



Home



My Network



Jobs



Messaging



Notifications



Me



For Business



Advertise

[Edit article](#)[View stats](#)[View post](#)

Not Normal Telecom

4,673 subscribers

[✓ Subscribed](#)

A Tale of Two 5Gs

## Why China Is Winning the Mobile Race

**Geoff Hollingworth**

Not a normal CMO. Rakuten Whisperer. Rakuten Symphony



June 24, 2025

China's 5G lead isn't about innovation, it's about execution at scale.

The communication network is the most important infrastructure in any country, it is what any country's whole economy runs on, it is what makes AI possible. It has to be treated as a national priority by each and every country and region, but today, that is only the case in one country. We can see the results.

### China outcomes are night and day different

By end 2024, China had deployed over 4.19 million 5G base stations, more than the rest of the world combined. China "forecasts a 5.7% year-on-year growth in industrial output for 2024, maintaining its significant contribution to China's GDP. Revenue from the telecommunications, software and IT services sectors is projected to grow by about 11% year-on-year in 2024." [\[RCR Wireless\]](#)

China has turned mobile into a national utility. Not an app, not a product, not a pilot. A strategic asset.

- **5G Dominance:** China has aggressively deployed 5G, with over 4.19 million base stations by end 2024, covering more than 56% of its mobile subscribers (approximately 1.78 billion), according to the

Ministry of Industry and Information Technology . This infrastructure supports industrial applications like smart factories, autonomous logistics, and remote equipment control.

- **Government Support:** The Chinese government has heavily subsidized 5G deployment, aligning with its "Made in China 2025" strategy to lead in advanced manufacturing. For example, Hefei has provided dedicated funding for industrial internet applications, with over 4,000 5G+ industrial internet projects by 2022 .
- **Industrial Applications:** Use cases include smart ports (e.g., Ningbo 5G Smart Port), automation of industry tasks like machine vision inspection, and IoT-enabled machinery, creating a "laboratory environment" for 5G innovation.

## China had a nation wide coordinated plan

**China didn't win the latest mobile race with better ideas—it won with better coordination.** It aligned policy, spectrum, workforce, and investment across a 10-year strategy. This is the benefit of being command-driven: one playbook, one direction, one budget.

- Each 5G base station gets \$700–\$1,400 in subsidies [\[link\]](#)
- Spectrum policy is clear, predictable, long-term
- Huawei trains up to 300,000 engineers annually
- Smart infrastructure like Ningbo's autonomous port is operational at scale

**They didn't ask what the market wanted. They built what the future needed.**

## Where was the rest of the world?

**We waited.** Waited for spectrum auctions. Waited for the private sector to invest. Waited for ROI models and vendor lock-in arguments to shake out.

**The result?**

- 5G is still largely 4G with a 5G radio on the end
- Coverage gaps persist especially in rural and indoor areas
- Mid-band access is still spotty or under delivered
- Workforce training is fragmented and underfunded

**This isn't about lack of innovation. It's about lack of execution.**

## Infrastructure doesn't follow startup logic

**The West treats telecom like another tech vertical.** But you don't bootstrap national infrastructure. You coordinate it. You fund it, align it, and govern it.

**China made 5G deployment the spine of its next industrial wave.** *Made in China 2025* became a line item in board meetings. This is not a leadership gap. This is a systems gap.

## We don't need to copy China. But we do need to learn.

This isn't about turning democratic systems into centralized regimes. Looking forward it's about rebuilding a culture of long-term planning. Of national purpose. And applying that urgency to telecom as if it matters – because it does.

Here's what that could look like:

- **Subsidize deployment—not just innovation**
- Accelerate and simplify spectrum access across different technologies
- Embed 5G workforce programs in universities and industry
- Fund real-world testbeds in ports, logistics, and manufacturing
- Make 5G as dependable as power or roads

If we want to win the next wave for example AI at the edge, real-time robotics, autonomous logistics, we need to stop hoping markets will figure it out alone.

## Final thought: execution beats aspiration

**A country cannot change its long term vision and belief system every 4 years.** This is why I support the continuation and acceleration of the Wireless Innovation Fund.

### Open RAN Policy Coalition Statement on Senate's Move to Rescind Wireless Innovation Fund - Open RAN Policy...

On June 5, the U.S. Senate Commerce Committee released its rescission package, which includes a proposal to revoke funding for the NTIA-administered Public Wireless Supply Chain Innovation Fund. The remaining \$850 million in th...

Open RAN Policy Coalition


**All countries/regions need similar** and programs need to be free of politics, the more likeminded countries share, the more momentum, predictability and accelerated progress follows. The people who receive such monies need to be held accountable for delivery of real results as fast as possible.

**China didn't out-innovate the West. It out-executed.** At scale, with speed, and with the force of national direction. We don't need authoritarianism. But we need strategy. And we need it now. **All countries need a long term vision and plan.**


Because infrastructure isn't just about what we build. **It defines what we're capable of.**

### Comments


  53 · 57 comments · 6 reposts



Like





Comment




Share

Add a comment...



Most recent



Stephen Douglas

• 1st

Head of Market Strategy @ Spirent & Advisory Board member.


1mo

...

1/2 - I think there is a middle ground to be had (if there is the will). Most governments did identify 5G as strategic priority (not necessarily a national utility) but then failed to fully implement the right and consistent policy instruments.


...more

Like

 6

Reply · 5 replies

See previous replies



Geoff Hollingworth

in

Author

1mo

...


Thank you [Stephen Douglas](#) . I was not aware of "India's 100% FDI" which I have to confess surprises me for the reasons you state. For the end of short termism I fear that only happens if there is a very real and happening external existential threat, that then forces party politics to be second to nationwide survival

...more

Like

Reply

35 impressions



Roger Entner

• 1st

Analyst and Founder at Recon Analytics LLC


3w

...

The key here is that China has disaggregated the telecom stack. Chinese carriers are mobile service providers not mobile network operators. De facto there is one 5G network in China and the "carriers" are MVNOs. That works well when the network owner invests and provides the network at cost or near cost. In an open market


...more

Like

 2

Reply · 3 replies

See previous replies



Roger Entner

• 1st

Analyst and Founder at Recon Analytics LLC

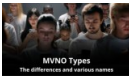
3w

...

Yes of course its a lot of generalizations. It's LinkedIn after all.

There are at least three MNO MOCN RAN service providers in the United States that are generally described as full MVNOs.


...more




There are various Different MVNOs types. Such as Skinny, Thin, Light, Thick and Full...

There are various Different MVNOs types. Such as Skinny, Thin, Light, Thick and Full MVNOS. What d...

Like

 1

Reply



Gregory Engelbrecht

• 1st

International Sales & Strategic Partnerships | Off-Highway Data An...


1mo

...

Let's not overlook one important element of success and acceleration: working together. When China does something, they do it as a team..., yes with a top-down directive, but nonetheless all working together. In western economies competition (preferably to gain monopoly) is the modus operandi, instead of combining next gen technologies. A


...more

Like

 3

Reply · 2 replies

See previous replies



Daniel McKimm

in

1st

1mo

...

Director, NE Ohio Regional Improvement Corporation. ForthU...


[Gregory Engelbrecht](#) Great point.

Like

Reply

https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/why-china-winning-mobile-race-geoff-hollingworth-uc7be/

4/7



**Paul Berriman** ✓ • 1st


Non-Exec Director & Advisor • Rain Networks South ...

(edited) 1mo ...

Absolutely and totally agree regardless of western media and other views. I having spent years in Hong Kong and on industry bodies like GTI Alliance and NGMN alongside folks like China mobile as well as working closely with Huawei, saw all of this first hand. From the get go, China saw and embraced the intentions of 5G in its original con ...more

Like • 10 | Reply • 4 replies

See previous replies




**Paul Berriman** ✓ • 1st

Non-Exec Director & Advisor • Rain Networks South Afri...

1mo ...

**Simon Lau** Thanks Simon!

Like | Reply



**Joe Madden** ✓ • 1st


Providing insight on wireless technology and markets

1mo ...

Geoff, if you look at the number of base stations required in China for coverage, compared with American networks, you would conclude that Chinese networks are incompetently provisioned...very inefficient from a cost point of view. Looks good because they overkilled it. ...more

Like • 2 | Reply • 8 replies

See previous replies




**Paul Berriman** ✓ • 1st

Non-Exec Director & Advisor • Rain Networks South Afric...

3w ...

**Joe Madden** Lets not forget that China Tower builds the cell sites for all three operators on a shared basis. In Hong Kong when we merged two networks we went from 3,000 sites each to one bigger 4,000 site network. Not the scale of China but the principle is the same). Also my experience of coverage in China is a ...more

Like | Reply



**Andreas Enotiadis** ✓ • 1st


Curious Engineer, Innovator, linking the dots

1mo ...

So if it is a utility (which is true tbh) then why should 5G (xG) and fiber and in general network access (not necessarily network service) not be a critical national infrastructure and (dare I say it?) a natural monopoly? Although this may lead to controversial and ideology driven arguments :) why build multiple narrow roads instead of a single big one? ...more

Like • 4 | Reply • 4 replies

See previous replies




**Andreas Enotiadis** ✓ • 1st


Curious Engineer, Innovator, linking the dots

3w ...

**Daniel McKimm** have been preaching it for almost 20 years too 🤔 . Remember Gig.U?

Like | Reply




**Jeffrey DeCoux**  • 1st

Chairman, Building Intelligent Infrastructure Economic Zones, Auto...

1mo ...



Always great insight **Geoff Hollingworth**.  
NextG, ITS, BB, etc. have been a BUSINESS MODEL and INVESTMENT challenge. The United States has great technical solutions and innovative companies. Infrastructure investors are now mobilizing \$billions in capital to underwrite the Intelligent Infrastructure to ...more



**Ronnie Vasishtha, SVP of Telecom at NVIDIA,**  
**testified on the critical need for the United...**  
Ronnie Vasishtha, SVP of Telecom at NVIDIA, testified on the critical need for the United States to lead with AI-RA...

Love • 1 | Reply • 3 replies

See previous replies

**Daniel McKimm**  · 1st  
Director, NE Ohio Regional Improvement Corporation. ForthU...

1mo ...

**Jeffrey DeCoux** Is it the only way we will succeed because the **#TechOligarchs** control both Congress and our states' legislators through **#RegulatoryCapture** and **#CitizensUnited**?

Eisenhower created our Interstate Highway System as a Pu ...more

Like | Reply



**Andy Jones**  · 1st  
Consultant & Advisor/Telecom Industry Thought Leader/Former Tier...

3w ...

In Europe, regulatory reform is desperately needed. Not to create pan-EU vertically integrated megaliths. Instead, on a national basis, a Wholesale/Retail (NetCo/ServCo) split model with appropriate obligations and incentives at each layer must be considered seriously - with competition at both layers. ...more

Like | Reply · 3 replies

See previous replies

**Greg Whelan**  · 1st  
Innovation Analyst, Executive Advisor, Venture Mentor focuse...

2w ...

**Andy Jones** issue of open access at the local level is lack of scale and lack of margin.



Like | Reply

**Brian Robertson**  · 1st  
Head of Industry Strategy @ GSMA

1mo ...

Having just returned from MWC Shanghai, I'd add the human element. Without doubt, everyone I spoke to had a "can do, will do" attitude. Follow ups will happen. Discussions will go forward. And new activities started. There is a feeling of "let's get things done" rather than "let's have another chat". Very invigorating. ...more


Like · 9 | Reply · 1 reply

**Geoff Hollingworth**  Author  
Not a normal CMO. Rakuten Whisperer. Rakuten Symphony

1mo ...

**Brian Robertson** Yes that investment and belief in people seems to have completely disappeared

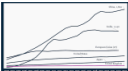
Like · 3 | Reply | 143 impressions

**Ken Figueredo** · 1st  
Innovation and Business Change | AI | IoT | 6G ecosystems...

(edited) 1mo ...

**Geoff Hollingworth** It helps to study how users across China are using communications networks, and not just for communicating.

<https://www.more-with-mobile.com/2025/03/telecommunications-futures-perspective.html> ...more

**Telecommunications Futures – A Perspective From China**  
Mobile Communications and convenience in China


Like · 2 | Reply · 1 reply

**Geoff Hollingworth**  Author  
Not a normal CMO. Rakuten Whisperer. Rakuten Symphony

1mo ...

Thank you **Ken Figueredo**, your pointers are always greatly appreciated. And absolutely more than just communicating...

Like | Reply | 129 impressions

 Load more comments



Not Normal Telecom

Provoking conversation and breaking taboos

 Brian, Mark and 2,300 connections are subscribed

4,673 subscribers

✓ Subscribed

More articles for you



5G – the excitement and the espionage, in layman's terms by @BBBClick

Ryan Jones

2



Can Europe Take the Lead in the 6G Era?

Tech Asset Insights

3



Not talking about a revolution. Talking about next mobile generation

Phil Brunkard

15 · 2 comments