

# China grants first driverless taxi permits to Baidu, Pony.ai

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A Baidu Apollo Robotaxi passes its customer service counter setup at the Shougang Park in Beijing, Sunday, May 2, 2021. China has granted Chinese internet services company Baidu and a rival autonomous car company, Pony.ai, permits to provide driverless ride-hailing services to the public in Beijing, a significant regulatory step in the country's pursuit of driverless technology. Credit: AP Photo/Andy Wong, File

China has granted Chinese internet services company Baidu and a rival autonomous car company, Pony.ai, permits to provide driverless ride-hailing services to the public in Beijing, a significant regulatory step in the country's pursuit of driverless technology.

The permits given to Baidu and Pony.ai allow them to offer rides without a safety driver behind the wheel to take over in cases of an emergency. The new permits still require a safety supervisor to be seated in the front passenger seat.

Baidu said 10 such autonomous cars began offering rides to passengers within a 60-square-kilometer (23-square-mile) area in suburban Beijing from Thursday.

Baidu already operates an autonomous fleet of taxis in Beijing under its Apollo Go ride-hailing services, but they must have a safety driver behind the wheel.

China has ambitions to lead [autonomous driving](#) technology globally but lags the U.S. in introducing such services. Alphabet's Waymo began offering driverless taxi services in Phoenix, Arizona in 2020.

In 2020, Beijing set a goal for 70% of cars sold in 2030 to have Level 2 and Level 3 self-driving technology. Level 2 is partial driving automation, which means the vehicle can control steering and speed. Level 3 automation means that the car can detect what's going on around it and drive itself.

Baidu, best known for its [search engine](#) and online advertising services, has in recent years invested heavily in autonomous driving and artificial intelligence technology, including automated personal assistants and AI chips.

The company said in a statement that it has accumulated over 27 million kilometers (16 million miles) of road testing over the last nine years with no [traffic accidents](#).

Baidu's Apollo Go autonomous taxi services operate in nine cities across China, including Shanghai, Shenzhen and Guangzhou.

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