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Li Auto: Portrait of a Car Brand

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Introduction

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries have witnessed seismic shifts in international transportation, with innovations in technology, design, and consumer experience transforming the way we live and move. Among these changes, the automotive industry stands as both a mirror and a driver of societal transformation. Within this vast landscape, new energy vehicle (NEV) brands have emerged to challenge traditional notions of mobility and sustainability. One such brand—Li Auto—has swiftly risen to capture imaginations, setting new standards in performance, comfort, and family-oriented innovation. "Li Auto: Portrait of a Car Brand" offers an in-depth exploration of the fascinating evolution of this automotive icon.

Founded in 2015 by visionary entrepreneur Li Xiang, Li Auto Inc., known in Chinese as Lixiang (理想), has carved out a unique niche in the world's fastest-changing automobile market. Li Xiang's journey from internet entrepreneur to pioneering automaker reflects both the restless dynamism of modern China and the potential for novel ideas to reshape entire industries. From its initial ambitions in shared mobility and low-speed electric vehicles to its strategic pivot toward premium smart SUVs, the story of Li Auto is one of reinvention and resilience.

At the core of Li Auto's meteoric rise lies a simple yet profound mission: "Create a Mobile Home, Create Happiness." More than a slogan, this philosophy has driven every aspect of the company's product development, design language, and corporate strategy. By addressing the everyday needs of Chinese families—spaciousness, comfort, connectivity, and above all, peace of mind—Li Auto has set itself apart from both established competitors and fellow NEV startups. Its groundbreaking extended-range electric vehicles (EREVs) have effectively erased "range anxiety" for consumers, blending electric propulsion with the security of extended travel.

This book dives deep into the technology and design philosophies underpinning Li Auto's success. Readers will journey through the evolution of key models such as the Li One and the L-Series, explore the technological marvels within each vehicle's intelligent cockpit, and gain an understanding of how manufacturing excellence and user feedback have shaped product lines. The text also examines financial milestones, from the company's high-profile IPO to its rapid surge in sales, illuminating both the opportunities and challenges facing high-growth ventures in a volatile market.

As the global automotive landscape navigates the transition toward electrification, automation, and sustainability, Li Auto's story resonates far beyond the confines of a single business case. The company not only embodies China's ascent in the field of clean transportation but also offers a lens through which to contemplate the broader

future of mobility—where families, technology, and environmental responsibility converge on every road traveled.

Through this comprehensive history, "Li Auto: Portrait of a Car Brand" brings to life the aspirations, innovations, and determination that have made Li Auto a beacon for a new generation of drivers and thinkers. This book tells the story of how a bold vision, rooted in real-world needs and smart execution, became a new chapter in the evolving saga of the global automobile.

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CHAPTER ONE: The Genesis of Li Auto: From Startup to Vision

The story of Li Auto, like many groundbreaking ventures, began with a confluence of ambition, insight, and a keen understanding of an emerging market. In 2015, a new name quietly entered the burgeoning Chinese automotive landscape: Beijing Chehejia Information Technology. This entity, founded by the visionary entrepreneur Li Xiang, was the nascent form of what would eventually become Li Auto Inc., a company poised to redefine the new energy vehicle (NEV) segment.

Li Xiang was no stranger to the world of entrepreneurship. Before embarking on his automotive journey, he had already carved out a significant reputation in China's internet and digital industries. His earlier successes, particularly with PCPop.com, an online forum dedicated to digital gadgets, and Autohome, a leading automotive news and services portal that achieved a successful initial public offering on the New York Stock Exchange, provided him with invaluable experience. These ventures instilled in him a deep understanding of consumer behavior, particularly within the automotive sphere, and honed his ability to identify and address unmet needs in the market. It was this foundation that would ultimately inform Li Auto's user-centric philosophy, a guiding principle that would permeate every aspect of the company's operations, from product design to customer service.

The initial foray into the automotive world for Li Xiang's new company, Chehejia, was somewhat different from the direction it would eventually take. The early focus was on exploring the potential of low-speed electric vehicles, with an eye toward applications in car-sharing and ride-hailing services. This segment, while seemingly niche, represented a novel approach to urban mobility, aligning with the broader global trend towards shared economies and sustainable transportation. However, the regulatory landscape in China proved to be a formidable challenge. A lack of robust government support for this particular category of low-speed EVs meant that the project, despite its innovative premise, faced an uphill battle. By 2018, it became clear that this initial direction was not sustainable, leading to the difficult but ultimately strategic decision to abandon the low-speed EV endeavor.

This pivot, rather than being a setback, marked a crucial turning point. It forced a re-evaluation of strategy and a recalibration of ambitions. In 2019, the holding company underwent a significant rebranding, emerging as Leading Ideal Inc. This name change was more than a mere cosmetic adjustment; it signaled a renewed sense of purpose and a clear shift in focus. The following year, this transformation was solidified with the official adoption of the name Li Auto Inc. This strategic evolution was the true

catalyst for Li Auto's journey into the realm of premium smart electric vehicles, setting the stage for its rapid ascent in the highly competitive NEV market. It was a moment of clarity, where past experiences and market insights converged to forge a new path for an automotive brand with grand aspirations.

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