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REPORT OF NACT WORKING GROUP MEETING

ASEAN-China AI Policy Alignment: Country and Regional Perspectives

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I. INTRODUCTION

1. The 2025 Network of ASEAN-China Think-Tanks (NACT) Working Group Meeting, held on 8 July 2025 in Shenzhen, China, was convened under the theme “ASEAN-China AI Policy Alignment: Country and Regional Perspectives”. As artificial intelligence (AI) becomes increasingly integrated into economic planning, industrial development, and governance frameworks worldwide, ASEAN and China are recognising the urgent need to coordinate and align their approaches to AI policy. The meeting provided a platform to deliberate shared interests, differing policy trajectories, and the possibilities of forging a balanced and forward-looking AI ecosystem across the region.

2. ASEAN’s AI landscape is marked by rapid investment and strategic experimentation. Countries like Singapore, Malaysia, and Thailand have simultaneously launched or refined national AI strategies and infrastructure projects centred on workforce development, industrial competitiveness, and ethical deployment. Other countries, including Vietnam, Indonesia, and Cambodia, are at various stages of formulating their national frameworks, often in parallel with broader digital economy policies. Regional efforts such as the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework and the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics aim to provide common direction, but national-level fragmentation persists.

3. China’s approach to AI policy, guided by the New Generation Artificial Intelligence Development Plan, is more centralised and state-driven. With ambitions to become the global AI leader by 2030, China has prioritised rapid technological development, algorithmic transparency, and data protection. Its governance model attempts to strike a balance

between innovation and accountability, making China’s experience particularly valuable for ASEAN countries seeking to advance their own AI ecosystems. China’s newly issued the Opinions on Deepening the Implementation of the “AI+” Initiative aims to propel industrial-scale commercial AI deployment, drive accelerated penetration and deep integration across sectors to establish a virtuous cycle where innovation and application mutually reinforce, and advance practical China-ASEAN AI cooperation through such proactive measures.

4. The convergence of ASEAN’s diversity and China’s scale presents unique opportunities but also notable challenges. While shared concerns around data governance, ethical AI deployment, and inclusive growth have brought both sides to the table, significant divergences remain. These include differing regulatory frameworks, national sovereignty concerns, and unequal levels of digital infrastructure and institutional readiness. The meeting sought to address these issues constructively by identifying synergies, exchanging policy lessons, and fostering region-wide collaboration.

5. Experts from 10 countries – Cambodia, China, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam – presented their national perspectives and priorities on-site in Shenzhen. The meeting was co-hosted by NACT China and NACT Malaysia, with support from the ASEAN-Greater Bay Area Research Institute and the Organising Committee of the ASEAN-China Greater Bay Area Economic Cooperation Forum.

6. Deliberations during the meeting centred around four core areas: (i) AI Regulatory and Ethical Harmonisation; (ii) AI Policy Frameworks

and Sectoral Priorities; (iii) Opportunities in AI Governance, Technology Transfer, and R&D; and (iv) Challenges in Data Sharing Mechanisms and Inclusive Growth. The following policy recommendations emerged from these thematic discussions and national presentations.

II. POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1. AI Regulatory and Ethical Harmonisation

- **Co-develop shared ethical guidelines** emphasising transparency, fairness, accountability, and inclusivity, drawing from the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics and China's Ethical Norms for New Generation Artificial Intelligence.
- **Establish ASEAN-China regulatory dialogue** to align the regulatory approaches including laws, regulations.
- **Establish an ASEAN-China AI Governance Working Group** to align standards (e.g., Singapore's PDPA, China's PIPL) and conduct regular review cycles.
- **Encourage mutual recognition of AI standards**, including safety and compliance systems to facilitate smoother AI deployment across borders.
- **Convene annual ASEAN-China AI Governance Summits** to review regulatory updates and advance dialogue on emerging technologies and ethical AI deployment.

2. AI Policy Frameworks and Sectoral Priorities

- **Support the development of national AI strategies** through ASEAN-China collaborative mechanisms and technical assistance.
- **Provide sector-specific guidance** in agriculture, healthcare, and education, ensuring alignment with inclusive development goals.
- **Encourage multistakeholder policymaking**, ensuring representation from government, academia, private sector, and civil society in AI strategy design.
- **Implement voluntary AI governance maturity assessments** to benchmark national AI governance maturity and progress.

3. Opportunities in AI Governance, Technology Transfer, and R&D

- **Establish an inter-ministerial task force on AI** to enable cross-sector coordination across digital infrastructure, ethics, and education.
- **Establish AI+ interconnection networks** to promote infrastructure cooperation and regional think tank exchanges.
- **Establish an inter-university AI collaboration network between China and ASEAN** to advance cooperation in talent development, frontier research and theoretical exploration.
- **Launch joint AI labs and innovation centres** in healthcare, smart cities,

and agriculture, building on examples like Alibaba-NTU in Singapore and Huawei-Siriraj Hospital in Thailand.

- **Create joint AI fellowships and talent training centres** to facilitate capacity-building and mutual skill recognition.
- **Encourage regional innovation sandboxes and cross-border pilots** to enable ethical and performance testing across the region.

4. Challenges in Data Sharing Mechanisms and Inclusive Growth

- **Facilitate consensus on cross-border data flows**, including legal standards for consent, classification, and interoperability.
- **Develop common technical protocols**, such as shared APIs and metadata tagging, to facilitate AI system integration.
- **Adopt federated learning systems** for sensitive sectors like health and agriculture, ensuring data privacy while enabling regional insight generation.
- **Establish an ASEAN-China Digital Inclusion Fund**, targeting rural deployment, minority language AI tools, and gender equity in AI literacy.