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**Commentary Article No. 4**

# China's Global AI Governance Initiative in a Multipolar World: Opportunities and Challenges for the Global South

September 2025

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Artificial intelligence (AI) has become a central arena of economic growth, security strategy, and global development, and as nations compete to shape its future, the diffusion of power among several major actors offers both opportunities and challenges for the Global South. China's Global AI Governance Initiative (GAIGI) exemplifies this dynamic. Through a series of diplomatic and institutional proposals, Beijing presents itself as a champion of inclusive, multilateral governance, pledging to bridge the "intelligence divide" and foster "shared prosperity," yet behind this cooperative language lies a deliberate strategy to guide global AI norms and reinforce its technological leadership (WAIC, 2025; Helmy, 2025). Since 2023, China has built a layered framework for global AI engagement: the GAIGI launched in 2023 as a foundational policy advocating inclusive, equitable, and secure governance for the benefit of humanity (Pandaily, 2025); the Global AI Governance Action Plan, adopted at the 2025 World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC, 2025), mobilizes international cooperation and balances innovation with ethics and safety; and the proposed World AI Cooperation Organization, described as a "useful supplement" to the United Nations, is designed to coordinate AI policies and standards while respecting national sovereignty (Helmy, 2025). Complementing these are the BRICS AI Industry Cooperation Network, which promotes South–South technical collaboration and shared standards among emerging economies, and the UNIDO AIM Global Centers of Excellence, established with Chinese support to accelerate AI applications in manufacturing, especially across Africa (UNIDO, 2025).

**The Formation of the World AI Cooperation Organization**

China's AI diplomacy deploys several soft power strategies particularly attractive to developing nations. Official rhetoric frames AI as a global public good, emphasizing equitable access and capacity-building for the Global South and rejecting monopolization by "a small handful of countries or companies" (Guo, 2025). High-visibility demonstration projects strengthen this message: the "Bright Power" smart-grid model in Brazil, DeepSeek-based real-time translation aiding earthquake rescues in Myanmar, Huawei's AI-powered rail security upgrades in South Africa, and donations of the MAZU early-warning disaster preparedness system to Djibouti and Mongolia (China Daily, 2025; Global Times, 2025). Collaborative ventures with foreign firms underscore an "open ecosystem" approach, aligning global expertise with Chinese industrial capacity and exporting "Chinese solutions" abroad (Pandaily, 2025). For many Global-South states, these initiatives offer concrete benefits such as technology transfer, infrastructure enhancement, and improved disaster-response capability.

Although China presents these efforts as cooperative, their institutional design reveals ambitions to influence the evolution of global AI governance. Headquartering the proposed World AI Cooperation Organization in Shanghai places China at the heart of standard-setting processes (Helmy, 2025). The initiative advocates "true multilateralism," emphasizing state sovereignty and consensus in contrast to Western risk-based or market-

driven approaches (Guo, 2025). By aligning with the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, China positions its framework as a ready-made template for emerging economies that lack their own standards infrastructure (UNIDO, 2025). This dual narrative, shared prosperity externally and strategic consolidation internally, enables Beijing to attract partners while strengthening its long-term role in AI rule-making.

These developments unfold within an increasingly multipolar order marked by U.S.–China technological rivalry. Days before WAIC 2025, the United States released its own blueprint to expand AI exports and alliances, reinforcing a bloc-based approach that excludes China (Helmy, 2025). Washington's export controls on advanced AI chips and infrastructure aim to constrain Chinese capabilities, yet Beijing continues massive investments in domestic compute networks and open-source models (Global Times, 2025). Competing governance architectures risk creating parallel systems of standards and institutions, fragmenting global norms and complicating cross-border interoperability (WAIC, 2025). For the Global South, this environment provides both leverage and vulnerability: multipolarity offers bargaining power to secure investment and technology from multiple partners, but it also raises the stakes of dependency and technical incompatibility.

In this context, China's Global AI Governance Initiative (GAIGI) has unfolded along two complementary tracks: the Global AI Governance Action Plan, adopted at the World Artificial Intelligence Conference (WAIC) in July 2025, which emphasizes cooperative implementation and infrastructure; and the proposed World AI Cooperation Organization (WAICO), first announced in 2025 as an institutional framework for standards and long-term governance. For Cambodia, aligning domestic strengths with these tracks would be beneficial. The Ministry of Posts and Telecommunications (MPTC), with its expertise in digital infrastructure and technical systems, would engage more closely with the Global AI Governance Action Plan, while the Ministry of Industry, Science, Technology and Innovation (MISTI), with its focus on research, development, and policy, would take a leading role in WAICO processes. This complementary involvement would allow Cambodia to participate constructively in shaping global norms while reinforcing its own development priorities without duplicating efforts.

**AI as the Fourth Paradigm: Beyond Technology**

Artificial Intelligence is more than a technological breakthrough; it marks a new paradigm of knowledge and governance. A scientific paradigm is a framework for questioning, discovery, and social organization. Humanity has passed through three: empirical observation (Galileo), theoretical science (Newton), and computational modeling (the rise of computers) (Bishnoi, 2023). AI is now seen as the fourth paradigm, transforming not just the speed but the nature of discovery (Hey et al., 2009). Unlike earlier paradigms rooted in human theories and models, AI autonomously processes vast data, uncovers hidden

patterns, and generates insights, influencing fields from healthcare and education to agriculture, diplomacy, and culture (Hey et al., 2009).

**World AI Cooperation Organization, Global South and Cambodia**

A Global-South perspective reframes China's initiatives as opportunities for active co-design rather than passive reception. Partnerships with China should prioritize technology transfer, open standards, and local capacity-building to avoid new forms of reliance, while regional organizations such as ASEAN, the African Union, and CELAC can negotiate collectively to shape standards and safeguard policy autonomy (Helmy, 2025). AI governance must also reflect diverse moral frameworks such as Buddhist compassion, Ubuntu relational ethics, and Confucian harmony so that "global" standards genuinely represent many civilizations (Guo, 2025). By insisting on these principles, the Global South can transform Chinese initiatives into platforms for equitable development and technological sovereignty.

The emerging multipolar landscape allows Global-South nations to leverage U.S.–China rivalry for favorable financing, training, and infrastructure from both sides; influence debates on AI ethics, data governance, and cross-border interoperability; and advance South–South collaboration through networks such as BRICS AI Industry Cooperation (UNIDO, 2025; Pandaily, 2025). Yet risks remain: divergent Chinese and Western norms may complicate trade, data sharing, and AI safety frameworks, and over-reliance on any one partner could replicate the very asymmetries the Global South seeks to escape (Helmy, 2025).

For Cambodia, joining the proposed World AI Cooperation Organization (WAICO) as a founding member would provide both strategic and developmental benefits. As a rapidly digitizing economy with ambitions to be a regional technology hub, Cambodia could use WAICO membership to access early standards-setting discussions, shape ethical frameworks that respect ASEAN cultural diversity, and secure partnerships for AI research, infrastructure, and workforce training. Early participation would also strengthen Cambodia's voice within a multipolar system, balancing ties with Western technology partners and China while safeguarding national sovereignty. Practically, Cambodia could leverage existing collaborations with Chinese and ASEAN institutions to establish a national AI governance task force, align its domestic regulations with WAICO's inclusive principles, and contribute regional expertise on ethical AI applications in areas such as agriculture, health, and disaster management. Such proactive engagement would ensure that Cambodia is not merely a technology consumer but an active architect of global AI governance (WAIC, 2025; Helmy, 2025).

**Conclusion**

China's Global AI Governance Initiative therefore reflects both the promise and the complexities of a multipolar world. By combining multilateral branding, capacity-building pledges, and visible development projects, Beijing seeks to present itself as a responsible leader offering "AI for good," while also pursuing a purposeful strategy to help shape global AI governance and reinforce its technological standing (WAIC, 2025; Helmy, 2025). For the Global South, the key is strategic agency: nations must engage with Chinese proposals such as the World AI Cooperation Organization and the Global AI Governance Action Plan not as passive recipients but as co-architects of a truly inclusive AI order. Regional alliances should codify principles of open standards, cultural diversity, and equitable access, ensuring that AI governance serves collective prosperity rather than great-power rivalry. Ultimately, AI governance is inseparable from global equity, and the Global South can and must shape the emerging multipolar landscape so the future of artificial intelligence reflects many centers of power and many voices rather than the dominance of any single bloc.

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