

What Swiss SMEs Can Learn from China's AI Industrialisation

MANAGEMENT SUMMARY & CORE TAKEAWAY

The World Artificial Intelligence Conference 2026 in Shanghai reveals a fundamental shift: China does not focus on the largest language models but on comprehensive industrialisation. Of 1,024 exhibitors, 242 showcased robotics and hardware, only 130 generative AI—and of those, 83 presented AI agents rather than foundation models. The lesson for Swiss SMEs: success with AI is determined not by model size but by concrete applications in manufacturing, supply chain and knowledge work.

CONTEXT & EXECUTIVE RELEVANCE

Many headlines frame the AI race as OpenAI versus DeepSeek. That is not what matters. The biggest question is: Who builds the largest AI-powered economy? WAIC 2026 in Shanghai delivers a surprisingly clear answer. While Western conferences still celebrate new model architectures, China presented a radically different priority at the world's largest AI conference: Of 1,024 exhibitors, 242 focused on robotics and hardware, only 130 on generative AI. Of those 130, 83 showcased AI agents for concrete industrial applications—not foundation models.

The Stanford AI Index 2026 confirms this shift with hard data: China has overtaken the US in AI publications with 35.3 per cent of all global output versus 16.8 per cent from the US. More striking: China installs 54 per cent of all industrial robots worldwide and leads in AI-related patents. This is not an academic exercise but a strategic realignment of the entire economy.

CORE ACTION ITEMS

01 AI-driven pharmaceutical factories with automated batch documentation and deviation detection

02 Logistics robots with dynamic route planning based on real-time bottlenecks

03 Supply chain optimisation with predictive demand planning and supplier risk assessment

04 Automated quality control in precision manufacturing with visual anomaly detection

SWISS COMPLIANCE & ARCHITECTURE GUIDELINES

- ☑ Full compliance with revised Swiss Data Protection Act (revDSG).
- ☑ Zero vendor lock-in on closed proprietary models.
- ☑ Seamless integration into Abacus, Bexio and M365 ecosystems.

Non-Binding Process Analysis

Let us review in 20 minutes where AI agents create immediate measurable efficiency in your workflows.

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