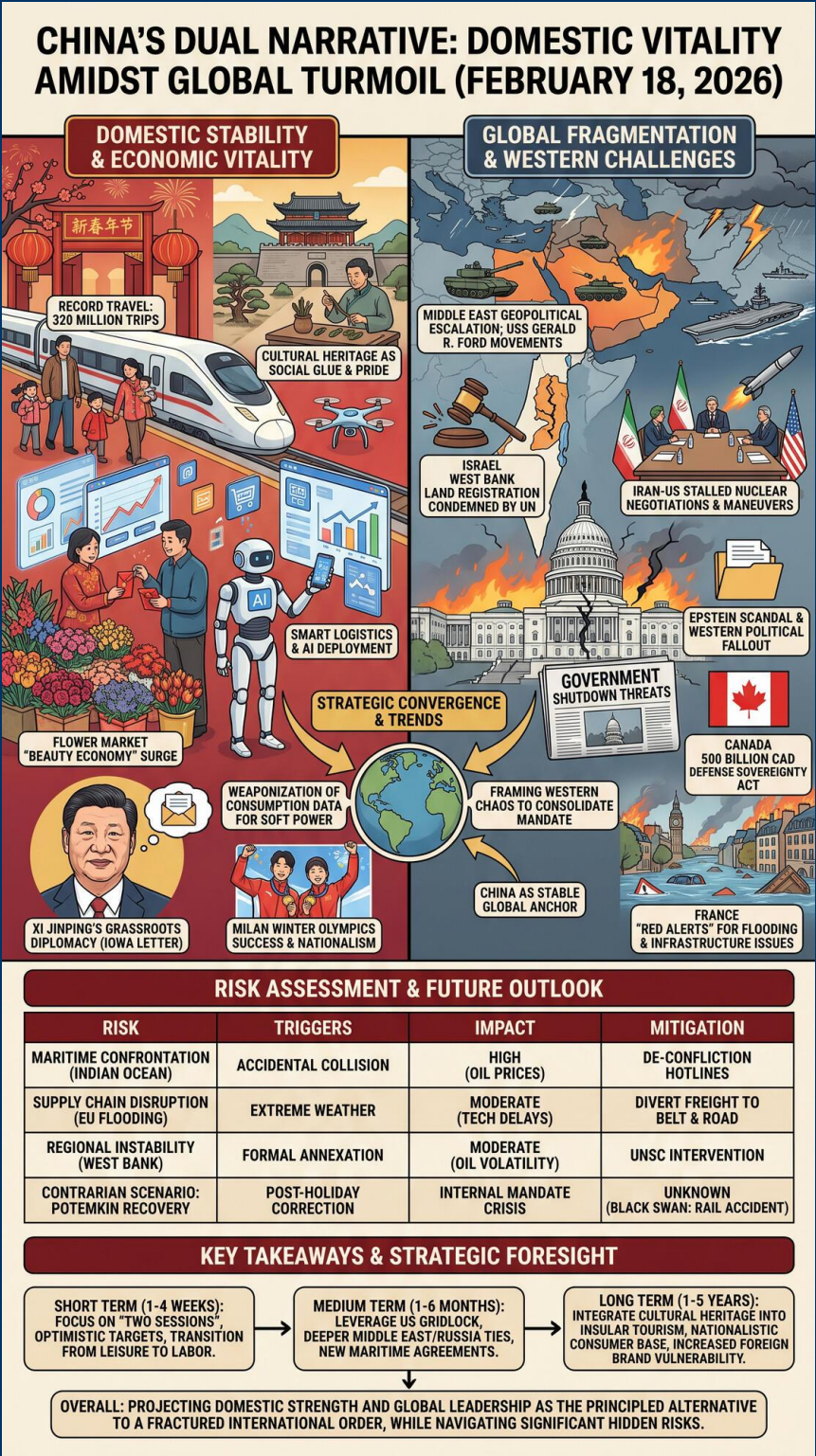


TODAY'S MEDIA TRENDS

CCTV1

FEBRUARY 18, 2026

THE GDELT PROJECT



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CHINA ASSERTS DOMESTIC
ECONOMIC VITALITY AMIDST
HEIGHTENED MIDDLE EASTERN
TENSIONS AND WESTERN
INTERNAL SCANDALS

DAY-AT-A-GLANCE

On February 18, 2026, marking the second day of the Lunar New Year and the "Rain Water" solar term, the Chinese state narrative focused heavily on projecting a dual image of domestic prosperity and global diplomatic leadership. While internal reports celebrated record-breaking travel volumes and a "consumption boom" in tourism and film markets, the news cycle simultaneously highlighted China's role as a stable mediator in the face of escalating conflicts in the Middle East and Eastern Europe. The government is leveraging massive holiday migration data—reporting over **320 million** cross-regional trips—to signal a definitive post-recovery economic strength, while President Xi Jinping's personal diplomacy with "old friends" in Iowa, USA, serves to contrast grassroots goodwill with the perceived institutional decay and scandal within Western political systems.

Geopolitically, the day was defined by a critical posture toward Western and Israeli actions. Detailed reports focused on the "illegal" registration of land in the West Bank and the internal political fallout of the Epstein scandal in the United States, framing Western democracies as chaotic and corrupt. This contrasts with China's portrayal of its own internal "Spring Festival" harmony and technological advancements, including the deployment of **AI and smart logistics** to manage the massive holiday travel rush. The convergence of these narratives suggests a strategic effort to consolidate domestic mandate through economic "good news" while positioning the nation as the principled alternative to a fractured international order.

MAJOR DEVELOPMENTS

- **Xi Jinping Reaffirms "Grassroots Diplomacy" with the United States:** President Xi replied to a letter from friends in Iowa, emphasizing that the **foundation of China-US relations** lies in the people and grassroots interactions, despite political shifts [at the state level](#).
- **Spring Festival Consumption and Travel Surpass Historical Records:** Total cross-regional travel reached **320 million** trips on the second day of the Lunar New Year, with a **21.64% increase** in UnionPay transactions [compared to last year](#).
- **Escalation of Middle Eastern Geopolitical Friction:** The UN and several Arab nations issued a strong **condemnation of Israeli** land registration in the West Bank, while Iran and the US continue to maneuver around **stalled nuclear negotiations** [in Geneva](#).

- **China Dominates Winter Sports at the Milan Winter Olympics:** Chinese athletes, including **Su Yiming** and Xu Mengtao, secured significant gold medals, which were used to fuel **nationalistic pride** during the New Year broadcasts [on CCTV](#).
- **Western Internal Instability Framed as "Chaotic":** Chinese media provided extensive coverage of the **Epstein scandal's** implications for US political figures and the potential **US government shutdown**, contrasting this with China's holiday [social order](#).

KEY GOVERNANCE TOPICS

Armed Conflict & Militarization

- Detailed reporting on the **USS Gerald R. Ford** carrier's movement toward the Middle East and the deployment of hundreds of aircraft [to the region](#).
- Canada's Ministry of Defense announced a **500 billion CAD** investment over 10 years to strengthen **national defense sovereignty** and reduce reliance on international suppliers [of military hardware](#).
- Ongoing reports of **naval drills** involving Iran, Russia, and China in the Indian Ocean as a counter-measure to **unilateralism in maritime trade**.

Macroeconomics & Trade

- Spring Festival box office receipts exceeded **2.2 billion yuan**, with a diverse range of genres driving a **7.18% increase** in online payment [transaction frequency](#).

- The **"Beauty Economy"** was specifically highlighted, as the domestic flower market saw a surge in sales for traditional New Year flora like butterfly orchids [and daffodils](#).
- E-commerce and logistics sectors integrated **AI and robotics** to maintain 24/7 operations during the holiday peak, showcasing **supply chain resilience and tech sovereignty**.

Climate & Extreme Weather

- France issued **"Red Alerts"** for flooding across 78 provinces, causing power outages for thousands of households, which was framed as a **failure of infrastructure preparedness**.
- China monitored the **Haihe River basin** for "Blue Algae" outbreaks, using artificial water supplements to **prevent mass fish kills and ecological damage**.

DEEP DIVE: TRENDS AND THEMES

The "Cultural Heritage" Narrative as Social Glue The transcripts reveal a systemic push to use "Intangible Cultural Heritage" (ICH) as a primary tool for national cohesion. By highlighting **traditional craftsmanship** in Huoshan (medicinal herbs) and the preservation of the **Ancient City of Zhengding**, the state is framing modern Chinese life as an **unbroken continuation** of millennial history. This serves to sanitize the rapid modernization process by rooting it in **traditional "filial" values** and cultural pride [and social stability](#).

Weaponization of Domestic Consumption Data Data regarding holiday travel and spending is being used as a **geopolitical signal** of China's economic "soft landing" and

continued growth. By reporting over **10.8 million** daily rail passengers and significant increases in **UnionPay** and **network payments**, the CCP is countering international narratives of economic stagnation [and financial risk](#).

INTERNAL DYNAMICS & DOMESTIC INSTABILITY

Domestic stability is portrayed as **absolute**, centered entirely on the **Spring Festival's** traditional family focus. However, the transcripts reveal subtle concerns regarding the **sustainability of rural development**. The focus on "military wives" visiting husbands at remote border posts (such as **Sanjiaoshan**) and the emphasis on "**poverty alleviation**" through tourism in the Wuling mountains suggests that the government is still managing significant **regional disparities** and the mental health of isolated personnel [and their families](#).

- The use of "**social credit**" and **monitoring** was hinted at through reports on **smart traffic management** and the deployment of "**digital stewards**" to maintain order during mass migrations [of the public](#).
- A significant "lead story" regarding **President Xi's letter to Iowa** indicates a strategic choice to bypass the US federal government, targeting **sub-national actors** to mitigate the impact of **containment policies** [from Washington](#).

EXTERNAL DYNAMICS & GLOBAL POSTURE

China is framing the "outside world" as a **bipolar landscape**: one of traditional partners (Global South) and another of

chaotic Western powers. The state media's portrayal of the **Middle East** focuses on the failure of US-led diplomacy, while Chinese-led "culture festivals" in **Brazil, Egypt, and Belgium** are used to project **soft power** and global leadership [and cultural appeal](#).

- **Geopolitical competition** was evident in the framing of the **Milan Winter Olympics**, where Chinese victories were presented as triumphs over Western competitors in **technical disciplines** [like snowboarding](#).
- The **Epstein scandal** and **US government funding crises** are being systematically used to delegitimize **American governance models**, portraying the US as a "**failing state**" compared to China's "prosperous New Year" [narrative cycle](#).

THE ECONOMIC ENVIRONMENT

The economic outlook is characterized by **aggressive retail and entertainment growth**, particularly in digital and cross-border transactions. Market sentiment is being bolstered by "record-breaking" holiday data intended to attract **foreign investment** into the tourism and consumption sectors.

- **Total National Retail Flow:** Expected to exceed **3.2 billion** cross-regional movements during the Spring Festival [holiday period](#).
- **Box Office Performance:** Holiday revenue surpassed **2.2 billion yuan**, with domestic productions dominating the **market share of viewership**.
- **Network Payment Volume:** Reached a peak of **144,000 transactions per second**, a historical record for **New Year payments** [on domestic platforms](#).

- **Commodity Prices:** Crude oil prices (Brent) rose **4.35%** to **\$70.35/barrel**, driven by **Middle East instability** and [shipping risks](#).

LEADERSHIP CHANGES

Leadership movements focused on the stabilization of **internal military cadres** and the public rehabilitation of international partners. No major "purges" were announced, but the visibility of **"Model Units"** in the army indicates a focus on **loyalty and morale**.

- **President Xi Jinping** is portrayed as the **singular diplomat**, personally handling communications with **"grassroots America"** to maintain **strategic depth** [outside official channels](#).
- **Su Yiming and Xu Mengtao** were elevated as **national icons**, representing the **"success of the nation"** on the global stage [following Olympic golds](#).
- **US and Israeli leaders** were characterized by **ineptitude and legal peril**, particularly in the context of the **Epstein case** and West Bank **settlement disputes** [and legal challenges](#).

EDITORIAL POSTURE & STORY HIERARCHY

CCTV's hierarchy was **strictly nationalistic and reassuring**. The "Lead" stories were **Xi's diplomatic letters** and the **festive success** of the Spring Festival. These were given over 60% of total airtime. "Buried" stories included the **ongoing stalemate in Ukraine** and **domestic economic structural issues**, which were replaced by upbeat reports on "flower markets" and "ice and snow tourism." The tone was one of **celebratory confidence**,

designed to distract from the **underlying volatility** of the global market and potential **maritime disruptions** in the Red Sea.

GEOPOLITICAL FRAMING

The day's framing reinforces China's role as a **stable, civilized anchor** in a world of **fracturing alliances** and Western moral decay. The subtext suggests that the **"Chinese Model"** of governance and social order is superior to the **"chaotic democracy"** of the West.

- **Iran** is framed as a **rational negotiator** seeking [切实的](#) (practical) outcomes while facing **unreasonable US pressure** and [military threats](#).
- **Israel** is portrayed as **principled only in aggression**, with its actions in the West Bank labeled as **"illegal and predatory"** by Chinese-backed UN [observer missions](#).
- **The United States** is depicted as **stable in its instability**, with leadership bogged down in **historic scandals (Epstein)** and **unresolved budget crises** [and shutdowns](#).

INFORMATION WARFARE ENVIRONMENT

- **Narrative Seeding:** The transcripts repeatedly use the term **"Spring Festival Economy"** to frame seasonal spending as **structural economic health** and [consumer confidence](#).
- **Censorship by Omission:** There was zero mention of **Chinese youth unemployment** or **property market debt**, despite these being critical risks during a major **spending holiday** [like New Year](#).

- **Meta-Narrative:** The **Epstein case** is being used as **domestic propaganda** to demonstrate to the Chinese public that Western elite systems are **inherently compromised** [and decadent](#).

HYPOTHESES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK

- **Post-Holiday Economic Correction:** While the "New Year Boom" is touted, a **sharp correction** in spending and tourism is likely in March as the **artificial stimulus** of the holiday fades.
- **Increased Naval Tension:** With US, Chinese, and Russian assets **maneuvering in the Indian Ocean**, a **miscalculation** or "freedom of navigation" confrontation is **highly probable** in the next 4-6 weeks [near Oman](#).

STRATEGIC FORESIGHT

Short Term (1-4 Weeks): Expect a **renewed focus** on "Two Sessions" preparation, using holiday data to set **optimistic growth targets** for the 2026 fiscal year. Regional travel will transition from **leisure to labor**, testing the **critical infrastructure** of the high-speed rail network [during the return rush](#).

Medium Term (1-6 Months): China will likely **leverage US political gridlock** to forge deeper **Middle Eastern energy ties**, potentially formalizing a new **trilateral maritime security agreement** with Iran and Russia [to bypass US sanctions](#).

Long Term (1-5 Years): The systemic integration of **ICH (Cultural Heritage)** into tourism and education will create a more **insular and nationalistic** consumer base,

making foreign brands **more vulnerable** to "cultural sensitivity" boycotts [and market exclusion](#).

RISK ASSESSMENT

- **Maritime Confrontation:** Escalating US naval presence vs. Iran/China drills. **Triggers:** Accidental collision in the Strait of Hormuz. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** High (Oil price spike). **Mitigation:** De-confliction hotlines [and neutral observers](#).
- **Supply Chain Disruption:** Flooding in France and potential rail strikes. **Triggers:** Extreme weather damaging EU logistics hubs. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Moderate (Tech component delays). **Mitigation:** Diverting freight [to the "Belt and Road" rail links](#).
- **Cybersecurity Vulnerability:** Surge in 14.4 million transactions/sec. **Triggers:** State-sponsored attacks on payment gateways during holiday peak. **Likelihood:** Low. **Impact:** Critical (Loss of social trust). **Mitigation:** Hardening AI-driven **threat detection systems**.
- **Regional Instability:** Israeli land registration in the West Bank. **Triggers:** Formal annexation or mass protests. **Likelihood:** High. **Impact:** Moderate (Global oil volatility). **Mitigation:** Immediate UN **Security Council intervention** [led by China/Russia](#).
- **Public Health/Safety:** Massive "Rain Water" weather shifts. **Triggers:** Sudden 20-degree drops in temp during return travel. **Likelihood:** Moderate. **Impact:** Low (Localized travel delays). **Mitigation:** Early warning **meteorological broadcasts** [and heat supply readiness](#).

GAPS & BLIND SPOTS

- **Structural Economic Weakness:** The broadcast omits **real estate debt** and **stock market volatility**, focusing only on "micro" consumption data [like flower sales](#).
- **Ukraine Conflict Reality:** Conflicting reports on territory gains (Sumy/Kharkiv) suggest the **ground truth** of the war is being **heavily sanitized** for domestic audiences [by state media](#).
- **Domestic Unrest:** No mention of **labor grievances** or strikes despite the intense pressure on **logistics and rail workers** during the 24/7 holiday [operations](#).

CONTRARIAN NARRATIVE SCENARIOS

The "Potemkin Recovery" Hypothesis: The record-breaking consumption and travel numbers may be a **one-off "revenge spending"** event that hides a **hollowed-out middle class**. If the post-holiday dip is deeper than expected, the CCP may face **internal mandate crises** by mid-2026. **Black Swan:** A **major high-speed rail accident** during the return rush, exposing **infrastructure fatigue** and triggering **mass social unrest** [during the holiday](#).

RECOMMENDATIONS & IMPLICATIONS

For Statecraft/Public Sector:

- Prioritize **sub-national and grassroots diplomacy** with Western nations to bypass **federal containment** strategies [as modeled by Xi](#).

- Invest heavily in **cultural heritage digitization** to maintain **ideological control** over the younger generation [and Gen Z](#).
- Monitor **maritime corridors** in the Persian Gulf for **dual-use drilling/drills** by non-Western blocs [and partners](#).

For Private Sector/Investors:

- Focus capital on the **"Beauty Economy" and Wellness** sectors in China, which remain **politically safe** and high-growth [amidst austerity](#).
- Prepare for **stricter data sovereignty** requirements as China integrates **AI into critical holiday logistics** [and monitoring](#).
- Hedge against **Canadian defense industry** shifts, as their "reshoring" initiative will disrupt **established North American** military supply chains [and contracts](#).

LEGISLATIVE ROUNDUP

The day was dominated by **international policy debate** rather than domestic bill passage, focusing on **UN observer mission statements** and **sovereign defense funding** proposals. The CCP emphasized the **"15th Five-Year Plan"** strategic goals for **cultural and ecological protection** [and infrastructure](#).

• BILLS DISCUSSED/DEBATED:

- **Canada Defense Sovereignty Act:** A 500 billion CAD allocation for **10-year domestic military procurement** [to reduce imports](#).
- **China 15th Five-Year Strategic Outlook:** Proposals to integrate **AI and ICH** into the "New Consumption" **economic model** [for 2026-2030](#).

- **HEARINGS & PRESS EVENTS:**
 - **UN Middle East Crisis Briefing:** Condemned Israeli **settlement expansion** and land registration as **illegal provocations** [by member states](#).
 - **Geneva Trilateral Talks:** Russian and Ukrainian representatives discussed **pre-conditions for a ceasefire**, with **no immediate resolution** [reached on territory](#).

KEY STORIES

- **Xi Jinping's Iowa Letter:** Reaffirmed **grassroots ties** as the future of US-China relations, bypassing **official diplomatic friction** [with Washington](#).
- **New Year Travel Surge:** **3.2 billion** cross-regional movements and a **21.6% rise** in spending, signaling a **consumption boom** [across China](#).
- **Su Yiming Snowboarding Gold:** China wins big at the **Milan Winter Olympics**, fueling **nationalistic pride** during the holidays [on television](#).
- **Israel West Bank Condemnation:** UN and 85 nations **strongly condemn** Israeli land registration, calling it "**predatory and illegal**" [in the West Bank](#).
- **Epstein Scandal Media Blitz:** Extensive coverage of **US political corruption** and the "shameful" **Epstein case files** to discredit **Western democracy** [to Chinese audiences](#).
- **Canada Defense Funding:** A massive **500 billion CAD** plan to reshore **military production** over a decade [in North America](#).

- **Haihe River Ecology:** Massive restoration and **algae control** efforts to preserve the "**Mother River**" of North China [and its biodiversity](#).
- **Spring Festival Box Office:** Records set as **domestic films** earn over **2.2 billion yuan** in the first week of release [of the holiday](#).
- **Iran-US Nuclear Standoff:** Continued maneuverings in **Geneva**, with Iran denying **nuclear ambitions** while refusing to **stop missile development** [near the US border](#).
- **Houshan Cultural Heritage:** A "Deep Dive" into the **thousand-year-old** herb processing techniques, framing it as **essential national culture** [and identity](#).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Today's Media Trends is a public interest experiment in applying deep thematic trend analysis to television news coverage from around the world to explore how responsibly applied advanced AI can help journalists and scholars better understand the overarching trends, themes and patterns of our global world.

No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

Each morning, in collaboration with the Internet Archive's TV News Archive, we apply Google's Gemini 3 to deeply examine yesterday's coverage from each television news channel to tease out the overarching themes and trends of its news coverage into a richly annotated thematic analysis. Each high-level insight is connected back to the original broadcast, allowing journalists and scholars to understand the dominate themes and trends

and instantly click out to the underlying sources for details.

By helping journalists and scholars see the broader trends and patterns of global news coverage, this analysis helps them identify relevant stories and coverage they might not otherwise have encountered and uncover connections, emphases and narrative shifts that enable more comprehensive reporting and deeper, evidence-based research.

This report is entirely machine generated using Gemini 3 and may include errors and

omissions. Please verify all findings. No data is used to train or tune any AI model.

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