Zhao Leji's NPC session with emergency minister ouster, and Xi's FYP deliberation reinforcing ideological-economic fusion for modernization.

16 Feb (South China Morning Post): Investigative journalists Liu Hu and Wu Yingjiao released on bail amid

corruption allegations against Sichuan Party official.

Liu Hu (50), a veteran investigative reporter, and Wu Yingjiao (34) were detained by Jinjiang district police in Chengdu on February 2 on suspicion of "making false accusations" and "illegal business operations" after publishing an article alleging that Pu Fayou, Party Secretary of Pujiang county (under Chengdu), abused authority to suppress private enterprises; other county officials were also implicated. On 16 February, authorities announced their release on bail pending further investigation, stating that a municipal team had found key allegations unfounded. Reporters Without Borders criticised the detention as emblematic of tightening media controls. Liu had previously been detained in 2013 under similar charges before acquittal. The episode illustrates the shrinking operational latitude for investigative journalism and reinforces the Party-state's preference for internal disciplinary channels over public exposure mechanisms when addressing corruption narratives.

18 Feb (South China Morning Post): Anti-corruption campaign expands to monitor 'quasi-naked officials' with overseas family ties.

Sources indicate that the Central Organisation Department conducted nationwide inspections since early 2025 targeting officials whose children reside abroad, even if spouses remain in China, broadening earlier scrutiny of "naked officials". These "quasi-naked officials" must declare overseas ties promptly and face heightened monitoring, with some losing promotion prospects or positions. The Central Commission for Discipline Inspection (CCDI) reportedly investigated a record 63 high-ranking officials last year. Examples include removal of a senior manager at a state-owned insurance firm and a ministry-affiliated institute director

for undisclosed family green cards in the United States. Stricter passport controls and post-retirement travel approvals have been imposed in several provinces. Officials argue overseas family links facilitate illicit capital flight chains, particularly amid strained judicial cooperation with Washington. The move reflects deepening securitisation within cadre management, linking political loyalty, capital controls and geopolitical distrust into a unified disciplinary framework.

19 Feb ([South China Morning Post](#)): Anti-corruption probes cast uncertainty over star-official-led think tanks such as CCIEE and Taihe Institute.

The Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) announced transfer of the China Centre for International Economic Exchanges (CCIEE) from National Development and Reform Commission administration to CASS oversight following the investigation and Party expulsion of Bi Jingquan, former food and drug regulator and CCIEE chairman. Earlier, the Taihe Institute, founded by former Ministry of State Security vice-minister Gao Yichen, also expelled, was disbanded for regulatory violations. CCIEE, established in 2009 with figures such as former vice-premier Zeng Peiyan and vice-chairman Wei Jianguo (former vice-minister of Commerce), had played a prominent Track 2 diplomacy role. Analysts including Einar Tangen and Alfred Wu interpret the restructuring as tightening political discipline over semi-official policy platforms aligned with Xi Jinping's "New Type Think Tanks with Chinese Characteristics". The recalibration suggests Beijing seeks to prevent informal influence networks and monetised policy access, reasserting Party control over intellectual intermediaries in foreign and economic policy discourse.

24 Feb ([Xinhua](#)): Central Leading Group for Party Building launches nationwide

education campaign on 'correct view of governance performance'.

Chaired by Cai Qi, member of the Political Bureau Standing Committee and head of the Central Leading Group for Party Building, with participation from Li Xi (also Standing Committee member and CCDI chief), the meeting outlined a Party-wide campaign aligned with the fourth plenary session of the 20th CPC Central Committee. The initiative emphasises "full and rigorous Party self-governance", prevention of deviations in performance assessment, rectification of prominent issues, and tangible public benefit. It frames the campaign as foundational for advancing socialist modernisation and consolidating governance legitimacy. By directing Party committees nationwide to treat it as a key 2026 task, the leadership signals that cadre evaluation metrics, especially amid the pivot from GDP-centricism, will be ideologically recalibrated. The campaign functions both as political education and as a mechanism to discipline local experimentation during the transition into the 15th Five-Year Plan period.

24 Feb ([Xinhua](#)): Premier Li Qiang chairs State Council executive meeting to align post-holiday work with 15th Five-Year Plan priorities.

Li Qiang convened the executive meeting to coordinate departmental focus as 2026 marks the start of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026–2030). The meeting underscored fostering new growth drivers, invigorating market vitality, expanding the silver economy, strengthening elderly care services, and reviewing draft revisions to the Law on Water alongside firefighting guidelines for local communities. Emphasis was placed on targeted policy tools to stabilise expectations and enhance people's well-being. The dual focus on demographic ageing and community-level governance indicates an attempt to translate macro-strategic objectives into social service and risk-management domains. The meeting

also illustrates technocratic continuity under Li Qiang, embedding consumption rebalancing and public safety into the Plan's early implementation phase, thereby linking economic restructuring with social stability imperatives.

26 Feb ([Xinhua](#)): NPC Standing Committee concludes 21st session; Wang Xiangxi removed as Minister of Emergency Management.

Under the chairmanship of Zhao Leji, the 14th National People's Congress (NPC) Standing Committee removed Wang Xiangxi from the post of Minister of Emergency Management, with President Xi Jinping signing the presidential order. The session approved personnel-related bills, adopted the draft agenda and presidium list for the forthcoming fourth NPC session, and endorsed the draft NPC Standing Committee work report for Zhao's delivery. Legislative priorities include review of the 15th Five-Year Plan outline, draft Environmental Code, draft Law on Promoting Ethnic Unity and Progress, and draft Law on National Development Planning. Zhao called for alignment with central Party tasks and openness to supervision. The personnel change within emergency management, an area central to disaster response and industrial safety, suggests accountability recalibration, while the legislative agenda signals codification of long-term planning and social cohesion under unified statutory frameworks.

27 Feb ([Xinhua](#)): Xi Jinping chairs Political Bureau meeting to deliberate draft 15th Five-Year Plan and government work report.

Xi Jinping presided over the CPC Political Bureau meeting assessing the draft outline of the 15th Five-Year Plan and draft government work report for submission to the NPC. The session characterised the 14th Plan (2021–2025) as a period overcoming Covid-19 shocks and major risks, and framed 2026–2030 as decisive for achieving basic socialist modernisation by

2035. Priorities include economic development as the central task, reform and innovation as the driving force, proactive fiscal policy, accommodative monetary policy, expansion of domestic demand, development of “new quality productive forces”, high-standard opening-up, green transition, and technological self-reliance. The articulation balances growth stabilisation with structural transformation. By integrating macroeconomic activism with Party self-governance, the leadership underscores that developmental legitimacy and political discipline are mutually reinforcing pillars entering the next planning cycle.

Security & Defence

Beijing intensified security postures through AVIC's Nantianmen sci-fi project previewing aerospace ambitions, Southern Theater patrols countering Philippine activities, export controls on 20 Japanese defence firms, Fujian Coast Guard enforcement near Kinmen, and Defence Ministry rebukes of Taiwan arms buildup and Japanese militarism, blending narrative innovation, operational presence, and economic statecraft to assert sovereignty and counter regional alignments.

17 Feb ([South China Morning Post](#)): AVIC-backed ‘Nantianmen Project’ blurs science fiction and aerospace-military signalling.

Launched in 2017 by Avic Global Culture Technology Co., a subsidiary of Aviation Industry Corporation of China (AVIC), the Nantianmen (Southern Celestial Gate) Project presents over 100 futuristic platforms, such as the Luanniao aerospace carrier, Xuannu hypersonic fighter, and Chengying tactical robotic ecosystem—through novels, artbooks (notably by Wei Tianhe in April 2025), and large-scale mock-ups at Zhuhai and Changchun air

shows. CCTV described designs as “reflecting reality”, while analysts like Song Zhongping argue they align with the PLA’s tiered technology pipeline. Planned theme parks in Shanghai (Lingang Special Area) and Meizhou aim at patriotic education and aerospace promotion, timed toward the PLA centenary in 2027. The initiative functions as narrative shaping: projecting frontier ambitions—fusion propulsion, AI swarms, directed energy—while maintaining ambiguity. It cultivates public support, stimulates industrial imagination, and potentially serves as strategic signalling without formal doctrinal commitment.

17 Feb (PLA Daily): Southern Theater Command conducts naval and air combat readiness patrols in South China Sea.

Zhai Shichen, spokesperson for the People’s Liberation Army Southern Theater Command, confirmed naval and air patrols conducted from Sunday to Monday in territorial waters of the South China Sea. He criticised the Philippines for organising joint patrols with external countries, stating such actions undermine regional peace and stability. The Command pledged resolute safeguarding of territorial sovereignty and maritime rights. Although details of force composition were not provided, the messaging underscores a calibrated deterrence posture amid intensifying multilateral maritime engagements. The patrols reinforce routine operational presence while framing external partnerships as destabilising. The communication pattern, measured but firm, signals continuity in maritime enforcement strategy, combining tactical deployments with narrative assertion of lawful jurisdiction and opposition to perceived encirclement dynamics.

24–26 Feb (Xinhua/China Daily): China adds 20 Japanese entities to export control list and places 20 more on watch list.

The Ministry of Commerce announced inclusion of 20 Japanese entities, including Mitsubishi Heavy Industries Shipbuilding Co., on the export control list, prohibiting export of dual-use items; another 20 entities, including SUBARU Corporation, were placed under stricter end-use verification. Spokesperson He Yongqian stated the measures respond to Japan’s accelerated military buildup and alleged ambitions to revise non-nuclear principles, asserting alignment with China’s Export Control Law and non-proliferation obligations. Zhang Xiaogang of the Ministry of National Defense separately criticised “neo-militarism”. The action explicitly links trade instruments with security signalling. While Beijing maintains that normal trade remains unaffected, the selective targeting of defence-linked firms introduces compliance risk into Sino-Japanese industrial ties. The move reflects economic statecraft deployment to contest regional security narratives and constrain perceived remilitarisation trajectories.

25 Feb (China Daily): Fujian Coast Guard intensifies routine patrols near Kinmen waters.

Zhu Anqing, spokesperson for the East China Sea Bureau of the China Coast Guard, stated that Fujian Coast Guard vessel task forces have enhanced law-enforcement patrols near Kinmen since early February to ensure orderly navigation and protect fishermen’s rights, including those from the Taiwan region. Framed as lawful routine patrols, the operations reinforce maritime administrative control in sensitive littoral zones adjacent to Xiamen and Kinmen. By emphasising protection of lives and property, the Coast Guard positions its actions within civilian maritime governance rather than overt military escalation. However, the timing alongside firm defence ministry statements against “Taiwan independence” indicates layered signalling—combining constabulary presence with political

messaging to normalise enforcement authority and incrementally consolidate jurisdictional claims.

28 Feb ([China Military Online/China Daily](#)): Defence spokesperson warns Taiwan authorities and criticises Japanese security revisions.

Senior Colonel Zhang Xiaogang condemned Taiwan leader Lai Ching-te's push for asymmetric capability buildup and US arms purchases, asserting that "resisting reunification by force is a dead end". Separately, he criticised Japanese Prime Minister Sanae Takaichi's security document revisions and potential weapons export liberalisation, invoking historical memory of wartime aggression. The dual messaging integrates cross-Strait deterrence with opposition to Japanese security normalisation. By framing actions as lawful defence of sovereignty while warning of "neo-militarism", Beijing situates regional security competition within historical legitimacy narratives. The coordinated rhetoric suggests an effort to shape regional threat perceptions, consolidate domestic consensus, and deter incremental security alignments perceived as challenging China's strategic periphery.

External Affairs & Diplomacy

Diplomatic engagements featured Premier Li Qiang and Chancellor Merz's economic symposium stressing industrial synergies and Xi's meeting advocating multilateralism on Ukraine, positioning Sino-German ties as buffers against protectionism while reaffirming one-China support amid Europe's strategic autonomy debates.

25 Feb ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)): Premier Li Qiang and Chancellor Friedrich Merz attend China-Germany Economic Advisory Committee symposium.

Li Qiang and German Chancellor Friedrich Merz met over 60 enterprise representatives in Beijing, emphasising complementary industrial strengths in machinery, chemicals, automotive, renewable energy and digital economy. Li highlighted the onset of the 15th Five-Year Plan, advocating synergy in innovation, localisation, third-party market cooperation, and high-level opening-up. Merz reaffirmed support for the one-China policy and welcomed Chinese investment in Germany. Both underscored opposition to protectionism amid global instability. The dialogue situates Sino-German economic ties as stabilising anchors within a fragmented global trade order. Beijing's messaging seeks to reassure European stakeholders while encouraging strategic autonomy within Europe, leveraging industrial interdependence to buffer geopolitical frictions and maintain diversified economic partnerships.

25 Feb ([Ministry of Foreign Affairs](#)): Xi Jinping meets Chancellor Friedrich Merz; discusses strategic partnership and Ukraine crisis.

Xi Jinping described China and Germany as the world's second and third largest economies, calling for enhanced strategic communication, innovation cooperation, and cultural exchanges. He emphasised multilateralism, UN centrality, supply chain stability, and alignment between Germany's technology strategies and China's green, intelligent development objectives. Merz reiterated commitment to the one-China policy and free trade. The leaders exchanged views on the Ukraine crisis, with Xi advocating dialogue, equal participation and common security architecture. The meeting and Joint Press Statement underscore Beijing's effort to sustain high-level engagement with Europe's core economy while articulating positions on global governance and security crises. It reflects a calibrated outreach to European partners amid strategic competition with the United States.

Economy, Finance, Trade & Commerce

Economic signals showed provincial revenue target cuts amid property woes, anticipated Sino-US trade talks post-tariff rulings, reciprocal Canadian tariff lifts, PBOC tweaks easing yuan hedging and financing, cadre confusion over GDP pivot to welfare KPIs, and 2025 GDP surpassing 140 trillion yuan with consumption-led 5% growth and R&D surge, reflecting moderated expectations, trade pragmatism, and rebalancing toward sustainability.

25 Feb ([Caixin Global](#)): Over half of provinces lower fiscal revenue growth targets amid property slump.

Budget reports from 31 provincial-level regions show 18 reduced general public budget (GPB) revenue growth targets for 2026, three maintained them, and only 10 raised expectations. Major hubs—Guangdong, Jiangsu, Shanghai—target modest 2–3% growth, while Hunan and Inner Mongolia project 0.5–1.5%; Beijing and six others expect 4% or higher. The data highlight fiscal strain from prolonged property downturn and weak industrial prices. With GPB being the largest fiscal component, subdued targets imply constrained local expenditure capacity. This fiscal realism aligns with Beijing’s pivot toward sustainable, people-centric metrics but also constrains infrastructure-driven stimulus. Provincial recalibration suggests a cautious consolidation phase, where debt control and revenue stability take precedence over expansionary ambitions.

26 Feb ([China Daily](#)): Sixth round of Sino-US trade talks anticipated following US Supreme Court tariff ruling.

After the US Supreme Court struck down tariffs under the International Emergency Economic Powers Act, including the 10% “fentanyl tariff” and 34% “reciprocal tariff”, Washington invoked Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974 to impose a

temporary 10% import surcharge. China’s Ministry of Commerce signalled readiness for candid consultations while assessing countermeasures. Analysts such as Bai Ming (Chinese Academy of International Trade and Economic Cooperation) and Luo Zhiheng (Yuekai Securities) expect negotiations to address expiring one-year agreements on tariffs and rare earth export controls. The episode illustrates cyclical trade management within statutory frameworks. Beijing’s approach blends negotiation openness with conditional firmness, leveraging economic resilience and technological capacity as strategic bargaining capital.

27 Feb ([China Daily](#)): China to remove additional tariffs on certain Canadian imports after consultations.

Following Canada’s adjustments to tariffs on Chinese electric vehicles, steel and aluminium, China’s Customs Tariff Commission announced removal of additional anti-discrimination tariffs on selected Canadian imports such as peas and lobsters, effective 1 March to 31 December 2026. A Ministry of Commerce spokesperson cited progress through bilateral consultations. The reciprocal rollback signals pragmatic dispute management within broader geopolitical tensions. By limiting the measure’s duration, Beijing preserves leverage while demonstrating flexibility. The action exemplifies calibrated economic diplomacy—responding proportionally to policy adjustments while safeguarding domestic industrial interests and signalling that tariff disputes remain reversible through negotiation.

27 Feb ([South China Morning Post](#)): People’s Bank of China adjusts cross-border yuan financing and cuts FX risk reserve ratio to zero.

The PBOC refined rules governing banks’ cross-border yuan interbank financing, tying outbound lending ceilings to capital strength and enhancing transparency to

stabilise offshore liquidity. Concurrently, it reduced the foreign exchange risk reserve ratio for forward forex sales from 20% to zero, lowering hedging costs. Offshore yuan briefly weakened from 6.8267 to beyond 6.86 per US dollar after the announcement. Goldman Sachs interpreted the move as signalling concern over rapid appreciation. The dual measures reveal balancing between currency internationalisation and exchange-rate stability. By facilitating hedging while smoothing offshore liquidity, the PBOC aims to moderate volatility without abandoning market-determined mechanisms, preserving competitiveness amid evolving trade conditions.

28 Feb (South China Morning Post): Shift from GDP-centric appraisal generates cadre uncertainty.

A five-month education campaign urges officials to prioritise social welfare and sustainability over growth-at-all-costs. Analysts Tang Dajie (China Enterprise Institute) and Zhou Zheng (China Macro Group) note confusion over revised key performance indicators (KPIs), as GDP remains a hard metric while “benefiting the people” lacks operational clarity. Provinces such as Zhejiang propose incorporating income growth and public service quality into evaluations, yet some local leaders still pledge above-average GDP expansion and infrastructure projects. The tension underscores transitional governance challenges: aligning central ideological directives with entrenched competitive incentives among provinces. The recalibration, if institutionalised through diversified KPIs, could structurally alter interprovincial competition and fiscal behaviour.

28 Feb (China Daily): China’s GDP surpasses 140 trillion yuan in 2025 with 5% growth.

The National Bureau of Statistics reported GDP reaching 140.19 trillion yuan in 2025, up 5% year-on-year; gross national income rose 5.1% to 139.37 trillion yuan. Final

consumption contributed 2.6 percentage points to growth, capital formation 0.8, and net exports 1.6. R&D expenditure increased 8.1% to 3.93 trillion yuan (2.8% of GDP), with basic research up 11.1%. Deputy NBS head Sheng Laiyun highlighted China’s contribution of roughly 30% to global growth. The milestone reinforces scale-based economic resilience even amid structural headwinds. Emphasis on consumption and R&D underscores strategic rebalancing toward innovation-driven and domestic-demand-led expansion as China enters the 15th Five-Year Plan cycle.

Science & Technology

Advancements encompassed TeABE gene-editing restoring autistic-like behaviors in mice, Xuelong 2’s Antarctic Ross Sea surveys, OR49 receptor discovery for mosquito repellents, and limited Nvidia H200 chip licenses, underscoring precision medicine, polar logistics, vector control, and semiconductor resilience in long-term innovation pipelines.

20 Feb (CGTN): Novel adenine base editor restores behaviour in CHD3-mutant mice.

A collaborative Chinese-led study published in Nature introduced a TadA-embedded adenine base editor (TeABE) correcting single-base mutations in the CHD3 gene associated with Snijders Blok–Campeau syndrome. Treated mice exhibited restored cognitive and behavioural functions, with CHD3 levels normalised and minimal off-target effects; preliminary validation in nonhuman primates showed consistent outcomes. The work positions in vivo base editing as a potential therapeutic pathway for neurodevelopmental disorders. While clinical translation remains distant, the research highlights China’s expanding footprint in precision gene-editing and translational neuroscience. The

combination of technical innovation and high-impact publication strengthens China's biomedical innovation profile within global life sciences competition.

21 Feb (CGTN): Icebreaker Xuelong concludes Ross Sea surveys during 42nd Antarctic expedition.

Xuelong retrieved final acoustic devices and deployed new ecological mooring systems with domestically developed sensors in the Amundsen and Ross Seas, collecting data on ocean conditions, krill, midwater fish and penguin habitats. Sixty-nine summer personnel departed Qinling Station, with 18 remaining for overwintering. The expedition demonstrates sustained polar research capability and technological self-reliance in sensor systems. Antarctic engagement advances climate science, marine ecosystem understanding and geopolitical presence under scientific auspices. Continued polar logistics capacity enhances China's long-term stake in Antarctic governance frameworks.

25 Feb (CGTN): Study identifies OR49 receptor enabling mosquito avoidance of borneol repellent.

An international team including Chinese researchers identified odorant receptor OR49 as mediating mosquito aversion to borneol, a camphor-derived compound. Disabling OR49 eliminated avoidance behaviour in *Aedes aegypti* and *Culex* species. Published in *Nature Communications*, the findings offer avenues for environmentally safer repellents amid rising chemical resistance. The research combines molecular neurobiology with public health relevance, linking traditional botanical knowledge with modern vector control strategies. It strengthens China's collaborative role in infectious disease mitigation research.

26 Feb (China Daily): Nvidia secures limited US license to ship H200 chips to China.

Nvidia CFO Colette Kress confirmed

Washington approved small volumes of H200 chip exports to China, though revenue remains unrealised amid regulatory uncertainty; China revenue fell to \$19.7 billion from \$25 billion year-on-year. The case illustrates evolving semiconductor export control dynamics under US statutory authorities. Limited licensing suggests calibrated restriction rather than absolute decoupling. For China, continued exposure to advanced GPU supply constraints reinforces urgency of domestic semiconductor capability development, aligning with the 15th Five-Year Plan's technological self-reliance objectives.

Overall, the fortnight reveals a systemic pattern: intensified political discipline, calibrated economic management, strategic signalling in regional security, diversified diplomatic outreach, and sustained investment in frontier science and technology. Beijing appears intent on entering the 15th Five-Year Plan period with consolidated institutional control, moderated economic expectations, and a carefully managed external posture.

About the Author

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