

# GLOBAL TIMES MAGAZINE



GLOBAL CHAMBER OF BUSINESS LEADERS

*Fourth Edition*

**THE GEOPOLITICS OF  
ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE:**

**THE RISE OF THE  
DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY**

**BUSINESS  
PROFESSIONAL  
WOMEN'S COMMITTEE:**

**THE INTERNATIONAL DAY  
OF WOMEN'S HEALTH 2023**

**GLOBAL TIMES  
BIG INTERVIEW**

**Miranda Merrie Mirie**

**CHAIR OF THE LOCAL CHAPTER FOR BORNEO  
AT THE GCBL CHAPTER FOR MALAYSIA**

# LEAD BY EXAMPLE



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Third Edition | 3-2023 | MMXXIII



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Editorial Team:

**JUSTINA MUTALE  
GREGOR KOS  
MELVIN TARLUE**

Editor in Chief:

**NICOLE S. FARRELL**

GTMChairman:

**DEJAN ŠTANCER**

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**2023** GLOBAL CHAMBER OF BUSINESS LEADERS  
**THE YEAR OF OPPORTUNITY**  
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## CHAIRMAN'S FOREWORD

# A YEAR OF RISK, BLOOD, SWEAT, AND OPPORTUNITIES



*The seal of the Chairman*

**DEJAN ŠTANCER,**  
CHAIRMAN

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Dear readers,

Welcome to the new edition of your favourite Global Times magazine, which brings you lots of news and plenty of interesting reading. As always. When it comes to news, let me stay for a moment with the news about access to funding and grants from the European Commission. As you may know, the European Commission tenders funds for projects practically all over the world, it is the so-called "Global Europe" agenda. The opportunity offered by the program is exceptional, especially since it offers the possibility of financing projects in a large part of the world, or in many countries.

Another great news is that we on the GCBL Board have completed the acquisition of special advisory status at the United Nations. The process has been completed, filed, and the actual completion or awarding of this prestigious status is now expected. However, the GCBL financing strategy has also been adopted. Through this strategy, we now have wide open doors for acquiring members from all over the world, as well as for making strategic partnerships, sponsoring, and also for accepting donations. Or as I once said, if we want to be a change in the world, and we certainly want to, then it is important to understand that will and determination are not enough, but an operational budget is needed. I am glad that every day more people who want a better tomorrow urge us to become the necessary change, so I see only reasons for joy and optimism.

I also consider it a special honour to be able to invite you to a gala event in the United Kingdom, which also carries a charitable note. Every gala dinner is an extravagant event in itself, but I guarantee you that the gala event we are preparing for you on June 18 in London, in Kensington, near the famous Buckingham Palace, will be something special. This is also why I invite you to join us in London and to do something good together for the health of very special children. You know, children are and always will be our greatest wealth!

As you can see, access to the link where you can find tickets for the event in London is published on quite a few pages, so we hope that the participation will be equivalent to our great engagement.

And before I invite you to read, let me say a word or two about the upcoming issue of Global Times magazine. As is tradition, we offer you plenty of interesting reading. You have the opportunity to get to know better our esteemed colleagues from all over the world, this time even the Chairwomen of our local chapter for Borneo in Malaysia. If we stay with the ladies, you can also read all about women's health, as we recently celebrated International Women's Health Day. Our colleague - Delegate for the DRC, Billy Issa Branham, will also introduce himself to you. You will also be able to read about geopolitics and artificial intelligence, as well as how the new human pangenome could help unveil the biology of everyone.

Yours sincerely,

*Dejan Štancer*







PIC:881860175

## Funding, Tenders

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# International Day: THE INTERNATIONAL DAY OF ACTION FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

Dr. Graciela de Oto,  
Co-Chair of the Business Professional Womens Committee



**I**t is not exactly a secret that women's healthcare and reproductive issues aren't always met with compassion in the workplace. As the world recognises International Day of Action for Women's Health today, the Global Chamber of Business Leaders (GCBL) throws their support behind womenfolk, citing that in these modern times, more attention and focused solutions need to become woven into the fabric of workplace policies and guidelines regarding the subject.

**Graciela De Oto**, Senior Advisor, Human Rights and Co-Chair of the Business and Professional Women's Committee of the GCBL, lent her voice to the global call.

When it comes to the seemingly slow progress of more compassion being expressed by and intentional steps being taken by managerial heads with respect to specific health issues regarding women in the workplace, De Oto expounded on the problem.

Said De Oto, "The realm of women's reproductive and gynaecological health often becomes shrouded in hushed conversations and vague references.

These crucial matters are frequently dismissed as mere women's issues, perpetuating a dismissive attitude. It is imperative that we challenge this perspective and strive to eliminate workplace taboos associated with female-specific conditions."

She continued, "When employers fail to provide support, women with gynaecological conditions may struggle to fulfil their professional potential, leading to detrimental effects on their mental well-being. Unfortunately, many women with those conditions feel reluctant to approach their employers and seek support, particularly if their manager is male. They fear a lack of understanding regarding the unique health needs specific to women.

To overcome this barrier, it is crucial for working women to feel empowered to seek support. One way to achieve this is by choosing an employer who demonstrates a commitment to implementing comprehensive health-related policies and fostering...



open dialogue. My ideal solution would be to promote awareness and education. By fostering a culture of understanding and empathy through training programs and workshops, managers can gain knowledge about women's health issues and develop a supportive approach. Additionally, implementing policies that address the unique challenges faced by women, such as flexible work arrangements and adequate maternity leave, can further demonstrate a commitment to women's well-being."

On the question of if she'd recommend a specific policy or area of law reform for a change to occur in chosen areas of women's healthcare, she remarked, "Advocating for comprehensive coverage of reproductive health services, including contraception, family planning

# International Day of Action for Women's Health



Our Health,  
Our Rights,  
Our Lives



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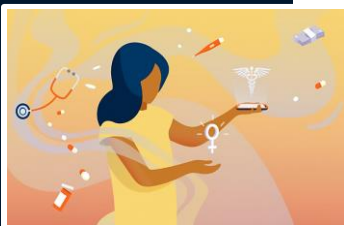
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and maternal healthcare is a specific policy idea that can bring positive change in women's healthcare. This recommendation aims to ensure that all women have affordable and accessible reproductive healthcare, regardless of their socio-economic status or insurance coverage. By addressing existing disparities and barriers, this policy promotes equal access to essential reproductive healthcare services."

"Additionally, accommodations should be made for women experiencing reproductive health challenges. This can involve provisions for menstrual leave, reasonable adjustments for women with chronic reproductive diseases and support for menopausal symptoms. By recognising and addressing these specific needs, organisations can create an inclusive and supportive environment. These accommodations contribute to promoting gender equity and overall well-being."

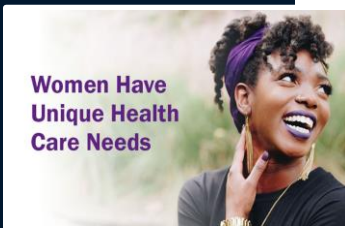
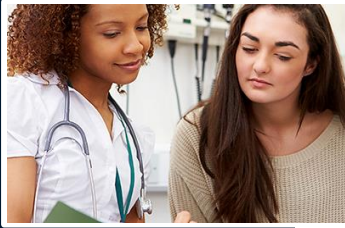
"By championing these policy ideas and advocating for their implementation, the GCBL Business and Professional Women's Committee can play a vital role in driving positive change in women's healthcare. These recommendations aim to enhance access, affordability and quality of reproductive health services, empowering women to make informed decisions about their bodies and...

reproductive futures." Drawing from personal observations and conversations, De Oto underscored that, "Human Resource personnel and top male executives may lack understanding or awareness when it comes to procuring special policies for women related to feminine challenges or natural biological occurrences. This lack of understanding can result in a failure to recognise the significance of implementing supportive policies. It can stem from a combination of limited exposure to these issues, societal biases, and a lack of empathy. These societal attitudes may create an environment where discussing or addressing feminine challenges becomes uncomfortable or deemed unnecessary. Gender bias can also play a role in shaping the mindset of HR personnel and male executives. Unconscious biases or stereotypes about women's abilities, commitment, or productivity during certain biological occurrences may influence decision-making regarding special policies."

"This can lead to the perception that accommodating these challenges may negatively impact work performance. However, I have also witnessed positive instances where HR personnel and executives actively sought to understand and accommodate these concerns, leading to the development of more compassionate policies. They understand that addressing feminine challenges and natural biological occurrences through special policies can enhance employee well-being, productivity and overall organisational success. It is worth noting that attitudes and mindsets can vary greatly among individuals and organisations can differ in their approaches. Increasing awareness, promoting diversity in leadership roles and fostering open dialogue about women's health can contribute to changing mindsets and encouraging the procurement of special policies."

What about the possibility of offering women Special Leave, which would be in addition to Vacation Leave, national Holidays, regular Sick Leave? Would it have the potential to negatively impact the general attendance of women and overall staff presence at any one time at an organisation? De Oto said, "The introduction of Special Leave for women affected by conditions such as PCOS, menopause, breast cancer, ovarian cancer, and other related health issues is a topic that involves various perspectives and considerations. While it is important to acknowledge the potential concerns, it is also crucial to evaluate the potential impact on attendance and overall staff presence. Implementing Special Leave for these health conditions can help foster a supportive and inclusive workplace culture. It shows that the organisation understands and accommodates the specific needs of its female employees, promoting gender equality and overall employee morale. However, it is important to balance the needs of individual employees with the operational requirements of the organisation."

"Policies and guidelines should be established to ensure that the provision of Special Leave is fair, transparent and does not result in abuse or negative impacts on overall staffing. This can include clear eligibility criteria, proper documentation and appropriate communication channels. By considering these factors and implementing thoughtful policies, organisations can create an environment that supports the health and well-being of their female employees while also maintaining overall attendance and staff presence.





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Support for women's healthcare and well-being by organisations can empower female employees in various ways. Access to comprehensive healthcare services, including reproductive health, maternity support, mental health resources and preventative care, ensures that women can prioritise their health and address any concerns. This, in turn, allows them to perform at their best and thrive in their professional roles."

"By implementing policies that support work-life balance, such as flexible work arrangements, paid maternity leave, childcare assistance, and family-friendly policies, organisations demonstrate a commitment to supporting women's well-being. This empowers female employees to effectively manage their personal and professional responsibilities, reducing stress and enhancing job satisfaction. Organisations that promote gender equity and equal opportunities create an environment where women feel valued and respected. When women have an equal footing in the workplace, it encourages them to contribute their full potential. Furthermore, a supportive work culture, free from discrimination, harassment, and bias, empowers female employees to thrive. This involves encouraging open communication.,,

Overall, support for women's healthcare and well-being by organisations goes beyond fulfilling legal obligations. It creates an empowering environment where female employees can flourish both personally and professionally and reap the benefits of a diverse and inclusive workforce; increased employee retention can be achieved; and improved overall organisational performance can be accomplished."



**DIANA BARRAGAN MEDINA**  
Committe Co-Chair



**GRACIELA DE OTO**  
Committe Co-Chair



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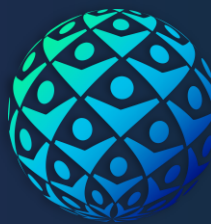
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## Miranda Merrie Mirie

# BORNEO SABAH IS CONSIDERED AS ONE OF THE DOMINANT STATES IN MALAYSIA

Chairwomen, GCBL Borneo Local Chapter, Chapter for Malaysia



Aspiring woman entrepreneur from Borneo Sabah who continuously strives for excellence throughout her entrepreneurial journey.

Started Candy Paint Asia Sdn Bhd back in year 2018 after gaining extensive knowledge in decorative painting industry for more than five (5) years.

She is actively involved in CSR works by supporting the youth community, as well as empowering women towards becoming entrepreneurs.

In 2021, the Board of Director of the Global Chamber of Business Leaders appointed Miranda as the Chair of the Borneo local chapter of the Global Chamber of Business Leaders Malaysia chapter.

### INTERVIEW:

How do you feel in the role of Chair of the local Chapter of the Global Chamber of Business Leaders for Borneo, Malaysia?

As the Chapter President for Borneo, I am truly proud to have always introduced GCBL to local government agencies and trade associations.

Maybe tell our readers something about yourself and introduce yourself so we can get to know you better.

I am Miranda Merrie Mirie, who is currently managing my own business in decorative and magnetic painting. My company, Candy Paint Asia, has become one of the industry's leading painting applicator and we have been involved in major projects such as housing developments, universities, hospitals etc.

Besides that, I am also heavily involved in numerous CSR initiatives, particularly uplifting women entrepreneurship and empowerment programmes in Borneo Sabah.

Among one of the flagship role is to represent Lincoln University to promote nursing care courses to a selective group of students.

How would you rate the work and assistance in your role as local Chapter Chair by the GCBL National Delegate for Malaysia, Alvin Soh?

Mr Alvin Soh has given me a lot of guidelines in alignment with GCBL code of ethics. I have seen lots of efforts contributed by him personally in major large-scale events and conferences. To date, I wish to thank...





him personally and also giving him my due respect for his assistance rendered to all GCBL members in Malaysia. He is always at the forefront to assist the members.

To name a few, 100 Series Live Pitching 2021; Affluent Women Personalities Engagement Series 2022; National CSR Excellence Conference 2022; Guinness World Record Culinary Competition 2022, which was held in World Trade Centre Kuala Lumpur; Market Outlook Roundtable 2023, which was held in KL Wellness City; and most recent one, namely Cancer Awareness Campaign 2023, which was held at Audi Centre Glenmarie.

What is your co-operation with the other Chairs of the local Chapters?

We know that it is a characteristic of Malaysia that all local Chapters are led by distinguished ladies, which makes us extremely proud. Yes, it is definitely a conducive environment meeting all the amazing ladies. We have met during events and the networking with similar peers are awesome.

Please describe to our readers the region of Borneo in which the local GCBL Chapter operated by you, what are the main characteristics of the region?

Borneo Sabah is considered as one of the dominant states in Malaysia, and being the local from Penampang, I'd say it has lots of potential in terms of business landscape development.

Youth communities in Borneo are well equipped with relevant knowledge and skills towards becoming technology-savvy users and there are many entrepreneurship training events and programmes for the youth.

Tourism is always highly sought to international tourists, as well as local residents. We have many beautiful islands and beaches as well as heritage cuisine. I hope GCBL can organize one global food-tasting event in the near future...

## ABOUT BORNEO

GLOBAL TIMES  
**BIG INTERVIEW**

**Borneo** (*/ˈbɔːrniou/*; Indonesian: *Kalimantan*) is the third-largest island in the world and the largest in Asia. At the geographic centre of Maritime Southeast Asia, in relation to major Indonesian islands, it is located north of Java, west of Sulawesi, and east of Sumatra.

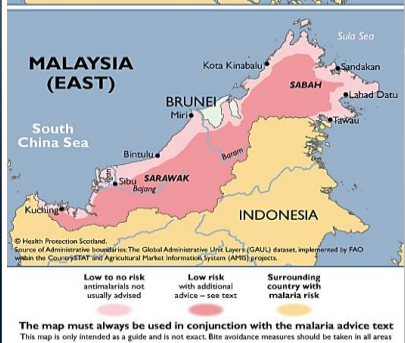
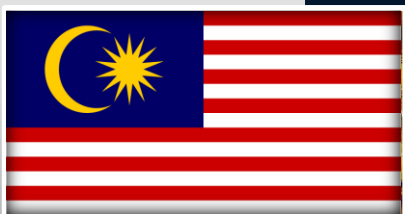
The island is politically divided among three countries: Malaysia and Brunei in the north, and Indonesia to the south. Approximately 73% of the island is Indonesian territory. In the north, the East Malaysian states of Sabah and Sarawak make up about 26% of the island. The population in Borneo is 23,053,723 (2020 national censuses).

Additionally, the Malaysian federal territory of Labuan is situated on a small island just off the coast of Borneo. The sovereign state of Brunei, located on the north coast, comprises about 1% of Borneo's land area. A little more than half of the island is in the Northern Hemisphere, including Brunei and the Malaysian portion, while the Indonesian portion spans the Northern and Southern hemispheres.

What opportunities do you see in Borneo and wider in Malaysia for GCBL members?

GCBL members can take Borneo as one of the tourists destinations. In Malaysia as the whole, our government has initiated many promotional activities to global business groups by investing in Malaysia.

Several economic clusters are hospitality, F&B chains, cosmetic, aesthetic wellness, durian, nursing care, retirement home etc. I strongly urge GCBL Country Delegates to group all members together for joining dialogue sessions and roundtable meetings in order to participate in respective development, trading and other business opportunities.



## ABOUT MALAYSIA



Malaysia is a country in Southeast Asia. The federal constitutional monarchy consists of thirteen states and three federal territories, separated by the South China Sea into two regions: Peninsular Malaysia and Borneo's East Malaysia. Peninsular Malaysia shares a land and maritime border with Thailand and maritime borders with Singapore, Vietnam and Indonesia. East Malaysia shares land and maritime borders with Brunei and Indonesia, and a maritime border with the Philippines and Vietnam. Kuala Lumpur is the national capital, the country's largest city, and the seat of the legislative branch of the federal government.

Putrajaya is the administrative centre, which represents the seat of both the executive branch (the Cabinet, federal ministries, and agencies) and the judicial branch of the federal government. With a population of over 32 million, Malaysia is the world's 45th-most populous country. The southernmost point of continental Eurasia is in Tanjung Piai. Located in the tropics, Malaysia is one of 17 megadiverse countries, home to numerous endemic species.

Malaysia has its origins in the Malay kingdoms, which, from the 18th century on, became subject to the British Empire, along with the British Straits Settlements protectorate. During World War Two, British Malaya, along with other nearby British and American colonies, was occupied by the Empire of Japan. Following three years of occupation, peninsular Malaysia was unified as the Malayan Union in 1946 and then restructured as the Federation of Malaya in 1948. The country achieved independence on 31 August 1957.

The independent Malaya united with the then British crown colonies of North Borneo, Sarawak, and Singapore on 16 September 1963 to become Malaysia. In August 1965, Singapore was expelled from the federation and became a separate independent country.

The country is multiethnic and multicultural, which has a significant effect on its politics. About half the population is ethnically Malay, with minorities of Chinese, Indians, and indigenous peoples. The country's official language is Malaysian Malay, a standard form of the Malay language.

English remains an active second language. While recognising Islam as the country's established religion, the constitution grants freedom of religion to non-Muslims. The government is modelled on the Westminster parliamentary system, and the legal system is based on common law. The head of state is an elected monarch, chosen from among the nine state sultans every five years. The head of government is the Prime Minister.

After independence, the Malaysian GDP grew at an average rate of 6.5% per annum for almost 50 years. The economy has traditionally been fuelled by its natural resources but is expanding in the sectors of science, tourism, commerce and medical tourism. Malaysia has a newly industrialised market economy, ranked third-largest in Southeast Asia and 36th-largest in the world.[15] It is a founding member of ASEAN, EAS, and OIC and a member of APEC, the Commonwealth, and the Non-Aligned Movement





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How would you comment on the innovations in the GCBL, including the consultative status with the UN and the association with some favourable international organizations?

I don't know much about the programme. Personally speaking, GCBL as one of the world leading Chambers should iron out more industry trade visit in other countries.

What impact do you think this elite association could have on the Chapter in Malaysia, maybe even on the local Chapter that you lead?

To date, we at GCBL Malaysia are looking forward to joining more physical events overseas such as conferences, forums, trade visits etc. Covid is already post-pandemic and we are all ready and eager to travel abroad.

How do you see the work of the umbrella organization GCBL and its management and is there anything you personally would do differently, any advice, maybe a hint?

Well, there could be more frequent Global Delegates meetings, as well as business profile presentation among the Members internationally.

How would you motivate new Members to join GCBL?

Should more programme and activities be introduced to everyone, business owners will always eager to join. For Malaysia Chapter, I'd say Mr Alvin Soh, our Country Delegate, has done really well by connecting everyone. I hope to see more relevant development from other Country Delegates. By doing so, we can iron out more business opportunities together.



## ABOUT ALVIN SOH

GLOBAL TIMES  
**BIG INTERVIEW**

Alvin Soh was appointed as the Global Chamber of Business Leaders Delegate for Malaysia in January 2021.

Alvin's company was awarded a Certificate of Business Excellence by the World Confederation of Business in November 2019 through the premier entrepreneurial ecosystem, better known as 100 Series Live Pitching, conducted by the Ministry of Enterprise Development Malaysia in October 2019.

Since its inception, the company has gained extensive exposure, namely a TV3 special interview along with media coverage from Bernama National News Agency, Yahoo Finance News, Markets Insider US, etc.

The company's ceremonies in April and August 2020 were widely covered in the main mainstream media in China and ASEAN region, and elsewhere in Asia. Under Alvin's leadership, Affluent Luxe World has gained wide acceptance in the market as a new premium medium serving outstanding personalities and outstanding brands in the industry.

Alvin belongs to the quota of the best executives and for his work in 2022, he also received the highest recognition of the Global Chamber of Business Leaders - The Chairman's Award.

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## Billy Issa Branham

# CREDIBILITY IS THE KEY ATTRACTIVENESS IN LIFE AND BUSINESS

Delegate for the Democratic Republic of Congo

**B**illy Issa Branham, Delegate of the Global Chamber of Business Leaders for Democratic Republic of the Congo, is currently one of the most prolific emerging voices in leadership development and mental transformation of his generation on the African continent.

He is also the Head Representative of the Central African region in the Alliance of the People of the World. His professional experience and achievements also see him as a coach, international speaker, thought leader, leadership consultant, best-selling author and social entrepreneur committed to the advancement of the Kingdom of God and the development of Africa.

Issa Branham is the 2022 Ambassador of the I Change Nations Congress For Global Communication (ICNCGC), an international organization based in the United States that brings world leaders to the table to discuss and raise awareness about the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and the Special Advisor for DRC at Productive Business Civility USA.

He shares the facets of his work and experience within and outside of the Global Chamber of Business Leaders (GCBL) in this interview.

What does it mean to you to be the Delegate for the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)?

It's a great privilege and honour for me to be the GCBL Delegate for the Democratic Republic of the Congo. Being a Delegate for the Democratic Republic of Congo is one of the greatest ways to boost the visibility and attractiveness of my country on the global stage in order to promote the investment, business and trade opportunities that my country offers.

DRC is the wealthiest country in the world by its potential but the global business community is not well informed about the country and its potential.

So, as the GCBL Delegate for the Democratic Republic of Congo, I help business leaders and investors to discover and explore the large range of opportunities that our country offers in different sectors of the economy. The future of the world and its economy lies in the Democratic Republic of Congo in terms of natural resources, climate change, energy, etc. DRC is the solution to most of the world's problems.

How have you benefited by way of learning and networking since you've joined the GCBL?

Being a GCBL Member offered me the opportunity to learn, connect and work with the top of the top in the world. Having the privilege of working with former Heads of State, top CEOs, entrepreneurs and investors is a great source of inspiration. I learn every day from their different experiences and it helps to build my personal leadership and career...







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What would you say has been the highlight of your time with GCBL thus far?

The highlight of my time with GCBL was when I was appointed as the GCBL Delegate. It's a great privilege but above all, for me it's a great burden and responsibility regarding the enormous challenges my country faces. I am concerned about Africa in general, but most about my mother country, DRC, to end poverty, corruption, war, hunger, diseases, epidemics, etc. For me, GCBL is the right platform offered to me to be a voice to tackle these issues with national and global leaders.

If you had to encourage members of the business community to become a part of our organisation, what would be your selling points?

The GCBL is a place to be. It's the right place to make the right connections as an entrepreneur and business leader. Business is connection. No connection, no business. Because business requires trust. Trust is the currency of business. The GCBL connects you to the right business partners. It provides a global platform to make the right connections. Being a GCBL Member gives speed to a business because it exposes you to credible leaders in the global marketplace. The DRC as it's called has its fair share of economic, developmental and environmental challenges like any other country.

How do you think working with the GCBL can help you to explore solutions to even one of the common problem areas? What would that area be?

The GCBL has a great range of experts who provide advice to governments around the world. One of my fights is to convince the leadership of the DRC to partner and work with the GCBL to accelerate the development process of our nation. Our country needs influential global voices who can speak and advocate for the sake of the country and defend its interests before the international community because it's been more than two decades that our country has been a victim of a Rwandan aggression in the Eastern part of our country causing more than 8 millions deaths. Different reports from the U.N proved that the government of our neighbouring country is arming terrorist and armed groups to plunder our natural resources.

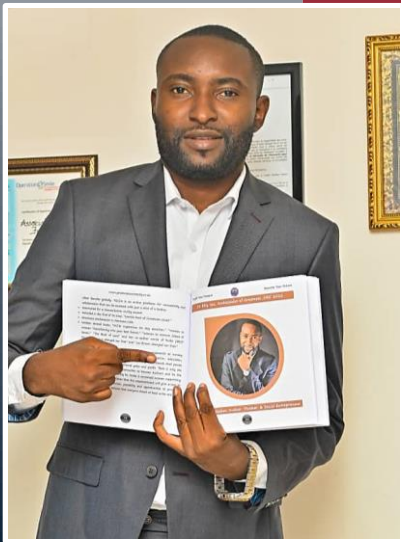
What is one idea that you'd like to see come into being in terms of a collaborative effort between the GCBL and the business (or other) sector of the DRC?

One of the ideas I'd like to see come into being is to host an annual international event where business leaders from the DRC can connect and meet the GCBL business community around the world. It will really boost our national Chapter and help to establish our Chapter in different cities of the country. We are working on how to partner with different provincial governments of the country in order to help them to develop, connecting them and the local business community to the GCBL.

In your opinion, what are some of the best features about the DRC regarding the people, innovation and vision?

(The) DRC is a country with an unprecedented potential in terms of human and natural resources. Hospitality is one of the words that characterizes our population. We are a kind country where everyone feels at home. In the DRC, no-one is a stranger. Our population is youth in its majority. We have one of the most dynamic, innovative, creative and entrepreneurial youths in the world with a population of over 100 million people. We border 9 countries. So, having your business in the DRC, you penetrate Central, Eastern and South Africa at the same time. The DRC is a continent by itself and is a paradise, an el dorado for business. It's a country to make money...





What advice would you give to the younger professionals who might want to excel in their respective fields, as an employee or business-owner, who might feel disenchanting or uncertain about future possibilities?

Like Denzel Washington, my advice to the younger professionals is to put God first. Work hard and smart. Connect and learn from mentors, they will give you speed. Work for a purpose, a vision and to serve people, not money.

Credibility is key to attractiveness in life, business and leadership. Work to build your credibility, it will increase your attractiveness. Lose money but never your credibility. It's easier to earn money than credibility. The 2 'Is' of credibility are integrity and impact. The impact of your work and the integrity of your person, your work ethic are the greatest life and business assets. Always remember that trust is the currency of business and leadership. So, never use shortcuts to gain money, never compromise your credibility for money. Because, it's not what you earn or gain that matters, it's who you become.

## ABOUT THE DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF CONGO

**The Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**, also known as **Congo-Kinshasa** and formerly known as **Zaire**, is a country in Central Africa. By land area, the DRC is the second-largest country in Africa, after Algeria, and the 11th-largest in the world. With a population of around 112 million, the Democratic Republic of the Congo is the most populous officially Francophone country in the world. The national capital and largest city is Kinshasa, which is also the economic center.

The country is bordered by the Republic of the Congo, Central African Republic, South Sudan, Uganda, Rwanda, Burundi, Tanzania (across Lake Tanganyika), Zambia, Angola, the Cabinda exclave of Angola and the South Atlantic Ocean.

Centered on the Congo Basin, the territory of the DRC was first inhabited by Central African foragers around 90,000 years ago and was reached by the Bantu expansion about 3,000 years ago. In the west, the Kingdom of Kongo ruled around the mouth of the Congo River from the 14th to 19th centuries. In the northeast, center and east, the kingdoms of Azande, Luba, and Lunda ruled from the 16th and 17th centuries to the 19th century. King Leopold II of Belgium formally acquired rights to the Congo territory in 1885 and declared the land his private property, naming it the Congo Free State. From 1885 to 1908, his colonial military forced the local population to produce rubber and committed widespread atrocities. In 1908, Leopold ceded the territory, which thus became a Belgian colony.

Congo achieved independence from Belgium on 30 June 1960 and was immediately confronted by a series of secessionist movements, which culminated in the seizure of power by Mobutu Sese Seko in a 1965 coup d'état. Mobutu renamed the country Zaire in 1971 and imposed a harsh personalist dictatorship until his overthrow in 1997 by the First Congo War. The country then had its name changed back and was confronted by the Second Congo War from 1998 to 2003, which resulted in the deaths of 5.4 million people. The war ended under President Joseph Kabila who governed the country from 2001 to 2019, under whom human rights in the country remained poor and included frequent abuses such as forced disappearances, torture, arbitrary imprisonment and restrictions on civil liberties. Following the 2018 general election, in the country's first peaceful transition of power since independence, Kabila was succeeded as president by Félix Tshisekedi, who has served as president since. Since 2015, the Eastern DR Congo has been the site of an ongoing military conflict in Kivu.

The Democratic Republic of the Congo is extremely rich in natural resources but has suffered from political instability, a lack of infrastructure, corruption, and centuries of both commercial and colonial extraction and exploitation, followed by more than 60 years of independence, with little widespread development. Besides the capital Kinshasa, the two next largest cities, Lubumbashi and Mbuji-Mayi, are both mining communities. The DRC's largest export is raw minerals, with China accepting over 50% of its exports in 2019. In 2021, DR Congo's level of human development was ranked 179th out of 191 countries by the Human Development Index. As of 2018, following two decades of various civil wars and continued internal conflicts, around 600,000 Congolese refugees were still living in neighbouring countries. Two million children risk starvation, and the fighting has displaced 4.5 million people.





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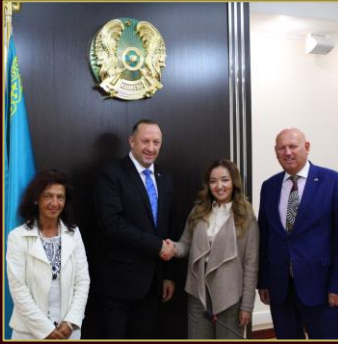


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# Geopolitics: THE GEOPOLITICS OF AI AND THE RISE OF THE DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY

Editory,  
THE GLOBAL TIMES  
The Brookings, Brienna Nicker



On September 29, 2021, the United States and the European Union's (EU) new Trade and Technology Council (TTC) held their first summit. It took place in the old industrial city of Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, under the leadership of the European Commission's Vice-President, Margrethe Vestager, and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Following the meeting, the U.S. and the EU declared their opposition to artificial intelligence (AI) that does not respect human rights and referenced rights-infringing systems, such as social scoring systems.

During the meeting, the TTC clarified that "The United States and European Union have significant concerns that authoritarian governments are piloting social scoring systems with an aim to implement social control at scale. These systems pose threats to fundamental freedoms and the rule of law, including through silencing speech, punishing peaceful assembly and other expressive activities, and reinforcing arbitrary or unlawful surveillance systems."

The implicit target of the criticism was China's "social credit" system, a big data system that uses a wide variety of data inputs to assess a person's social credit score, which determines social permissions in society, such as buying an air or train ticket. The critique by the TTC indicates that the U.S. and the EU disagree with China's view of how authorities should manage the use of AI and data in society. The TTC can therefore be viewed as the beginning steps towards forming an alliance around a human rights-oriented approach to the development of artificial intelligence in democratic countries, which contrasts with authoritarian countries such as Russia and China.

However, these different approaches may lead to technological decoupling, conceptualized as national strategic decoupling of otherwise interconnected technologies such as 5G, hardware such as computer chips, and software such as operating systems. Historically, the advent of the world wide web created an opportunity for the world to be interconnected as one global digital ecosystem. Growing mistrust between nations, however, has caused a rise in digital sovereignty, which refers to a nation's ability to control its digital destiny and may include control over the entire AI supply chain, from data to hardware and software. A consequence of the trend toward...



greater digital sovereignty—which then drives the trend further—is increasing fear of being cut off from critical digital components such as computer chips and a lack of control over the international flow of citizens’ data. These developments threaten existing forms of interconnectivity, causing markets for high technology to fragment and, to varying degrees, retrench back into the nation state.

To understand the extent to which we are moving towards varying forms of technological decoupling, this article first describes the unique positions of the European Union, United States and China concerning regulation of data and the governance of artificial intelligence. The article then discusses implications of these different approaches for technological decoupling, and then discusses implications for specific policies around AI, such as the U.S. Algorithmic Accountability Act, the EU’s AI Act, and China’s regulation of recommender engines.

## EUROPE: A HOLISTIC AI GOVERNANCE REGIME

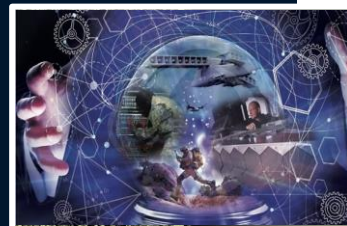
The EU has, in many ways, been a frontrunner in data regulation and AI governance. The European Union’s [General Data Protection Regulation](#) (GDPR), which went into effect in 2018, set a precedent for regulating data. This is seen in how the legislation has [inspired](#) other acts, e.g., the [California Consumer Privacy Act](#) (CCPA) and China’s [Personal Information Protection Law](#) (PIPL). The [EU’s AI Act \(AIA\)](#), which could go into effect by 2024, also constitutes a new and groundbreaking risk-based regulation of artificial intelligence, which, together with the [Digital Markets Act \(DMA\)](#) and [Digital Services Act \(DSA\)](#), creates a holistic approach to how authorities seek to govern the use of AI and information technology in society.

The EU AI Act establishes a horizontal set of rules for developing and using AI-driven products, services, and systems within the EU. The Act is modelled on a risk-based approach that moves from unacceptable risks (e.g., social credit scoring and use of facial recognition technologies for real-time monitoring of public spaces), to high risk (e.g., AI systems used in hiring and credit applications), to limited risk (e.g., a chatbot) to little or no risk (e.g., AI-enabled video games or spam filters). While AI systems that pose unacceptable risks are outrightly banned, high-risk systems will be subject to conformity assessments, including independent audits and new forms of oversight and control. Limited risk systems are subject to transparency obligations, such as user-facing information when interacting with a chatbot. In contrast, little or no risk systems remain unaffected by the AI Act.

The EU Digital Markets Act (DMA) attempts, among other things, to ensure that digital platforms that possess so-called gatekeeper functions, in their access to and control of large swaths of consumer data, do not exploit their data monopolies to create unequal market conditions. The implicit goal is to increase (European) innovation, growth, and competitiveness. Similarly, the EU Digital Services Act (DSA) seeks to give consumers more control over what they see online. This means, for example, better information about why specific content is recommended through recommender engines and the possibility of opting out of recommender-based profiling.

The new rules aim to protect users from illegal content and aim to tackle harmful content, such as political or health-related misinformation. In effect, this carves out new responsibilities for very large platforms and search engines to engage in some forms of content moderation. This means that gatekeeper platforms are considered responsible for mitigating against risks such as disinformation or election manipulation, balanced against restrictions on freedom of expression, and subject to independent audits. The aim of these new laws is not only to ensure that the rights of EU citizens are upheld in the digital space but also to make sure that...





European companies have a better opportunity to compete against large U.S. tech firms. One way of doing this is to mandate compatibility requirements between digital products and services. Such compatibility requirements have already required Apple to change the standard of its charger starting in 2024 and could also require greater interoperability between messaging services such as Apple’s iMessage, Meta’s WhatsApp, Facebook Messenger, Google Chat, and Microsoft Teams. While increased interoperability could increase the vulnerability and complexity of security-related issues, instituting such changes would arguably make it harder for companies to secure market share and continue their network-driven forms of dominance.

At the same time, the EU is trying to build ties to U.S. tech companies by opening an office in the heart of Silicon Valley headed by Gerard de Graaf, the European Commission’s director of digital economy, who is expected to establish closer contact with companies such as Apple, Google, and Meta. The strategic move by the EU is also going to serve as a mechanism to ensure that American tech companies comply with new European rules such as the AIA, DMA, and DSA. Concerning semiconductors, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced the European Chips Act in February 2022, intending to make the EU a leader in semiconductor manufacturing. By 2030, the European share of global semiconductor production is expected to more than double, increasing from 9 to 20%.

The European Chips Act is a response to the U.S. CHIPS and Science Act and China’s ambitions to achieve digital sovereignty through the development of semiconductors. Semiconductors are the cornerstone of all computers and, thus, are integral for developing artificial intelligence. Strategic policies such as the European Chips Act suggest that control over the computer-based part of the AI value chain and the politicization of high-tech development will only become more important in coming years.

The largest tech companies—Apple, Amazon, Google, Microsoft, Alibaba, Baidu, Tencent, and others—are mostly found in the U.S. and China, not in Europe. To address this imbalance, the EU aims to set the regulatory agenda for public governance of the digital space. The new regulations aim to ensure that international companies comply with European rules while strengthening the EU’s resolve to obtain digital sovereignty.

**US: A LIGHT-TOUCH APPROACH TO AI GOVERNANCE**

The United States’ approach to artificial intelligence is characterized by the idea that companies, in general, must remain in control of industrial development and governance-related criteria. So far, the U.S. federal government has opted for a hands-off approach to governing AI in order to create an environment free of burdensome regulation. The government has repeatedly stated that “burdensome” rules and state regulations often are considered “barriers to innovation,” which must be reduced, for example, in areas such as autonomous vehicles.

The U.S. also takes a different approach than the EU and China in the area of data regulation. The U.S. has not yet drawn up any national policy on data protection, such as in the EU, where in 2018 the GDPR introduced a harmonized set of rules across the EU. By comparison, only five out of 50 U.S. states—California, Colorado, Connecticut, Utah, and Virginia—have adopted comprehensive data legislation. As a result, California’s Consumer Privacy Act (CCPA), effective in 2020, has, to some extent, become the U.S.’s *de facto* data regulation. The GDPR in many ways served as a model for CCPA, which requires companies to give consumers increased privacy rights, including the right to access and delete any personal data as well as the right to opt-out of having data sold and be free from online discrimination. Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act protects platforms...



from liability for content posted. Under current law, liability for content remains with users who post it. In part due to this focus on users rather than platforms, in the U.S. there is little oversight of recommender engines that rank, organize, and determine the visibility of information across search engines and social media platforms. Content moderation is a thorny issue, however. On the one hand, there is an argument to be made for platforms to engage in content moderation to avoid overly discriminatory and harmful behavior online. On the other hand, states such as Texas, and Florida, among others, are passing laws prohibiting tech companies from “censoring” users, which are enacted to protect their constituents’ rights to free speech. The counterargument made by platforms is that their content moderation decisions, as well as their use of recommender engines, is a form of expression that should be protected by the First Amendment, which defends American citizens and companies from government restraints on speech. While the United States takes a laissez-faire approach to regulating artificial intelligence, that tends to be fragmented at the state level, new industrial policy initiatives are aimed explicitly at strengthening certain aspects of the AI supply chain. One example is the CHIPS and Science Act, where Democrats and Republicans have come together to create new incentives for producing semiconductors on American soil.

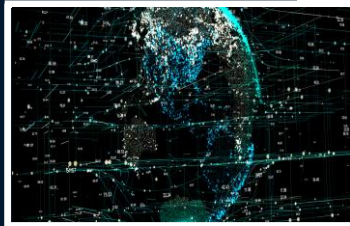
Based on the idea of digital sovereignty, the CHIPS and Science Act marks a shift in U.S. industrial policy to address renewed concerns over maintaining U.S. technological leadership in the face of fast-growing competition from China. When it comes to using artificial intelligence in the public sector, the United States has experienced significant opposition from civil society, especially to law enforcement’s use of facial recognition technologies (FRT), for example, from the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU). Again, the U.S. approach has been fragmented. Several cities—such as Boston, Minneapolis, San Francisco, Oakland, and Portland—have banned government agencies, including the police, from using FRT. “It does not work. African Americans are 5-10 times more likely to be misidentified,” said Alameda Council member John Knox White, who helped ban facial recognition in Oakland in 2019.

In the United States, a March 2021 report by the country’s National Security Commission on Artificial Intelligence (NSCAI) defined the “AI race” (between China and the United States) as a value-based competition in which China must be seen as a direct competitor.

In the report, NSCAI went further and recommended creating so-called “choke points” that limit Chinese access to American semiconductors to stall progress in some areas of technological development. Some of these “choke points” were seen in August 2022, when the U.S. Department of Commerce banned Nvidia from selling its A100, A100X, and H100 computer graphics processing units (GPUs) to customers in China, in a move intended to slow China’s progress in semiconductor development and prevent advanced chips from being used for military applications in China. The Department of Commerce justified the move by saying it was meant to “keep advanced technologies out of the wrong hands,” while Nvidia has signaled that it will have serious consequences for its global sales of semiconductors.

Over the years, however, many Chinese researchers have contributed to important breakthroughs in AI-related research in the United States. U.S. companies such as Microsoft Research Asia (MSRA), headquartered in Beijing, have also played a crucial role in nurturing Chinese talent in AI. Several former MSRA researchers have gone on to spearhead China’s technological development in leading companies such as Baidu. Against the background of growing mistrust between the United States and China, these forms of cooperation are suffering, resulting in rethinking existing ties in areas of technological collaboration. Over the long run, ongoing technological decoupling could contribute...





to a bifurcation of digital ecosystems. The Bureau of Industry and Security's (BIS) Entity List arguably contributes to these developments by blacklisting entities on the list from doing business with U.S. enterprises. In terms of software, these developments are already happening. Google, for example, stopped providing access to its Android operating system (OS) to Huawei after the company was placed on the Entity List. These developments caused Huawei's sales of smartphones to plummet on international markets due to a sudden lack of access to Android's (OS) and app store, hurting interoperability between hardware and apps and services. These developments have resulted in Huawei doubling down on developing its own proprietary operating system, HarmonyOS, for use across its products.

In terms of AI-related regulation, the U.S. Algorithmic Accountability Act was reintroduced in 2022, but it has not been approved in either the Senate or the House of Representatives, where it was first introduced in 2019. Should the Act be passed, it would require companies that develop, sell, and use automated systems to be subject to new rules related to transparency and when and how AI systems are used.

In the absence of national legislation, some states and cities have started to implement their own regulations, such as New York City's Law on Automated Employment Decision Tools. The law stipulates that any automated hiring system used on or after January 1, 2023, in NYC, must undergo a bias audit consisting of an impartial evaluation by an independent auditor, including testing to assess potential disparate impact on some groups.

### CHINA: A BUDDING AI GOVERNANCE REGIME

China's approach to AI legislation is evolving rapidly and is heavily based on central government guidance. Implementing China's national AI strategy in 2017 was a crucial step in moving the country from a lax governance regime to establishing stricter enforcement mechanisms across data and algorithmic oversight. In 2021, China implemented the Personal Information Protection Law (PIPL), a national data regulation inspired by the GDPR. PIPL entails that companies operating in China must classify and store their data locally within the country—an element critical in establishing digital sovereignty. Under the law, companies that process data categorized as "sensitive personal information" must seek separate consent from these individuals, state why they process this data, and explain any effects of data-related decision-making. Like the GDPR, PIPL gives China's consumers increased rights while companies have become subject to stricter national oversight and data-related controls, enhancing trust in the digital economy.

In terms of AI regulation, China oversees recommender engines through the "Internet Information Service Algorithmic Recommendation Management Provisions" which went into effect in March 2022, the first regulation of its kind worldwide. The law gives users new rights, including the ability to opt-out of using recommendation algorithms and delete user data. It also creates higher transparency regarding where and how recommender engines are used. The regulation goes further, however, with its content moderation provisions, which require private companies to actively promote "positive" information that follows the official line of the Communist Party. It includes promoting patriotic, family-friendly content and focusing on positive stories aligned with the party's core values. Extravagance, over-consumption, antisocial behavior, excessive interest in celebrities, and political activism are subject to stricter control: Platforms are expected to intervene actively and regulate this behavior. Therefore, China's regulation of recommendation algorithms goes far beyond the digital space by dictating what type of behavior China's central government considers favorable or not in society. Unlike the United States, Chinese regulations put the responsibility on...



private companies to moderate, ban, or promote certain types of content. However, China's regulation of recommender engines can be complicated—both for companies to implement and for regulators to enforce—because the law often may be interpreted arbitrarily. The regulation could further accelerate the decoupling of practices for companies operating in China and international markets. In terms of innovation, China's central government has strengthened private partnerships with China's leading technology companies. Several private companies, including Baidu, Alibaba, Huawei, and SenseTime, among others, have been elevated to "national champions" or informally to members of China's "national AI team" responsible for strengthening China's AI ecosystem. The result is that technology giants such as Baidu, Alibaba, and others have moved into the upper echelons of China's centrally planned economy. And precisely because of these companies' importance to the social and economic development of the country, the government is bringing them closer to the long-term strategic goals of the Communist Party.

These developments include experimenting with mixed forms of ownership, for example where government agencies acquire minority stakes in private companies through state-run private equity funds and then fill board seats with members of the Communist Party.

Other measures include banning sectors that do not live up to the Party's long-term priorities. One of these was China's for-profit educational technology sector, which was banned in 2021 because the party wanted to curb inequality in education.

In China, the state is playing a central and growing role in adopting facial recognition technologies to monitor public spaces. According to Chinese government estimates, up to 626 million facial recognition cameras were installed in the country by 2020. Huge public sector demand has not surprisingly contributed to making China a world leader in developing AI related to facial recognition. Meanwhile, pushback by civil society continues to play a marginal role in China compared to the United States, which makes it more difficult for the population to question the government's use of AI in society.

While the U.S. and the EU only recently have launched new initiatives and industrial policies explicitly aimed at semiconductors, China has long nurtured its chip industry. In 2014, for instance, the National Integrated Circuit Industry Investment Fund was established to make China a world leader in all segments of the chip supply chain by 2030. While China still lags far behind the U.S in semiconductor development, it is an area of the AI value chain that receives continued attention from China's central government, as it is critical for the country's ambitions of achieving AI leadership by 2030. Regarding how AI intersects with social values, China's latest five-year plan states that technological development aims to promote social stability. Artificial intelligence should therefore be seen as a social control tool in "the great transformation of the Chinese nation," which implies maintaining a balance between social control and innovation.

### THE DESIRE FOR SELF-SUFFICIENCY

The ideological differences between the three great powers could have broader geopolitical consequences for managing AI and information technology in the years to come. Control over strategic resources, such as data, software, and hardware has become paramount to decisionmakers in the United States, the European Union, and China, resulting in a neo-mercantilist-like approach to governance of the digital space. Resurfacing neo-mercantilist ideas are most visible in the ways that trade in semiconductors is being curtailed, but they are also apparent in discussions over international data transfers, resources linked to cloud computing, the use of open-source software...





and so on. These developments seem to increase fragmentation, mistrust, and geopolitical competition, as we have seen in the case of communication technologies such as 5G. The United States, Canada, England, Australia, and several European countries have excluded Chinese 5G providers, such as Huawei and ZTE, due to growing mistrust about data security and the fear of surveillance of citizens by China's central government. As technological decoupling deepens, China will seek to maintain its goal of achieving self-sufficiency and technical independence, especially from high-tech products originating in the United States. As recently as May 2022, China's central government ruled that central government agencies and state-subsidized companies must replace computers from foreign-owned manufacturers within two years. That includes phasing out Windows OS, which will be replaced by Kylin OS, developed by China's National University of Defense Technology. Regarding open-source code repositories such as GitHub (owned by Microsoft), China has also signaled that it seeks to diminish its reliance on foreign-developed open-source software. In 2020, for instance, the Ministry of Industry and Information Technology (MIIT) publicly endorsed Gitee as the country's domestic alternative to GitHub.

While the development of leading open-source deep learning frameworks continues to be led by U.S. technology enterprises—e.g., TensorFlow (Google) and PyTorch (Meta)—Chinese alternatives developed by national champions such as PaddlePaddle (Baidu) and Mindspore (Huawei), among others, are growing in scope and importance within China. These developments illustrate that achieving self-sufficiency in open-source software development such as deep learning frameworks are on the political agenda of China's central government, feeding into its long-term desire for achieving digital sovereignty. Certain U.S. policies, such as placing a growing number of Chinese companies on the BIS Entity List, will make it more difficult for China's central government to rely on strategic technical components from the United States as part of the country's economic growth strategy, thus incentivizing China to continue toward its goal of achieving technological self-sufficiency.

These developments mean that previous forms of cooperation across the Pacific, e.g., in terms of academic research and corporate R&D, are quietly diminishing. These developments may complicate the possibilities for finding new international solutions to harmonization of AI use and legislation. While the U.S. and EU diverge on AI regulation, focused on self-regulation versus comprehensive regulation of the digital space, respectively, they continue to share a fundamental approach to artificial intelligence based on respect for human rights. This approach is now slowly being operationalized to condemn the use of AI for social surveillance and control purposes, as witnessed in China, Russia, and other authoritarian countries. To some extent, "American" and "European" values are evolving into an ideological mechanism that aims to ensure a human rights-centered approach to the role and use of AI. Put differently, an alliance is currently forming around a human rights-oriented view of socio-technical governance, which is embraced and encouraged by like-minded democratic nations. This view strongly informs how public sector authorities should relate to and handle the use of AI and information technology in society.

#### WHERE ARE WE HEADED?

On May 15, 2022, the United States and EU TTC held its second summit, this time in Saclay, a suburb of Paris and one of France's leading research and business clusters. Secretary Blinken and Vice President Vestager met again to promote transatlantic cooperation and democratic approaches to trade, technology, and security. The meeting ultimately strengthened the strategic relationship across the...

Atlantic in several specific areas, including engaging in more detailed information exchange on exports of critical technology to authoritarian regimes such as Russia. The United States and the EU will also engage in greater coordination of developing evaluation and measurement tools that contribute to credible AI, risk management, and privacy-enhancing technologies. A Strategic Standardization Information (SSI) mechanism will also be set up to enable greater exchange of information on international technology standards—an area in which China is expanding its influence.

In addition, an early warning system is being discussed to better predict and address potential disruptions in the semiconductor supply chain. This discussion includes developing a transatlantic approach to continued investment in long-term security in supply for the EU/U.S. market. While the TTC is slowly cementing the importance of the U.S. and the EU's democratic transatlantic alliance in artificial intelligence, the gap between the U.S. and China seems to widen. The world is, therefore, quietly moving away from a liberal orientation based on global interoperability, while technological development increasingly is entangled in competition between the governments of the United States and China. These developments diminish the prospects for finding international forms of cooperation on AI governance, and could contribute to a Balkanization of technological ecosystems. The result, already partially underway, would be the emergence of a “Chinese” network and its digital ecosystem, a U.S. and a European one, each with its own rules and governing idiosyncrasies.

In the long run, this may mean that it will be much more difficult to agree on how more complicated forms of artificial intelligence should be regulated and governed. At present, the EU and China do seem to agree on taking a more active approach to regulating AI and digital ecosystems relative to the U.S. This could change, however, if the U.S. were to pass the Algorithmic Accountability Act. Like the EU AI Act, the Algorithmic Accountability Act requires organizations to perform impact assessments of their AI systems before and after deployment, including providing more detailed descriptions on data, algorithmic behavior, and forms of oversight.

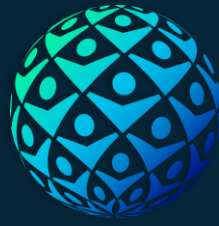
Should the U.S. choose to adopt the Algorithmic Accountability Act, the regulatory approaches of the EU and the U.S. would be better aligned. Even though regulatory regimes may align over time, the current trajectory of digital fragmentation between the EU and US on one side, and China on the other, is set to continue under the current political climate.

Undoubtedly, AI will continue to revolutionize society in the coming decades. However, it remains uncertain whether the world's countries can agree on how technology should be implemented for the greatest possible societal benefit. As stronger forms of AI continue to emerge across a wider range of use cases, securing AI alignment at the international level, could be one of the most significant challenges of the 21st century.

The views expressed in this article are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of the editorial staff of the Global Times Magazine, or the Global Chamber of Business Leaders.







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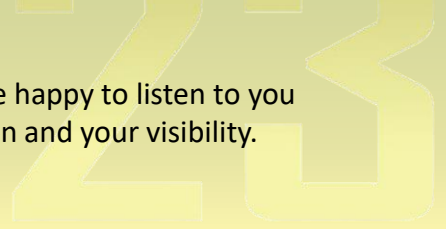
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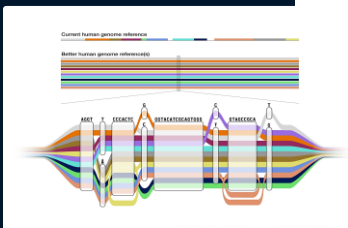
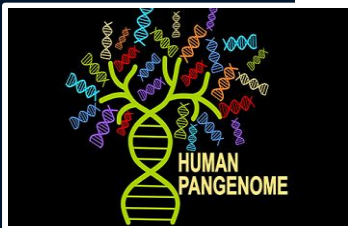




# Science: THE NEW HUMAN PANGENOME COULD HELP UNVEIL THE BIOLOGY OF EVERYONE

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The pangenome includes the genetic instruction books of 47 people



**More** than 20 years after people got a peek at the first draft of the human genome, our genetic instruction book, researchers have unlocked the next level: the human pangenome.

In four studies published May 10 in *Nature*, researchers describe the achievement, how the pangenome was built and some of the new biology scientists are learning from it. The more complete reference book, which includes almost all the DNA of 47 people, will allow researchers to explore types of variation that could never be examined before, such as large chunks of duplicated, lost or rearranged DNA.

That work could possibly reveal more details about the genetic underpinnings of heart diseases, schizophrenia and various other diseases and disorders. The pangenome adds 119 million DNA bases — the information-carrying units of DNA — not present in the existing human genome, called the reference genome. Much of that DNA is in never-before-explored parts of the genome containing multiple copies of genes that are duplicated from originals elsewhere in the DNA.

Those duplicated parts are changing faster than nonduplicated portions of the genome, says Evan Eichler, a human geneticist at the University of Washington in Seattle and one of the leaders of the Human Pangenome Reference Consortium. What's more, when Eichler and colleagues examined the types of variants that arise in these duplicated regions, they found "a very strong signal that the mutations that are occurring are fundamentally different from [mutations in] the rest of the genome," he says.

Some of these duplicated regions include ones implicated in humans' large brains relative to other species and other traits that set humans apart from other primates. Others have been implicated in certain traits or diseases.

Conversely, another study found that the very short arms of certain chromosomes, including chromosomes 13, 14 and 21, are becoming more like each other as they swap DNA. Those short arms are important because they contain genes for making ribosomal RNAs, which serve as the scaffolds for ribosomes, the machinery responsible for building every protein in the body.

But perhaps the biggest achievement of the pangenome project is that it is finally giving researchers a more complete look at the full spectrum of human genetic diversity.

### How was the pangenome built?

The roughly two-decade-old human reference genome derives mostly from one man, but is a patchwork quilt of more than 60 people's DNA (SN: 3/4/21). It has been restitched and added to over the years but still has holes. Last year, the first fully complete human genome was announced (SN: 3/31/22). That genome contains all of the DNA from tip to tip, or telomere to telomere, of each human chromosome. Except that genome wasn't from a person. It came from a type of tumor known as a hydatidiform mole. These unusual tumors result when a human sperm fertilizes an empty egg and the father's chromosomes are duplicated.

The genetic information from such tumors represents "not even one individual. It's from one half of one individual," says human geneticist Timothy O'Connor of the University of Maryland School of Medicine in Baltimore who was not involved in either project. The new pangenome draft is from actual people and contains almost complete DNA from 47 anonymous individuals from different parts of the world. That diversity is important "because it helps us to understand ourselves as a single human species, as a single human race," O'Connor says.

Past genetics research has been criticized for relying too heavily on DNA from people of European heritage. Studying just one population of people could mean missing genetic variants that have arisen in specific populations, O'Connor says. "Having a pangenome reference allows us to assess that population-specific variation in a much more detailed way. And hopefully, that will then lead to greater insight into the biology of everyone."

While the pangenome is a great first step to better represent all human genetic diversity, O'Connor says, "it still is missing key groups in the world. It's still underrepresenting Latin Americans and Indigenous Americans, and ... there's nobody included from Oceania.... There's still a lot more variation that needs to be added to the pangenome to really, truly be representative of everyone."

Added diversity is coming, human geneticist Karen Miga of the University of California, Santa Cruz said during a May 9 news conference. The consortium plans to complete a total of 350 genomes, including these 47, by mid-2024. The first phase of the project was aimed at developing the technology to build the pangenome.

Now, the consortium is in talks with Indigenous groups and scientists from around the world about "trying to develop a shared framework, so that it's not the U.S. trying to set the table.

It's really providing a table and inviting other stakeholders who see the value in creating this type of reference resource to join us," said Miga, who helped lead the pangenome project.

### HOW IS THE PANGENOME IMPORTANT FOR HUMAN HEALTH?

Having a more complete understanding of human genetic diversity could help researchers begin to unravel the genetic underpinnings of various diseases and disorders.

What's more, new DNA deciphering technologies have allowed pangenome researchers to examine types of genetic variants that have been difficult to study before.





In particular, duplicated regions of the genome were hard to study because researchers previously could read only short pieces of DNA. There was no way to tell where in the vast puzzle of the human genome those nearly identical pieces fit. Newer “long-read” DNA deciphering, or sequencing, technology makes it possible to read stretches of DNA many thousands of bases long (SN: 2/22/21).

Being able to assess where some people have extra DNA and others are missing DNA, called structural variants, adds a more nuanced view of human genetics, O'Connor says, revealing more of its complexity (SN: 4/10/09).

For instance, researchers used the pangenome map to trace how chromosomes fold up so that different parts are touching each other. Scientists could see some folds and chemical marks in structural variants that may affect how genes are turned on and off. That could affect traits or health. Eichler's group also mapped one version of a gene that has converted another copy into its own image. These gene conversions were surprisingly common with each person having, on average, more than 2,000 instances of them.

With this more nuanced and complex view of human genetics comes a promise for improved genetics-based medicine. But it may take a while before the pangenome makes a difference in medical clinics, Eichler says. Researchers hope the pangenome will help them more easily diagnose the genetic changes that contribute to rare diseases and find treatments for common disorders, he says. Once that happens, clinicians may start incorporating data from the pangenome in their practices.

Source: [Sciencenews.org](https://www.sciencenews.org)

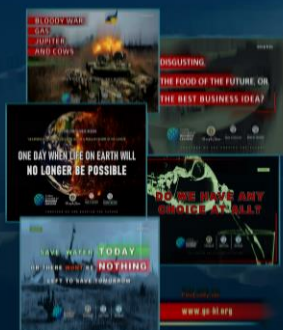
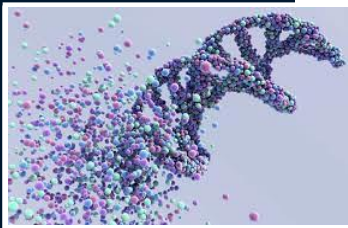
**CITATIONS:**

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