China's internet courts and AI-assisted judging

IMPLEMENTED 2017–2026 · GOVERNMENT AND PUBLIC SERVICES · CHINA · BAND D · CLAIMED ONLY
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China's internet courts in Hangzhou, Beijing and Guangzhou run cases largely online and use AI tools for support work, including a virtual AI judge at the Beijing Internet Court that helps with litigation reception. The Supreme People's Court says AI must only assist and that judges decide. Efficiency figures are the courts' own; the gains come mainly from moving procedures online.

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AT A GLANCE

AI and automation used: AI assistants and automation within online courts: a virtual AI judge for litigation reception, and tools for case retrieval, transcription and document drafting.

Implemented: 2017–2026. Grade: band D, Task support, Claimed only.

Headline result, as reported: Courts report 45-minute average online hearings and 38 days per case (2019); the Supreme People's Court says AI may only assist judges

1 · The case

The facts, as reported by the 5 sources listed at the end. Where a source is silent, the field says "Not reported".

Organisation

Hangzhou Internet Court, Beijing Internet Court and the Supreme People's Court (China). Specialist online courts: Hangzhou (opened August 2017), Beijing and Guangzhou (September 2018), working with the Supreme People's Court's wider programme of smart courts. Canvas block: 4. Operations and process. Also 8. Governance and risk.

Business challenge

The challenge. Not reported in detail. The white paper describes a move to online litigation for online disputes, and the court's rationale as making litigation more convenient and efficient.

How it was addressed. The three internet courts handle internet-related civil and administrative cases largely online, with filing, mediation, evidence, hearings and judgments on a platform. The white paper lists smart tools used across Chinese courts: voice-to-text transcription, automatic generation and correction of documents, recommendation of laws and similar cases, and warnings of decision deviation. On 27 June 2019 the Beijing Internet Court launched an online litigation service centre with an AI judge, a virtual figure based on speech and image synthesis that helps with litigation reception and guides users. In December 2022 the Supreme People's Court set national principles for judicial AI. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Who implemented it

Alibaba (Software vendor): Per MERICS, supplied identity verification through Alipay, transaction records as evidence and cloud services to the Hangzhou court; MERICS says Alibaba also developed the pilot AI assistant judge it describes..
In-house (In-house): Designed and run the online court platforms and set national AI rules for courts..
MERICS says the AI assistant judge it describes was introduced in June 2019 and developed by Alibaba. Xinhua dates the June 2019 AI judge launch to the Beijing Internet Court and does not name a developer.

Technology (SEAM pillar E)

SEAM types: not established; the sources do not say how the system works. Deployment: Not reported. Vendors and products: Alibaba, AI judge (Beijing Internet Court), Faxin legal research platform, Smart Court systems.

Where it was built in: Online litigation platforms run by each court, with court tools for voice-to-text transcription, e-file generation, case retrieval and document drafting, per the white paper. MERICS reports Alibaba provided identity verification, transaction records as evidence and cloud services to the Hangzhou court. How the AI judge works beyond speech and image synthesis is Not reported.

What changed

Before: cases ran offline through the courts' usual procedures. After: the three courts report online hearings averaging 45 minutes and cases concluded in 38 days on average, about three-fifths and one-half faster than before, per the white paper. The sources do not separate the effect of AI from the effect of online procedure. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

What it cost

Not reported.

What it saved

Per the white paper, online hearings saved about three-fifths of time and case conclusion about one-half, and the Suzhou Intermediate Court reported judges' administrative workload down about 40 per cent and clerks' nearly 50 per cent from its integrated smart court system. These are the courts' own figures. [1] [2] [3] [4] [5]

Governance and control

The Supreme People's Court's 2022 opinions state that AI shall not make judicial decisions in place of the judge, that results are for reference only and that responsibility falls on the decision-maker. In March 2026 the court's president said AI-assisted trial systems must proceed steadily and prudently, remaining assistive. MERICS raised questions about Alibaba's influence, potential conflicts of interest and algorithmic bias.

S2 · Accountable owner · Claimed
The 2022 opinions state that judicial responsibility ultimately falls on the decision-maker and that decisions are made by judges. [1]

A1 · Safe use · Claimed
The opinions set principles of security and legality and require ethical risk management, including mechanisms for risk control, emergency response and responsibility investigation. [1]

A2 · Human in the loop · Claimed
The opinions say AI may not replace judges, AI results are references only, and users may choose whether to use judicial AI. The Supreme People's Court president repeated this in March 2026. [1] [5]

A3 · Monitoring and assurance · Claimed
The opinions require AI systems to be open to examination, evaluation and filing by responsible bodies, and to be explainable, testable and verifiable. No audit results are reported. [1]

A4 · Vendor AI · Not reported
MERICS raised questions about conflicts of interest and algorithmic bias given Alibaba's role; no vendor controls are described. [4]

A5 · Agent controls · Not reported
No agents are described.

A6 · Standards and regulation · Claimed
The Supreme People's Court issued its own opinions in December 2022 with targets for 2025 and 2030, applying to courts nationwide. [1]

What worked, what did not, what is unproven

WORKED

– The courts report quicker hearings and case conclusion than before (white paper, October 2019 data).

– The white paper reports that up to 98 per cent of parties accepted first-instance judgments and did not appeal.

– The Supreme People's Court published national rules for judicial AI in 2022 with stated targets for 2025 and 2030.

DID NOT

– MERICS described the AI assistant judge as a flagship experiment and said its wider viability was unclear.

– MERICS noted data protection, algorithmic bias and IT shortcomings as issues to address.

UNPROVEN

– Whether the 2025 target of a complete judicial AI application system has been met: Not reported.

– Current figures for Hangzhou and Beijing: not found in the sources opened.

Timeline

Aug 2017 Hangzhou Internet Court established [2]

Sept 2018 Beijing Internet Court (9 September) and Guangzhou Internet Court (28 September) established [2]

Jun 2019 Beijing Internet Court launches an online litigation service centre with an AI judge [3]

Oct 2019 Internet courts report 118,764 cases accepted and 88,401 concluded as of 31 October [2]

Dec 2019 Supreme People's Court publishes white paper Chinese Courts and Internet Judiciary [2]

Dec 2022 Supreme People's Court issues Opinions on Regulating and Strengthening the Application of Artificial Intelligence in the Judicial Field [1]

Mar 2026 Supreme People's Court President Zhang Jun says AI-assisted trial systems must stay assistive and only judges bear judicial responsibility [5]

2 · Grade and SEAM assessment

MarLuc's opinion, made on the evidence above. How cases are graded: marluc.co.uk/case-studies/how-we-rate

Level of change and impact

Claimed: Not applicable. Grade: D, Task support. Proof: Claimed only. Level of change: Task support.

Task support (Level 1, band D). The sources describe AI as support for reception, administration and drafting, with judges deciding. The technology is only partly AI, so the case is marked as AI and automation used.

The internet courts redesigned litigation to run online, but the sources attribute their speed to online procedure, not to AI, and describe the AI tools as support for reception, transcription, drafting, case retrieval and administration. AI helps individual staff and judges with tasks, so this is task support (band D). All results are the courts' own, so the marker is Claimed only.

The SEAM view and lessons learnt

The court programme combines a redesigned online procedure with AI support tools. The sources credit the speed to the online process, so the AI contribution is hard to isolate. The supreme court's rules put control at the judge and ask for explainable, testable systems, but no results of such testing are public in the sources opened. For a large public body, the transferable point is to measure AI's effect separately from process redesign.

1. Measure the effect of AI separately from the effect of redesigning the process.
2. State in writing that people decide and bear responsibility.
3. Publish tests of any AI system that supports judges or case handlers.

Evidence

Score 2 of 4. Official court documents and Xinhua relay the courts' own figures; MERICS offers independent analysis but no evaluation of outcomes.

Evaluation method. Official court documents (white paper, Supreme People's Court opinions in Chinese), Xinhua via the Supreme People's Court website, MERICS analysis and Caixin reporting. Chinese quotes translated for this synopsis.

Sources disagree. Average online hearing length differs by source and period: MERICS (October 2019) reported 28 minutes for Hangzhou; the December 2019 white paper reported 45 minutes across the three courts. MERICS also places the June 2019 AI assistant judge in the Hangzhou court; Xinhua dates it to the Beijing Internet Court.

Status. Ongoing. The Supreme People's Court president restated the assistive principle in March 2026.

3 · Original sources

Read these in full. To challenge a fact or a grade, use the contact form at marluc.co.uk or the link on https://marluc.co.uk/case-studies/china-internet-courts-ai-assisted-judging

[1] Supreme People's Court (China): 最高人民法院关于规范和加强人工智能司法应用的意见 (Opinions on Regulating and Strengthening the Application of Artificial Intelligence in the Judicial Field), 9 December 2022
https://www.court.gov.cn/fabu/xiangqing/382461.html

[2] Supreme People's Court: Chinese Courts and Internet Judiciary (white paper, December 2019; English text via China Justice Observer)
https://www.chinajusticeobserver.com/law/x/chinese-courts-and-internet-judiciary

[3] Xinhua via Supreme People's Court website: Beijing Internet court launches AI judge (28 June 2019)
https://subsites.chinadaily.com.cn/supremepeoplescourt/2019-06/28/c_766675.htm

[4] MERICS: Size matters: Alibaba shapes China's first Court of the Internet (17 October 2019)
https://merics.org/index%2ephp/en/comment/size-matters-alibaba-shapes-chinas-first-court-internet

[5] Caixin Global: Two Sessions: China's Top Court Draws Red Line on AI in Courtrooms (10 March 2026)
https://www.caixinglobal.com/2026-03-10/two-sessions-chinas-top-court-draws-red-line-on-ai-in-courtrooms-102421415.html

Hangzhou Internet Court, Beijing Internet Court and the Supreme People's Court (China) website: https://english.court.gov.cn

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