

China's Tech Giants Have a Side Job: Helping Beijing Spy

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Alibaba and its peers assist authorities in policing crime, silencing dissent

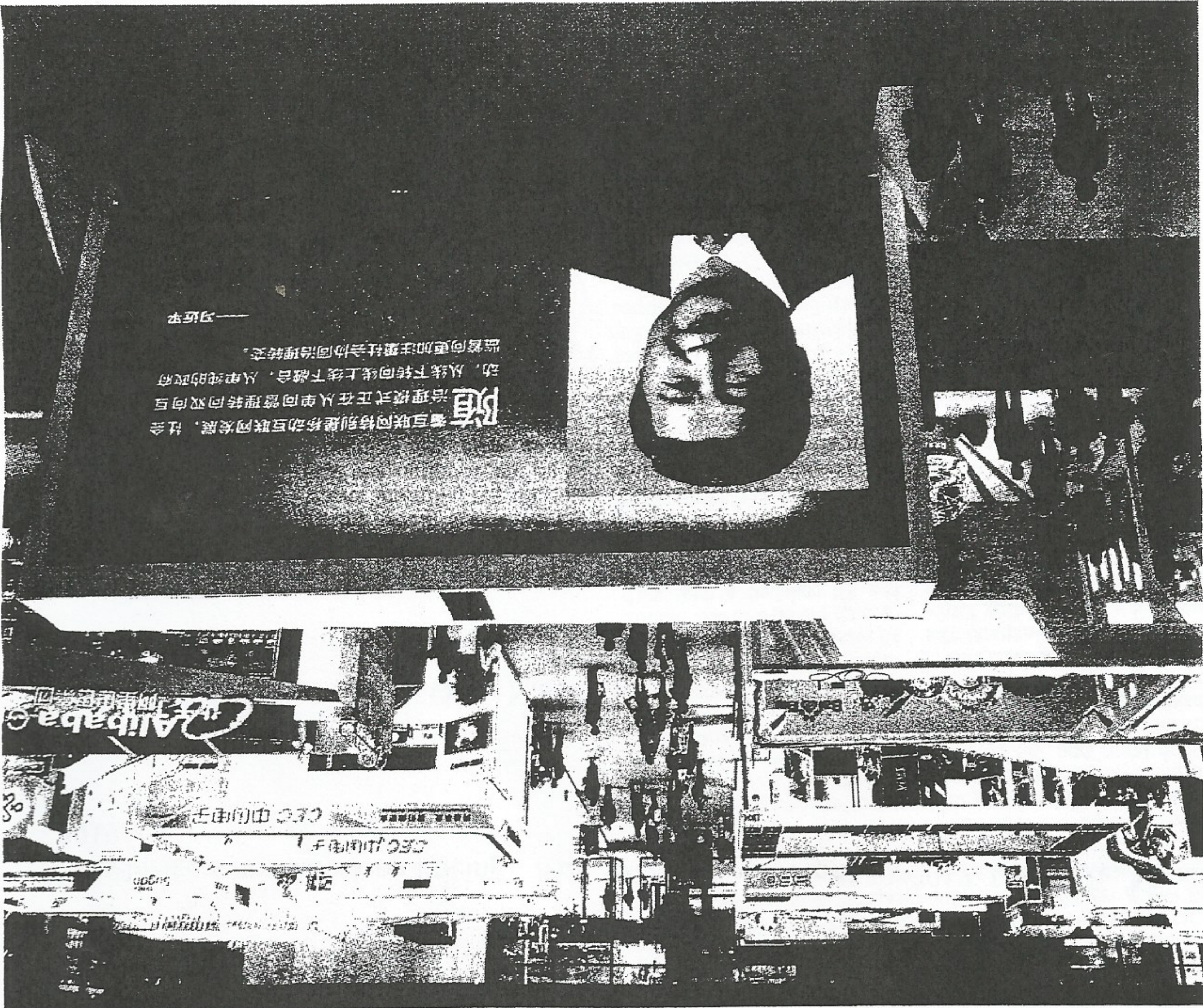
By Liza Lin
and Josh Chin

HANGZHOU, China—Alibaba Group's sprawling campus has collegial workspaces, laid-back coffee bars and, on the landscaped grounds, a police outpost.

Employees use the office to report suspected crimes to the police, according to people familiar with the operation. Police also use it to request data from Alibaba for their own investigations, these people said, tapping into the trove of information the tech giant collects through its e-commerce and financial-payment networks.

In one case, the police wanted to find out who had posted content related to terrorism, said a former Alibaba employee. "They came to me and asked me for the user ID and information," he recalled. He turned it over.

The Chinese government is building one of the world's most sophisticated, high-tech systems to keep watch over its citizens, including surveillance cameras, facial-recognition technology and vast computers systems that comb through terabytes of data. Central to its efforts are the country's biggest technology companies, which are openly acting as the government's eyes and ears in cyberspace.



Chinese President Xi Jinping appeared on a screen during the annual World Internet Conference in Wuzhen, China, in 2016.