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Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies

RCAS Commentary

Compete Where Necessary, Cooperate Where Possible

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About RCAS

香港亞洲研究中心| The Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS) is a nonprofit research organization focusing on Asian affairs. It is a newly established institution founded in February 2022 by Dr. Nian Peng in Haikou and subsequently moved to Hong Kong in September 2023. We currently have an international research team with nearly 100 resident/nonresident researchers from China and other countries.

RCAS aims to become a leading research institute and think tank on Asian affairs in the Indo-Pacific region. To date, RCAS has conducted research programs on maritime disputes in the South China Sea (SCS), China's relations with the Indo-Pacific states, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), terrorism/counterterrorism in the Afg-Pak region, and so on. It is committed to promoting maritime cooperation, regional integration, and regional peace in the Indo-Pacific region at large.

RCAS has published nearly ten books in Chinese and English and more than 20 papers in SSCI/SCOPUS/CSSCI-indexed journals. Recent English publications include *Populism, Nationalism and South China Sea Dispute: Chinese and Southeast Asian Perspectives* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2022); *Pakistan's Foreign Policy: Contemporary Developments and Dynamics* (London: Routledge, 2022); *Crossing the Himalayas: Buddhist Ties, Regional Integration and Great-Power Rivalry* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *The Reshaping of China-Southeast Asia Relations in Light of the COVID-19 Pandemic* (Singapore: Springer Nature, 2021); *Territorial Disputes, The Role of Leaders and The Impact of Quad: A Triangular Explanation of China-India Border Escalations* (2023); *Managing the South China Sea Dispute: Multilateral and Bilateral Approaches* (2022); *China-Pakistan Cooperation on Afghanistan: Assessing Key Interests and Implementing Strategies* (2022); *Hedging Against the Dragon: Myanmar's Tangled Relations with China since 1988* (2021); and *China-Pakistan Conventional Arms Trade: An Appraisal of Supplier's and Recipient's Motives* (2020).

RCAS has also published hundreds of articles, and its researchers have been interviewed in various local and international media outlets, such as *The Diplomat* in the United States, *East Asian Forum (EAF)* in Australia, *Bangkok Post* in Thailand, *Jakarta Post* in Indonesia, *Lian He Zao Bao*, *Think China* in Singapore, *South China Morning Post (SCMP)*, *China-US Focus* in Hong Kong, *CGTN, Global Times, World Affairs* in China.
RCAS researchers have actively participated in international conferences or study visits in the United States, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar, Cambodia, and other places.

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With global governance facing unprecedented changes, it is even more critical not to overlook one of the biggest issues in international relations today: artificial intelligence. With China and the United States as two major strategic competitors in AI, there is a possible need for some Asia-Pacific cooperation.



▲Internet.

The question is not who will win the AI race, but whether the two leading industrial giants can engage constructively, boosting global gains and common good from this technology.

According to Stanford University's 2026 AI Index Report, the US and China tussled for the top ranking in 2025, with China's research publications, citations, AI patent output and industrial robot deployments gaining ground. In frontier-model production, high-impact patents and private investment, though, the US still leads but the gap is narrowing.

Nevertheless, one of the most significant progresses is the launch of a China-US AI Dialogue at the summit in Washington in late September, which will enable the two countries to exchange views on the potential risks and benefits of AI. The next round of discussion is scheduled for November. They also pledged to set up a bilateral communication channel for AI incidents. These steps help put guardrails on competition. The potential applications of AI systems are becoming more widespread

in financial markets, healthcare, education, military planning, critical infrastructure and cybersecurity.

Advanced AI could therefore have repercussions well beyond the tech industry if used maliciously.

In the realm of AI, the competition and cooperation between China and the US will have a significant impact on the Asia-Pacific, a region that features both key production bases and growing markets.

One side of the equation is being demonstrated by China's industrial-scale deployment. According to the World Robotics 2025 report released by the International Federation of Robotics, an estimated 295,000 industrial robots were installed in China in 2024, surpassing the combined total of other top four countries — Japan, the US, the Republic of Korea and Germany. This points to the increasing linkage of AI and manufacturing, automation and industrial competitiveness.

The potential in Southeast Asia is great. Stanford researchers found that more than 80 percent of respondents in Malaysia, Thailand, Indonesia and Singapore believe that AI will significantly change their lives within three to five years. Over 80 percent of workers surveyed in India and China said they regularly or semi-regularly used AI at work. These statistics illustrate the fact that AI is not just for laboratories anymore; it's becoming a part of everyday business activity.

However, the Asia-Pacific countries may face a challenging strategic dilemma. As some major economies are building their own AI ecosystems, some countries could be left with a choice between different competing technologies, platforms, chip suppliers and data regimes. It would be very costly for smaller economies. AI hardware is still a deeply concentrated market, as data from Stanford show. In 2025, the US hosted 5,427 data centers, more than 10 times as many as any other country.

But digital sovereignty is also gaining prominence as East Asia and the wider Pacific region are adopting more measures for the localization of data. Governments should establish some compatible rules, invest in smart digital infrastructure and computing power, and promote education on AI through North-South cooperation as well as South-South cooperation. AI should be used as a tool for businesses to leverage to make an impact in manufacturing, farming, healthcare, logistics, finance and public services — not merely a tech fad. It is also the task of universities to provide the research, talent and critical thinking required to make these technologies locally relevant.

Such AI cooperation was also emphasized at the APEC High-Level Forum on AI held in Chengdu in July. Rather than building ever more sophisticated models, participants stressed the need to take AI from the abstract to the real by means of digital

infrastructure, skills, business implementation, healthcare, traffic and cross-border payments to increase responsible AI cooperation, capacity development and knowledge sharing, as well as collaboration between the public and private sectors.

Trade pacts and geopolitical alliances are among the factors that are going to decide the future in the Asia-Pacific region. The future will also be affected by a growing range of algorithms, computing power, data, semiconductors and human capital. New channels for AI dialogue and consultations can be small but significant steps for the common good.

The regional dimension holds great potential. Inclusive development is more likely to serve as a pathway toward the shared goal rather than division; if governments set out policies that support its development, enterprises make it an effective application, and universities create knowledge and talent. Technology should be used for the benefit of people, and the Asia-Pacific region should champion a simple principle: compete where it is necessary, cooperate where it can.

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About Author



Sujit Kumar Datta is Deputy Director, Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies (RCAS), Hong Kong, and Director, Hong Kong Research Center for Asian Studies-Bangladesh Center, and the former Chairman and Professor in the International Relations Department at the University of Chittagong, Bangladesh. Dr. Datta graduated with a BA (Honors) and MA degree in International Relations from the Jahangiragar University and completed his PhD in International Politics from the School of Political Science and Public Administration, Shandong University, China. After that, he had worked at the BRAC Training Division (BTD) as a faculty member. He had joined in the department of International Relations, University of Chittagong, Bangladesh as a Lecturer in January, 2010. Dr. Datta has authored several articles and book chapters in renowned national and international peer-reviewed journals (Web of Science, Scopus indexed). Email:datta.ir@cu.ac.bd.