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Europe's Artificial Intelligence Governance under External Pressure: Implications for Cooperation with China

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Abstract

Introduction. China and the European Union (EU) have established a robust foundation for international cooperation within the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), evolving from initial infrastructure-centered projects toward advanced technological innovation. Among these emerging technologies, artificial intelligence (AI) has emerged as a critical frontier technology, commanding the strategic interest of both parties due to its transformative impact on socioeconomic development, global competitiveness and innovation potential. Recognizing complementary strengths, China and the EU aim to further AI cooperation. However, extant AI collaboration is encumbered by several challenges, which should be addressed by corresponding strategies.

Materials and Methods. Consequently, this study adopts two key methods for discussing the issue – critical literature review and case study approach, integrating a literature review of 21 relevant articles (2005–2025) and case analyses of the EU AI Act and EU perceptions of China's AI rise. Materials covers three dimensions: the BRI and China-EU relations, AI cooperation agreements by China and the EU, and AI industry-university-research (IUR) programs.

Results. Key research findings include: Progress in bilateral policy alignment and IUR projects, existing challenges considering EU internal policy divide, market access barriers, partial technological developmental level, and different innovation priorities, and strategic caution in China-EU tech cooperation marked by the EU's FDI screening framework, including Russian field, and labeling China as a "systemic competitor."

Discussion and Conclusion. To conclude, China and the EU should both enhance policy coordination mechanisms, differentiate development strategies, make reciprocal improvements in market access, and intensify joint technological innovation and industry collaboration. These recommendations offer a strategic roadmap to unlock the full potential of China-EU AI cooperation. The thorough analysis of China-EU collaboration in the domain of AI is bound to encompass the China-Russia cases and can meantime serve as a valuable example for the avoidance of risk, the undertaking of joint research endeavors and the enhancement of competitiveness in future AI collaborations between China and Russia.


Keywords: Belt and Road Initiative (BRI); China-EU Cooperation; Artificial Intelligence (AI); International Cooperation; Technology Governance; Innovation Policy

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Управление искусственным интеллектом в Европе под внешним давлением: последствия для сотрудничества с Китаем

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Аннотация

Введение. Китай и Европейский союз создали прочную основу для международного сотрудничества в рамках инициативы «Один пояс, один путь», развиваясь от первоначальных проектов, ориентированных на инфраструктуру, к передовым технологическим инновациям. Среди этих новых технологий искусственный интеллект стал важнейшей пограничной технологией, вызывающей стратегический интерес обеих сторон из-за его преобразующего воздействия на социально-экономическое развитие, глобальную конкурентоспособность и инновационный потенциал. Признавая взаимодополняющие сильные стороны, Китай и Евросоюз стремятся к дальнейшему сотрудничеству в области искусственного интеллекта. Однако эффективность сотрудничества в этой области затруднено рядом проблем, которые должны решаться соответствующими стратегиями.

Материалы и методы. В исследовании используются два ключевых метода обсуждения проблемы, основанной на критическом обзоре научных статей, опубликованных в 2005–2025 гг. и анализе законодательства, в том числе Закона Европейского союза об искусственном интеллекте. Материалы охватывают три измерения: материалы инициативы «Пояс, путь», особенно отношения между Китаем и европейскими странами, соглашения о сотрудничестве в области искусственного интеллекта между Китаем и Евросоюзом и программ исследований в области искусственного интеллекта в университетах, с ориентацией на промышленность.

Результаты. Выявлен прогресс в согласовании двусторонней политики проектов развития активной инновационной среды и динамичными возможностями развития промышленности и рынка. Существуют проблемы, связанные с внутренним политическим разделением Европейского союза, барьеры для доступа на рынок. Установлен различный уровень технологического развития и различные приоритеты инноваций, а также стратегическая осторожность в технологическом отношении, отмеченная системой проверки прямых иностранных инвестиций в странах Европы, включая Россию, и маркировкой Китая как «системного конкурента».

Обсуждение и Заключение. Китай и Европейский союз должны усилить механизмы координации политики, дифференцировать стратегии развития, внести взаимные улучшения в доступ к рынкам и усилить совместные технологические инновации и отраслевое сотрудничество. Эти рекомендации предлагают стратегическую дорожную карту для раскрытия полного потенциала сотрудничества Китая и стран Европы в области искусственного интеллекта. Тщательный анализ сотрудничества обязательно охватит кейсы Китая и России и может послужить ценным примером избегания рисков, проведения совместных исследовательских работ и повышения конкурентоспособности в будущем в области развития искусственного интеллекта.

Ключевые слова: инициатива «Один пояс, один путь»; искусственный интеллект; международное сотрудничество; управление технологиями; инновационная политика

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Introduction

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has generated significant momentum for exchange and cooperation across countries along its routes in economic, cultural, technological, and other domains. As two of the world's major economic powers, China and the European Union (EU) have continuously sought to strengthen their collaboration under the BRI framework. The BRI, inspired by the spirit of the ancient Silk Road, not only enhances connectivity through infrastructure and trade but also opens new avenues for cutting-edge technological cooperation [1]. In recent years, this initiative has expanded beyond traditional infrastructure projects to include digital and innovation-driven endeavors, creating opportunities for collaborative work in emerging technologies.

Among these emerging technologies, Artificial Intelligence (AI) has become a particularly promising area for China-EU collaboration. Each side brings complementary strengths: China possesses vast data resources, a dynamic market, and rapid application-driven innovation capabilities, whereas the EU leads in AI-related ethical frameworks, regulatory design, fundamental research, and certain high-end industrial applications [2]. As AI technology advances rapidly and global competition intensifies, both China and the EU recognize the importance of leveraging their complementarities and strengthening mutual AI cooperation. The BRI provides a solid political foundation and broad platform for this cooperation, as evidenced by active bilateral communication and alignment efforts ("policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration, and people-to-people bonds") [3]. BRI-driven growth in trade and investment has already begun to benefit the China-EU AI industry by expanding market space for joint AI projects [4]. Moving forward, there is clear potential for collaboration in areas such as semiconductor chip development, AI applications expansion, and joint technological research.

As one of the major powers in Europe, Russia has been keeping up with the trend of times, actively fostering the partnership and maintaining friendly exchanges with China in various aspects. With positive responses to policy calls and strategic alignment, a series of cooperation consensus between the two countries have been put into practice, with remarkable collaborative results achieved, making Russia one of the most important partners for China in jointly building the BRI [5].

With regard to the potential for AI cooperation, a favorable outlook is also predicted for China and Russia. Russia has a longstanding tradition in mathematics and theoretical physics, providing a solid theoretical foundation for research in artificial intelligence algorithms. Meanwhile, China has experienced significant advancements in the field of Artificial Intelligence with numerous application scenarios and robust market demand. A mutually beneficial collaboration between the two sides is possible in the domains of medical AI and smart city construction, among others. As a member of the EU, Russia accords significant importance to the issue of AI ethics and regulation [6]. A thorough examination of the prevailing circumstances, challenges, and approaches to China-EU collaboration in the domain of AI is bound to encompass the China-Russia cases. This analysis can serve as a valuable exemplar for the avoidance of risk, the undertaking of joint research endeavors, and the enhancement of competitiveness in future AI collaborations between China and Russia.

Building on the BRI context that offers abundant opportunities for China-EU AI development, this study aims to analyze the current status, challenges and corresponding strategies of China-EU AI cooperation guided by the BRI. It specifically addresses three core questions: What are the existing achievements made in China-EU AI collaboration across policy, industry, and academia? How do EU internal division (e.g., the debates on the EU AI Act and geopolitical factors (e.g., China as a “systemic competitor”) impact cooperation? What targeted strategies can enhance mutual trust and bilateral innovation synergies? To answer these three questions, the study first maps the current achievements of China-EU AI cooperation, investigates the underlying challenges that both sides face in advancing AI cooperation, and analyses how such factors impact long-term cooperation, illuminating why certain frictions persist despite the BRI’s supportive framework [7]. Finally, based on this analysis, the study proposes a set of targeted strategies and recommendations aimed at resolving these issues and developing effective cooperation models for China and the EU in the AI domain.

This study is significant both theoretically and practically in the context of international technology cooperation. Taking the current status of China-EU AI cooperation as the subject, this study conducts a thorough analysis of the prevailing issues and the measures adopted in response, with the objective of providing useful references for the enhancement of international AI collaboration in the future. In theory, as international technological collaboration becomes increasingly crucial for global economic development, there is a need for focused research on cooperation between major regions (such as China and the EU) in critical fields like AI. By examining China-EU AI cooperation under the BRI, this paper fills a gap in the literature on global technological collaboration, offering insights into collaborative innovation, knowledge transfer, and policy coordination from a new perspective. In practice, identifying the existing problems in China-EU AI collaboration and proposing tailored solutions can help improve the efficiency and environment of cooperation. Strengthened AI partnerships between China and the EU – both leading economic powers – would facilitate better allocation of global innovation resources, promote the sharing and application of scientific advancements, and provide effective technological support for solving global challenges [8]. In the long run, a robust China-EU AI cooperation not only benefits both parties but also contributes to a mutually beneficial partnership that can drive progress and prosperity for the international community.

Literature Review

This study began with a critical analysis focusing on publications from 2005 to 2025 related to China-EU AI cooperation under the BRI. The primary source for literature was the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) academic journal database. A comprehensive search was conducted using keywords such as “China-EU relations,” “Belt and Road Initiative,” and “AI cooperation,” with the query refined to peer-reviewed academic journals. After filtering out duplicates and marginally relevant hits, 21 relevant journal articles were identified and reviewed (search completed by March 4, 2025). These publications provided background on the evolution of China-EU relations in the context of the BRI and insights into any existing discussion of AI collaboration between the two sides. This helped in pinpointing the research gaps – notably, while numerous works discuss BRI

projects or general tech cooperation, few delve into the specifics of AI collaboration – thereby clarifying the direction for the subsequent focused analysis in this paper.

The promotion of the BRI in China-EU AI cooperation in the key field of international technology is the focus of this study, which aims to provide both theoretical and pragmatic guidance on bilateral strategies in AI development. The extant literature has predominantly focused on the evolution of China-EU collaboration (particularly with regard to economic aspects) concerning the BRI. This collaborative endeavour has progressed from an early phase, distinguished by its ambiguity and limited engagement, to a more advanced stage characterized by comprehensive and profound involvement. Some researches seek to explore the changes in the EU's stance on the BRI in different periods, with particular attention to the influence of both internal and external factors. It is noteworthy that recent studies have identified technological cooperation, particularly in the field of AI, between China and the EU as being pivotal and promising, if a more robust foundation of mutual trust in political strategy is built.

The majority of literature on this subject adopts a favourable stance on China-EU cooperation, with the focus of the literature being on the challenges that are likely to be encountered and the countermeasures that have been proposed to address them. However, there is a paucity of extant studies that have conducted in-depth analyses on the field of AI, and there are gaps in key issues such as cooperation models, possible obstacles, and strategic guidance in the current situation. The objective of this study is to address these gaps in the existing literature.

Case Study Approach

In addition to literature review, the study employs a case study approach to conduct in-depth analysis of China-EU AI collaboration dynamics. Two cases were selected for their relevance to the identified challenges: (1) the development and implications of the EU Artificial Intelligence Act, and (2) European reports and policy actions reflecting the EU's perception and cautious approach toward China's rise in AI. The first case – analysis of the EU AI Act's legislative process, content, and debates – allows examination of how AI governance is evolving in Europe and what it might mean for cooperation. These two case studies – one focused on regulatory governance and the other on geopolitical perception – provide a micro-level look at the challenges identified in the broader analysis. The insights gained from the cases inform the discussion of problems and shape the recommendations for more effective cooperation strategies. After conducting these case studies, the findings were synthesized. Successful experiences were noted (where cooperation overcame challenges) and persistent issues were analysed, leading directly into the formulation of targeted cooperation strategies presented in the Discussion section.

Materials

Previous Studies on the BRI and China-EU Relations

The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has been widely studied as a framework that strengthens China's ties with countries around the world, including those in Europe. According to both policy documents and scholarly analyses, the BRI emphasizes five forms of connectivity inherited from the spirit of the ancient Silk Road: policy coordination, infrastructure connectivity, trade facilitation, financial integration, and people-to-people

bonds [9]. In the context of China-EU relations, prior studies have highlighted substantial progress in each of these areas over the past decade.

At the policy coordination level, China and the EU have established comprehensive dialogue mechanisms. Regular leadership visits and annual summits have led to platforms like the China-EU Connectivity Platform and sub-regional initiatives such as the “17+1” cooperation with Central and Eastern European countries [10]. Bilaterally, China has signed BRI cooperation memoranda with 27 European countries [11]. A notable example in terms of infrastructure connectivity is the China-Europe Railway Express, which by 2023 reached over 200 cities in 25 European countries – running over 78,000 train trips and transporting goods worth over \$300 billion – significantly enhancing logistical efficiency across the continent [12].

Alongside infrastructure, trade facilitation between China and the EU has grown, between 2014 and 2024, EU imported to China grow by 101.9% and exported by 47.0%. In 2024, EU exported of goods to China worth €213.3 billion and imported goods worth €517.8 billion [13]. Enhanced financial integration is another outcome, exemplified by the active participation of European countries in institutions like the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – 26 European countries have joined, with 15 as founding members. Furthermore, China’s membership in the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) has introduced additional funding for joint projects. Finally, people-to-people bonds have strengthened through cultural and educational exchanges. Initiatives like the China-EU High-Level People-to-People Dialogue have spurred events (e.g., a China-EU Culture and Art Festival) [14] and programs like the Sino-French Hundred Schools Exchange [15]. By 2023, China had established Confucius Institutes in 41 European countries [16]. These developments demonstrate that the BRI has underpinned decades of increasing China-EU cooperation. The overarching trend under the BRI has been one of pragmatic collaboration driven by mutual economic interests and the pursuit of competitive advantages.

AI Cooperation Agreements by China and the EU

With the rapid progress of AI, both China and the EU have actively put forward proposals and agreements to guide AI development and governance. In October 2023, President Xi Jinping announced China’s Global AI Governance Initiative at the Third Belt and Road Forum, signaling China’s commitment to shaping international norms for AI. The EU, for its part, released a White Paper on Artificial Intelligence in 2020 and has been in the process of adopting the EU AI Act (entered into force on August 1, 2024), aiming to regulate AI within its single market [17]. In late 2023, the Bletchley Declaration was signed by the EU and 27 other countries (including China) as a call for global attention to safe and ethical AI use [18]. More recently, at the AI Action Summit 2025, over 60 countries – among them China and key EU member states – endorsed the Statement on Inclusive and Sustainable AI for People and Planet [19], which emphasizes legally sound and socially beneficial AI development. In addition, China and individual EU countries have pursued bilateral understandings; for example, in 2024 China and France issued a Joint Statement on Artificial Intelligence and Global Governance, committing to the secure and trustworthy development of AI [20]. These agreements and policy initiatives serve both as a bond bringing China and

European partners together on AI cooperation and as safeguards against misuse of AI technology.

China-EU Industry–University–Research (IUR) Programs in AI

Concrete collaborations in AI between China and European partners have been emerging through industry–university–research initiatives. One notable example is the partnership with the German Research Centre for Artificial Intelligence (DFKI): in 2019, China and DFKI jointly established the Sino-German Artificial Intelligence Cooperation Center and an AI Accelerated Incubation Centre in Shanghai, which facilitates comprehensive joint exploration in AI and related fields like augmented reality, and supports industry by incubating innovative projects [21]. Beyond Germany, other European countries have also engaged with China on AI. In late 2024, an academic forum in Bucharest marking 75 years of China-Romania diplomatic ties brought Chinese and Romanian scholars together. They held in-depth discussions on AI and other advanced topics, shared research findings, and set objectives for follow-up joint research – an event reported to have strengthened plans for future Sino-Romanian collaboration in AI [22].

Collaborations are also forming in specialized sub-fields of AI across different countries. For example, institutions like Zhongguancun Science City and Beihang University’s Robotics Institute on the Chinese side have engaged with the Italian National Competence Centre for Robotics to exchange ideas on robotics innovation, paving the way for collaborative innovation and joint achievements in robotics and AI [23]. The private sector, too, has showcased cooperative potential: in July 2024, CITIC Telecom and its subsidiaries demonstrated integrated “cloud-network-security” solutions using AI for a Sino-French business audience, effectively helping French enterprises localize their operations in China and vice versa through AI-powered services [24]. Academic output reflects this rising cooperation trend as well. Notably, the number of academic papers co-authored by Chinese and European researchers in AI has steadily grown since 2011, and by 2022 it surpassed the volume of China-US joint publications in AI. The Chinese Academy of Sciences, for instance, has become a leading contributor of AI research in partnership with European institutions [25]. Such data suggest a deepening academic linkage and mutual openness, exemplified recently by the global impact of platforms like DeepSeek (a Chinese open-source AI model) which European researchers are studying closely [26].

In summary, China-EU AI cooperation at the IUR level is on an upward trajectory, evidenced by joint centres, exchange programs, industry showcases, and scholarly collaborations.

Results

Policy Developments: The EU AI Act and Trans-European Variations

Within Europe, the drafting and passage of the EU AI Act have revealed significant internal divisions regarding AI governance. Some member states and stakeholders argue for stricter oversight to preemptively mitigate AI’s risks, while others worry that overregulation could stifle innovation. Countries like France and Germany, home to some of Europe’s most promising AI startups (e.g., Aleph Alpha, DeepL, Mistral AI), have voiced concerns that excessively stringent rules might hinder their nascent AI industries. The French startup Mistral AI warned that heavy compliance burdens could undermine the EU’s competitiveness, especially against a backdrop of looser regulations in other regions like the

United States. Similarly, companies such as Meta (which operates globally including in Europe) emphasize the need for openness to drive technological breakthroughs, cautioning against rules that might inadvertently slow progress [27]. The implementation of the AI Act is expected to require companies to invest more in compliance (lawyers, documentation, risk mitigation research) rather than purely in R&D. As noted by the Cecilia Bonefeld-Dahl – Director General of Digital Europe (a major tech industry group), firms might end up diverting substantial resources towards meeting regulatory requirements instead of hiring AI engineers for innovation. This internal debate highlights a core dilemma for the EU: how to balance ethical oversight and safety with the necessity of fostering a vibrant AI industry [28].

According to data from Eurostat, in 2023 the adoption rate of AI in enterprises was above 15% in countries like Denmark and Finland, yet remained below 4% in others like Romania, Bulgaria, and Poland [29]. This “Old Europe vs. New Europe” gap in digital capacity means that a one-size-fits-all regulation could affect members differently, and it poses a challenge for collective advancement in AI. Fragmented technological development within Europe can hamper the EU’s overall ability to cooperate effectively with external partners like China, since differing national capabilities may lead to varying priorities or absorption capacities in joint projects. How the EU strikes this balance will significantly influence the form and success of AI cooperation with external partners under frameworks like the BRI.

Strategic Caution Toward China: Shifting Perceptions in EU Discourse

As China’s technological prowess and global influence have grown, European attitudes toward collaboration with China in high-tech fields have become more cautious. Signs of this emerging wariness were visible as early as 2018. In December 2018, Luxembourg hosted a cooperation conference reviewing EU AI project, where one session involved China’s AI unicorn company DeepBlue showcasing six cutting-edge AI research results. Although experts praised DeepBlue’s achievements – it even passed a project review unanimously – the event also rang alarm bells for some European officials and scientists. Prominent voices, such as Luxembourg’s Marco Walentiny and others, openly expressed concern that China’s rapid progress in AI could challenge Europe’s own tech companies, worrying that smaller European states might become dependent on or overtaken by Chinese AI firms [30].

By 2019, such concerns were prompting concrete policy responses. A report by the Federation of German Industries (BDI) in January 2019 warned that China, through active industrial and innovation policies, was on track to become a leading technological power, exerting pressure on German and EU industries. This perspective influenced the highest levels of EU policy: in March 2019, the European Commission’s strategic outlook on EU-China relations echoed the BDI’s view by referring to China not just as a partner but also as a “systemic competitor.” Around the same time, the EU moved to protect its technological assets by approving a Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) Screening Framework (enforced from 2019 onwards). This framework explicitly included sectors like artificial intelligence in the scope of investments to be scrutinized, an action clearly aimed at monitoring and potentially restricting Chinese investments in sensitive European tech companies.

These developments indicate that, in recent years, many EU member states have shifted to a more defensive posture regarding China: cooperation is still desired, but there is a heightened emphasis on safeguarding core technologies and avoiding unwanted dependencies [31]. Such an environment inevitably increases the complexity and difficulty of Sino-European scientific and technological cooperation, as trust needs to be rebuilt and common ground deliberately sought despite strategic tensions.

Barriers to Cooperation: Compliance, Market Entry, and Innovation Styles

1. The EU's Internal Divisions Hindering Unified Planning. One major challenge is the lack of a unified EU stance on AI development and governance, which complicates joint planning with China. Within the EU, debates continue over the strictness of AI regulation – whether rules should be tightened to prevent misuse or relaxed to encourage innovation. These unresolved internal differences mean the EU struggles to formulate a single, coherent strategy on AI. Consequently, when engaging with China, the EU cannot always offer a clear unified cooperation framework or standard, which leads to higher communication and coordination costs and makes it difficult to pursue truly joint and streamlined China-EU AI initiatives, as extra effort is needed to navigate a patchwork of differing national regulations and opinions within Europe and reconcile varying expectations and guidelines.

2. Divergent Development Levels Hampering Cooperation. Within the EU, some member states are at the forefront of AI adoption while others are far behind, which forces China to adopt differentiated cooperation strategies for different partners [32]. Managing such a complicated spectrum of partnerships increases the management overhead of cooperation. Moreover, if we compare overall capabilities, China's AI sector – bolstered by a huge market, fast-growing companies, and state support – in many respects is moving faster than the EU's, which has a more fragmented market and fewer globally dominant AI firms. This imbalance can lead to tensions over issues like technology transfer or intellectual property, integration of industries, expected outcomes, and the fair distribution of benefits in joint projects. In essence, differing development levels mean China-EU AI cooperation does not start on an even playing field, making it harder to set mutual goals and achieve equitable, satisfactory results for all parties.

3. Market and Investment Barriers Limiting Cooperation Scale. The stringent requirements envisioned by the EU's market access and investment policies obviously raise the entry bar for Chinese AI firms in Europe [33]. Even large Chinese companies must invest heavily in upgrading technologies, obtaining legal advice, and undergoing compliance training to meet the EU's high standards for security, privacy, and ethics. This can discourage some enterprises from expanding to Europe or limit the number of joint ventures initiated. Conversely, European authorities have grown more cautious about incoming investments: the EU's tighter FDI screening (partially motivated by concerns over China) means Chinese investments or acquisitions in European tech firms face greater scrutiny and sometimes rejection. This cautious stance is driven by a desire to protect national security and prevent loss of competitive advantage, but it also means fewer opportunities for free collaboration and more obstacles to scale up joint AI initiatives or capitalize on cross-investment opportunities [34].

4. Differences in Research and Innovation Approaches. The EU has a strong tradition in fundamental research grounded in mathematics, logic, and algorithm theory – its AI

efforts often emphasize rigorous theoretical breakthroughs and long-term development of technologies [35]. Such an approach means that turning lab discoveries into practical applications can be a slow process. China, by contrast, excels in application-driven innovation: leveraging vast datasets, a thriving developer community, and a receptive market, Chinese AI enterprises rapidly deploy AI solutions in real-world scenarios and iterate on them. While these approaches are complementary in principle, they can be out of sync in practice. European basic research results might not find immediate application or might require adaptation to fit commercial needs, whereas China's fast-paced innovations might outstrip the underlying theoretical verification that European researchers expect. If not managed, such alignments can lead to frustrations, with each side feeling the other is either "too slow" or "too applied," thus impeding seamless cooperation in AI R&D.

Discussion

Strengthening Policy Coordination

The first strategy is to strengthen communication and coordination on AI policies at multiple levels between China and the EU. Both sides should work on institutionalizing a regular policy dialogue mechanism dedicated to AI and emerging technologies. This could involve scheduled high-level exchanges – such as annual summits or intergovernmental working groups – and joint expert seminars focusing on AI development strategies, regulatory approaches, and ethical guidelines. Such sustained dialogue would help both parties clarify mutual cooperation targets, primary areas of interest, and implementation roadmaps, thereby preemptively addressing misunderstandings or policy discrepancies. Additionally, China and the EU should actively collaborate in international forums on AI governance (for example, within the UN or GPAI contexts) to jointly advocate for a fair and effective global AI governance framework. Enhanced policy dialogue will create a more predictable and aligned policy environment for bilateral AI projects, reducing the uncertainties that arise from differing interpretations and ensuring both sides move in the same direction on governance issues.

Bridging Development Gap

The second strategy is to bridge the gap in AI development levels to ensure more balanced collaboration. China can pursue differentiated partnership models with European countries based on each country's AI maturity. For those EU members with advanced AI adoption (e.g., Denmark, Finland, France, Germany), cooperation can centre on joint R&D initiatives in cutting-edge fields and exchanges of high-level talent. In contrast, for countries where AI deployment is still nascent (e.g., in parts of Eastern and Southern Europe), China could focus on technology transfer, demonstration projects, and training programs that help build foundational AI capabilities [36]. Beyond bilateral efforts, China might also support the establishment of AI innovation hubs or incubators in less-developed European regions, or co-funding start-ups and research projects in those areas. Such initiatives would help diffuse advanced technologies across the EU, narrow the internal digital gap, and ultimately elevate the baseline for China-EU AI cooperation. By leveling up the playing field, these efforts create a stronger foundation for collaboration, ensuring that all partners can contribute to and benefit from joint AI projects more equitably.

Optimizing the Market Environment

Another crucial strategy is to create a more open and secure market environment for AI cooperation. Both China and the EU should work in tandem to lower entry barriers and mitigate protectionist frictions. For Europe, this could mean streamlining approval processes for qualified Chinese AI companies and calibrating investment review mechanisms. In parallel, China can further open its domestic AI market to European firms, ensuring an open and level playing field [37]. Bilateral agreements or memoranda of understanding might be established to formally safeguard the rights of each side's enterprises operating abroad – for example, agreements on data protection reciprocity or mutual recognition of certain safety standards in AI. Additionally, the two sides could consider setting up a joint China-EU AI investment fund or financing platform, which encourages co-investment in AI start-ups and projects of mutual interest, sharing risks and benefits [38]. By improving transparency and trust in how investments are handled, China and the EU can reduce fears that often lead to strict investment barriers [39]. Easing market access, protecting investors' rights, and providing joint financial support mechanisms will collectively expand the scope of China-EU AI cooperation and build confidence among industry players.

Fostering Innovation Synergies

A fourth strategy is to deepen direct technological collaboration and jointly build AI industry ecosystems. China and the EU should increase projects in bilateral cooperation by establishing more joint laboratories, research institutes, and innovation centers focused on AI. These joint hubs would bring together talent, funding, and expertise from both sides, creating a platform for continuous collaboration on research projects and technology development. It's also important to encourage mobility and exchange among AI researchers and engineers – through joint training programs, mutual visits, and perhaps co-advising of doctoral students – to cultivate a generation of experts fluent in transnational collaboration. On the industry front, China and the EU might consider co-developing AI industry parks or innovation zones that leverage each side's advantages, benefiting from agglomeration effects (a complete AI industry chain that spans hardware, software, applications, and services) [40]. A practical extension of this idea is to collaboratively carry out AI projects in third-party markets, particularly in countries along the Belt and Road. These measures will help weave a tighter network of cooperation, ensuring that technological advancement becomes a shared endeavor.

Implications for China-Russia Cooperation

Although this study is concentrated on China-EU AI cooperation, the framework for addressing regulatory disparities and innovation gaps offers insights for that between China and Russia. For instance, Russia's theoretical AI capabilities rooted in mathematical traditions could complement China's applications driven by data, which resembles the EU's strengths in fundamental research. With shared critical interests in AI ethics and Eurasian connectivity, future China-Russia cooperation should make good use of bilateral partnership and mathematical research excellence to carry out an outstanding AI governance model for the global world.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study examined the status quo, challenges, and potential strategies for China-EU AI cooperation in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative. In summary of

the scientific findings, analysis above identifies Europe's ongoing debates over how strictly to regulate AI, the disparities in AI development and capabilities between the two sides (and within the EU), restrictive market and investment policies that limit exchange of technology and capital, and divergent focuses in innovation that can cause misalignment in joint efforts. Research results also present a "three-layer coordination model" (policy alignment, market facilitation, academic exchange) to address both macro-level governance gaps and micro-level industry frictions.

To move forward, the paper recommends a multifaceted approach. Policy-wise, China and the EU should establish more robust and regular dialogues to harmonize AI governance strategies and build mutual trust. Development-wise, tailored cooperation frameworks are needed to uplift less advanced participants so that collaboration can happen on more equal footing. Market-wise, reducing barriers and creating joint investment instruments would provide a more enabling environment for businesses and innovators from both sides. Innovation-wise, setting up joint research ventures and industry partnerships will integrate resources and expertise, creating synergies across the entire AI value chain. Strengthening cooperation in AI not only addresses specific bilateral goals but also contributes solutions to global challenges (through shared AI governance and innovations), thereby benefiting the international community. In providing both an analysis of current obstacles and a roadmap for overcoming them, this study contributes to a deeper understanding of how two major powers can collaborate on frontier technologies in a way that fosters mutual benefit and shared progress.

As a key EU member and strategic partner of China, Russia's stance makes an influence on the China-EU AI cooperation landscape. Considering the promising prospects, deepening cooperation between Russia and China in the field of artificial intelligence is not only of great significance for the implementation of the "Digital Silk Road" as an extension of the BRI, but also will help further enhance the effectiveness of AI cooperation between China and Europe.

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