



# In China, Tesla Transmits Location Data Directly To Government

Other manufacturers of electric vehicles are required to do the same. Thus, if you own a car in China, the government can precisely track your location every minute of the day. □ TN Editor

When Shan Junhua bought his white Tesla Model X, he knew it was a fast, beautiful car. What he didn't know is that Tesla constantly sends information about the precise location of his car to the Chinese government.

Tesla is not alone. China has called upon all electric vehicle manufacturers in China to make the same kind of reports — potentially adding to the rich kit of surveillance tools available to the Chinese government as President Xi Jinping steps up the use of technology to track Chinese citizens.

“I didn't know this,” said Shan. “Tesla could have it, but why do they

transmit it to the government? Because this is about privacy.”

More than 200 manufacturers, including Tesla, Volkswagen, BMW, Daimler, Ford, General Motors, Nissan, Mitsubishi and U.S.-listed electric vehicle start-up NIO, transmit position information and dozens of other data points to government-backed monitoring centers, The Associated Press has found. Generally, it happens without car owners’ knowledge.

The automakers say they are merely complying with local laws, which apply only to alternative energy vehicles. Chinese officials say the data is used for analytics to improve public safety, facilitate industrial development and infrastructure planning, and to prevent fraud in subsidy programs.

But other countries that are major markets for electronic vehicles — the United States, Japan, across Europe — do not collect this kind of real-time data.

And critics say the information collected in China is beyond what is needed to meet the country’s stated goals. It could be used not only to undermine foreign carmakers’ competitive position, but also for surveillance — particularly in China, where there are few protections on personal privacy. Under the leadership of Xi Jinping, China has unleashed a war on dissent, marshalling big data and artificial intelligence to create a more perfect kind of policing, capable of predicting and eliminating perceived threats to the stability of the ruling Communist Party.

There is also concern about the precedent these rules set for sharing data from next-generation connected cars, which may soon transmit even more personal information.

“You’re learning a lot about people’s day-to-day activities and that becomes part of what I call ubiquitous surveillance, where pretty much everything that you do is being recorded and saved and potentially can be used in order to affect your life and your freedom,” said Michael Chertoff, who served as Secretary of the U.S. Department of Homeland Security under President George W. Bush and recently wrote a book

called “Exploding Data.”

Chertoff said global automakers should be asking themselves tough questions. “If what you’re doing is giving a government of a more authoritarian country the tools to have massive surveillance, I think then companies have to ask themselves, ‘Is this really something we want to do in terms of our corporate values, even if it means otherwise forgoing that market?’”

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