

In Conversation with...Abraham Liu

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Interviews

Huawei's Abraham Liu believes we're on the cusp of the 'Fourth Industrial Revolution' – and the leadership for it can come from Europe.



Photo credit: Huawei

The Chinese tech giant is also well placed, he believes, to help Europe “connect the continent” and enable it to lead this tech-led revolution. “And here,” he says, “we have something special to offer Europe.”

Liu, the company's chief representative to the European institutions, including the European Parliament, says the “something special” is “the most advanced technologies”, including 5G.

Drawing on a sporting metaphor to further explain, he says, “just like a bicycle, one wheel is European industry and the other is mobile technology provided by the mobile industry of which Huawei is a part.”

Liu suggests that only by combining two wheels together can Europe's "digital sovereignty truly move forward. We know that a unicycle will never win the Tour de France."

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Connecting the continent is currently uppermost in his thoughts he explains, adding that a lack of connectivity is "not uncommon" in Europe.

"This bothers me," he says, "since like most people, professionals or tourists, we need a reliable connection wherever we go. Connectivity is a social right."

He explains, "Connectivity will enable people to use the internet to promote business, do Air B&B type commerce, sell local products online and, most importantly, get connected with their family members."

Liu was in the European Parliament last week to take part in a lively debate, co-hosted by a group of cross-party MEPs, about the roll-out of 5G networks and other new technologies.

Liu explains that he worked for six years in Africa where connectivity was a "major" problem and one solution Huawei provided was SingleRAN, a simplified radio access network product, which he says was well received by the operators because of its simplicity, low cost and low power consumption.

"To my surprise," he explains, "that product didn't come from China - It came from a joint innovation of Huawei and Vodafone in Europe and this product enabled hundreds of millions more people to be connected."

Liu, who has worked for the high-profile company for two decades, the last two years in Europe, says, "This is something Huawei has been doing for the last 30 years to improve the quality of people's everyday lives, and yes, we are very proud of it."

"There is, he says, a Chinese saying which means: 'Seek common ground while preserving differences.' This, Liu suggests, is neatly in line with the European Union's own motto: 'United in Diversity'"

"Ensuring connectivity is what we are all about. We bring business opportunities, provide better health care, better education and entertainment access to every citizen."

Liu says the company provides "another form" of connectivity. This includes developing 'StorySign', a free app powered by Huawei AI that reads children's books and translates them into sign language.

This, he explains, could help 32 million deaf children globally learn to read more easily. In 2009,

Huawei also enabled the world's first 4G network in Oslo and is currently working with European operators to deploy the first wave of super-fast and low latency 5G network.

It had also "boosted awareness" of Leica, a leading German company to "tens of millions of new customers locally" and has partnered with more than 150 leading European universities for "fundamental" research.

The company, he also points out, has 3,500 European companies in its supply chain which "creates lots of jobs and a lot of investment."

But he readily understands "that new technologies create opportunities and changes, but changes come with uncertainty and uncertainty can bring unease and anxiety. That's exactly why we plan to work to ease fears and create opportunities."

Outlining some of the company's future work, he explains, "Over the next five years, we are committed to investing over €90bn in research worldwide, almost five times NASA's current annual budget."

Its efforts will focus on high-performance computing and quantum computing - together with other advanced technologies - through Huawei's 23 research facilities in 14 European countries, "creating jobs and helping local economies."

These technologies, he argues, are for European industry and will help Europe strengthen its advantage in these areas.

"Over the next five years, we are committed to investing over €90bn in research worldwide, almost five times NASA's current annual budget"

Europe can also, he feels, be a leader in the 5G era. "But leading in 5G is not just about the technology itself, rather, more about the industry potential that will be enabled by 5G," he cautions.

To illustrate the point, he draws on another metaphor, this time from nature, saying "5G base stations are like trees but the potential released by 5G is like a forest."

Liu, who also leads the company's European public affairs and communications office, says, "My 17 years overseas experience makes me understand that not every country has the same culture and values."

"During my time in Europe I've been most impressed by European values of openness and advocacy of multilateralism - an alliance of many countries pursuing a common goal - which is a cornerstone in this challenging geopolitico environment."

"Globally we need to all work together to reduce future uncertainty and to keep the global political and economic system up to date."

There is, he says, a Chinese saying which means: "Seek common ground while preserving differences." This, he suggests, is neatly in line with the European Union's own motto: "United in Diversity."



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