

Preface

Happy Birthday, Internet! In 2019, we are celebrating the World Wide Web's 30th anniversary. Growing from ARPANET, a decentralised network created by the Pentagon that was designed to withstand a nuclear attack, to its current status as a global platform that connects billions of people and devices, the development of the Internet has long been guided by the United States. US companies developed the first personal computers, smartphones and social networks that we use to communicate as well as the routers and servers that carry the world's data.

It is Asia, however, where the future of the Internet is most likely to be written. Already today, China has the highest number of internet users in the world. India is simultaneously home to the second-largest number of smartphones in the world and the world's largest offline population. "The next billion users" are mainly Asian.

Concurrently, Asian companies are making their way onto the list of top technology companies: South Korea-based Samsung is the second-biggest tech company in the world. In 2018, China's Tencent broke into the top ten, after Foxconn Technology Group joined the club in 2017.

While during the advent of the internet, the US has taken a market-centred approach, policymakers of today operate in a complex, dynamic and uncertain environment, where governments are increasingly asked to act as facilitators in the face of these constantly changing conditions. In late 2014, Singapore rolled out the Smart Nation Initiative – a mega-digitalisation project to transform the city-state into a hyper-connected nation. In Japan, the concept of "Society 5.0" was introduced as a foundation for future economic growth.

China is rising as a cyber superpower. In a very short period of time China has established a leading role in Artificial Intelligence, dominating in global investment, number of AI companies, and applications of new technologies like facial recognition. Baidu, Alibaba and Tencent (BAT), the three most powerful companies providing web applications in China, are sharing the same stage as Apple, Google, Facebook and Amazon. Not least there is the social credit system, often depicted as a draconian mass surveillance project driven by almighty technologies to curtail personal freedom.

On a global level, digital networks play an increasingly important role in international relations, trade security, and strategic deliberations. In the absence of a global agreement for international cybersecurity, the contribution of Asia Pacific states to finding common ground on state operations in cyberspace is ever more important.

In this issue of our biannual *Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs* the authors discuss the implications of digital policies and the impact of digital technologies on economies and societies in Asia. The authors map out the size of China's AI ecosystem so far, analyse the factors behind BAT's success and point towards an underlying motivation for the social credit system: lack of trustworthiness at all levels of society. The issue presents Singapore's Smart Nation Initiative, Japan's Concept of "Society 5.0", and Australia's Cyber Engagement Strategy, discusses trends in employment relations driven by technology adoption in India and digital economy transformation in ASEAN. Where does Europe come into play? Read on!



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