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China blocks SoftBank’s $5.4B ABB robotics deal, a blow to Son’s AI push

Beijing has blocked SoftBank’s purchase of ABB’s robotics arm. It is a direct hit to Masayoshi Son’s plans for “physical AI,” and it shows China now treats robot data as a national security asset.

By **Manasee Kurlekar** | November 5, 2026



Masayoshi Son wanted ABB’s robots for SoftBank’s AI future. Their biggest market just said no.

China blocked SoftBank’s $5.4 billion takeover of the Swiss group’s robotics unit.

China’s foreign-investment security review office blocked the deal, ABB said. Regulators were worried that sensitive robotics data could be sent outside China and used to train AI models. It is a direct hit to Masayoshi Son’s plans for “physical AI,” and it shows China now treats robot data as a national security asset.

Regulators feared robotics data leaving the country to train AI models, possibly including models from SoftBank-backed OpenAI.

That matters because China is ABB Robotics’ biggest market, and more than 90% of the robots it sells there are made locally.

Europe had already approved the deal without conditions in March. SoftBank fell about 7%. Now ABB has to decide what to do with a business it was trying to sell.

Read online: https://worldbusinesswatch.com/news/12/372/china-blocks-softbanks-5-4b-abb-robotics-deal-a-blow-to-sons-ai-push.html
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