

From Soft Law to Soft Power:

How Singapore and Japan are Influencing Global AI Policy

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Abstract

Since fall 2022, the release of numerous consumer-accessible AI applications – including ChatGPT, Claude, Gemini and Midjourney, among others – have captured the public's imagination, and policymakers' attention. The emergence of increasingly advanced generative AI systems and proliferation of powerful foundation models have thrust the issue of regulation and oversight into the limelight.

Over the past year in the United States alone, scores of state and federal bills to regulate AI have been offered and dozens more hearings have been held by both state legislatures as well as the U.S. House of Representatives and the Senate, examining both the benefits and costs of this rapidly-advancing technology's impact on the socio-economic fabric. Perhaps most notably, the European Union has been viewed as the global leader in developing rules to address the various risks posed by AI. The continent's AI Act² has been under consideration since April 2021, and so was well underway amidst the explosion of interest following the November 2022 release of ChatGPT-3. The AI Act was ultimately approved by the European Parliament on April 22, 2024, came into force on August 1, 2024 and after a 24-month transitional period, will be enforced effective August 2, 2026, with a few exceptions.

However, despite the EU having hitherto captured much of the public limelight in AI regulation, there are two countries that have AI policy frameworks that precede the EU AI Act's inception by numerous years: Singapore and Japan.

This paper will examine how the soft law AI governance frameworks implemented by the Singaporean and Japanese governments are evolving from domestic rules-based regimes to a more region-wide system of interlocking regulatory expectations.

I. Introduction

Over the past half decade, developments in applications of artificial intelligence (AI) have become an increasingly noteworthy feature of technology policy conversations around the world. In the last few years in particular, we have seen a Cambrian explosion of technical

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² See European Union's [Artificial Intelligence Act](#), Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 ("EU AI Act").

advancements in AI, thrusting the issue to the forefront of global policy priorities. Until very recently, much of the response to AI was siloed to high-level principles — whether issued by governments, international fora, or private companies — and most of the policy attention was specifically focused on developments in the European Union (EU), where the EU AI Act became the world’s first broad-based regulation targeted at AI.

But despite the passage, and forthcoming implementation, of the EU AI Act, there are a number of other countries that were actually developing regulatory frameworks for AI before the technology caught the eye of policymakers in the EU and elsewhere. This paper will focus on two such countries – Singapore and Japan – that have been taking strong global leadership roles in promoting alternative regulatory approaches to AI.

Despite much AI policy attention having been directed towards the EU over the past few years, Japan and Singapore have emerged as significant players in the global AI arena. Each country has a robust history of devising and deploying AI policy strategies and frameworks to promote the development and governance of this transformative technology. Grasping the subtleties of their unique approaches is essential for policymakers, researchers, and industry stakeholders looking for practical, and effective, models for AI governance. Perhaps even more important, however, is understanding how these countries are now leveraging their domestic governance experience to shine a spotlight on their efforts within the broader international community.

Although each country has laws and regulatory authorities that will likely impact or intersect with AI, such as Japan’s Act on the Protection of Personal Information (APPI) or Singapore’s Personal Data Protection Commission (PDPA), this paper’s focus will be scoped to those governance frameworks that are AI-specific.³ The nature of AI’s cross-sectoral impact means that many laws — from privacy and data protection to copyright and intellectual property — can substantially influence both the development of AI models and their subsequent deployment. The purpose of this paper, however, is to focus narrowly on those governance frameworks that address AI as a separate technology category.

II. A Brief History of AI Governance in Singapore and Japan

As noted previously, Singapore and Japan have a long history of prioritizing AI policy and governance.⁴ The following section will briefly detail both countries’ past quarter century history of initiatives promoting the advancement, adoption, and governance of AI technology.

Early Initiatives (2000-2010)

³ See <https://www.japaneselawtranslation.go.jp/en/laws/view/4241/en> and <https://www.pdpc.gov.sg/>

⁴ In the context of this paper, the term “AI governance” refers to a broad spectrum of policies and regulations designed to steer the development, implementation, and utilization of AI technologies in ways that optimize their advantages while mitigating potential risks.

Japan's journey towards AI regulatory governance began in the early 2000s with the establishment of research initiatives and government-funded projects aimed at advancing AI technology. Organizations like the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (JSPS) and the National Institute of Advanced Industrial Science and Technology (AIST) played pivotal roles in fostering AI research and development.⁵

The government's focus on AI gained momentum with the launch of the "e-Japan Strategy" in 2001, which aimed to leverage information technology, including AI, to revitalize the economy and improve societal well-being.⁶ As part of this strategy, Japan began investing in AI research and development (R&D) through various initiatives, such as the Funding Program for World-Leading Innovative R&D on Science and Technology (FIRST), which allocated resources to support cutting-edge AI projects.⁷ Additionally, the establishment of research centers and collaboration networks facilitated knowledge exchange and accelerated AI innovation in Japan during this period.

Similarly, in Singapore the early 2000s marked the beginning of concerted efforts to position the city-state as a hub for AI research and development in the region. The launch of initiatives like the National Grid Pilot Project in 2002 reflected Singapore's commitment to building infrastructure and capabilities to support advanced computing technologies, including AI.⁸ The formation of public-private partnerships, such as the Singapore-MIT Alliance for Research and Technology (SMART), enabled collaborative AI research endeavors and knowledge transfer between academia, industry, and government agencies.⁹ These strategic investments in AI infrastructure and talent development laid the groundwork for Singapore's future emergence as a leading AI innovation hub in Asia.

Strategic Planning and Governance Frameworks (2010-2018)

In the 2010s, Japan and Singapore intensified their efforts to develop comprehensive AI governance frameworks to address the rapidly evolving landscape of artificial intelligence technologies.

In Japan, the government's commitment to AI governance was reflected in the formulation of the "New Industrial Structure Vision" in 2017, which identified AI as a key driver of economic growth and outlined strategies to promote its responsible development and deployment.¹⁰ That same year, Japan took a significant step towards AI regulatory governance with the publication of the "AI R&D Strategy," which outlined the government's vision for AI innovation. As part of this strategy, the Japanese government formulated the "AI Ethical Guidelines" to address ethical

⁵ See <https://www.jsps.go.jp/english/> and https://www.aist.go.jp/index_en.html

⁶ https://japan.kantei.go.jp/it/network/0122full_e.html

⁷ <https://www8.cao.go.jp/cstp/sentan/index.html>

⁸ <https://www.nas.gov.sg/archivesonline/data/pdfdoc/2003110102.htm>

⁹ <https://smart.mit.edu/>

¹⁰ <https://www.rieti.go.jp/en/events/17082301/info.html>

concerns surrounding AI technologies. These guidelines emphasized principles such as transparency, fairness, and accountability in AI development and deployment.¹¹

Subsequently, Japan introduced the "AI R&D Strategy" in 2019, which outlined specific goals and action plans to advance AI research, foster innovation, and ensure ethical AI practices. The strategy emphasized the importance of interdisciplinary collaboration, industry-academia partnerships, and international engagement to address emerging challenges and opportunities in AI governance.¹²

Similarly, Singapore bolstered its AI governance efforts in the 2010s with the launch of the "National AI Strategy" in 2019, which articulated a holistic approach to harnessing AI for economic and social advancement while safeguarding against potential risks. The strategy focused on four key pillars: research, innovation, enterprise adoption, and manpower development, aiming to cultivate a vibrant AI ecosystem supported by robust governance frameworks.¹³ Singapore also established the "AI Ethics and Governance Steering Committee" to provide strategic oversight and guidance on ethical AI principles, data governance, and regulatory frameworks.¹⁴ Furthermore, the "Singapore Advisory Council on the Ethical Use of AI and Data" was launched to engage stakeholders and develop best practices for responsible AI deployment across various sectors.¹⁵

Throughout the 2010s, both Japan and Singapore recognized the importance of proactive and adaptive AI governance frameworks to effectively navigate the complexities of AI technologies. Collaboration between government agencies, industry stakeholders, academia, and civil society played a pivotal role in shaping policies, standards, and guidelines to promote trust, transparency, and accountability in AI development and deployment.

Collaboration and International Engagement (2018-present)

In 2018, Singapore introduced the initial draft of the country's "Model AI Governance Framework" to provide practical guidance for organizations developing and deploying AI systems. Singapore formally released the first edition of the Framework at the World Economic Forum (WEF) Convening in Davos, Switzerland in 2019. The updated version was released the following year at the 2020 WEF. Likewise, although their AI Governance Guidelines were not formally published until July 2021, the Japanese Ministry of Economy, Trade, and Industry (METI) began considering the features of their AI framework in 2019.¹⁶ These frameworks emphasized the importance of ethical AI deployment, transparency, and accountability, and to remain the countries' primary AI governance frameworks, respectively.

¹¹ https://ifi.u-tokyo.ac.jp/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/JSAI_report_210427.pdf

¹² https://wp.oecd.ai/app/uploads/2021/12/Korea_National_Strategy_for_Artificial_Intelligence_2019.pdf

¹³ <https://www.smartnation.gov.sg/nais/>

¹⁴ <https://www.imda.gov.sg/-/media/imda/files/about/media-releases/2019/annex-e-factsheet-scs-ai-ethics-governance-steering-committee.pdf>

¹⁵ <https://www.imda.gov.sg/about-imda/emerging-technologies-and-research/artificial-intelligence>

¹⁶ https://www.meti.go.jp/shingikai/mono_info_service/ai_shakai_jisso/pdf/20220128_2.pdf

In subsequent years, Japan has increasingly focused on fostering collaboration between industry, academia, and government agencies to promote AI innovation while ensuring ethical standards were met. For example, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida recently announced a new strategic council focused on generative AI that will bring together experts from various sectors to facilitate discussions on AI governance issues.¹⁷

In Japan, the current AI governance approaches reflect a multifaceted strategy aimed at balancing innovation and regulation to maximize the benefits of AI while addressing potential risks. Building upon the initiatives of the previous decades, Japan continues to prioritize AI research and development through strategic investments and collaboration between government, industry, and academia. The Japanese government's AI R&D Strategy outlines specific goals and action plans to advance AI technologies in key areas such as healthcare, mobility, and disaster prevention, while also emphasizing the importance of ethical AI practices and international cooperation. Furthermore, Japan has been proactive in developing regulatory frameworks and guidelines to govern AI applications responsibly, including initiatives to address algorithmic transparency, data privacy, and bias mitigation.

Similarly, Singapore has adopted a comprehensive and forward-looking approach to AI governance, driven by its National AI Strategy and commitment to becoming a global AI innovation hub. The Singapore government's AI governance efforts are anchored in principles of transparency, accountability, and human-centricity, with a focus on promoting trust in AI technologies through ethical guidelines and regulatory frameworks. The Model AI Governance Framework, developed in collaboration with industry stakeholders, provides practical guidance for organizations to implement responsible AI practices, including measures for data governance, algorithmic fairness, and accountability mechanisms.¹⁸

Singapore's proactive stance on AI governance is further exemplified by the establishment of dedicated institutions such as the Advisory Council on the Ethical Use of AI and Data, PDPA, and AI Verify Foundation, which play pivotal roles in shaping policies and standards to ensure the ethical and responsible development and deployment of AI technologies. Singapore's strategy has also been one of proactively engaging with stakeholders — primarily other governments, private industry, and various civil society groups — and the public in discussions on AI governance issues through initiatives such as the "AI Commons" platform, which aims to foster AI literacy among citizens and promote dialogue on ethical AI development and deployment.¹⁹

Overall, the current AI governance approaches in Japan and Singapore reflect a dynamic and collaborative effort to navigate the complex challenges and opportunities presented by AI technologies in the digital age. By fostering innovation while prioritizing ethical considerations

¹⁷ <https://japannews.yomiuri.co.jp/politics/politics-government/20230510-108854/>

¹⁸ <https://www.pdpc.gov.sg/-/media/Files/PDPC/PDF-Files/Resource-for-Organisation/AI/SGModelAIGovFramework2.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://connect.aisingapore.org/>

and regulatory compliance, both countries are laying the groundwork for a sustainable and inclusive AI ecosystem that benefits society at large. As AI continues to evolve and permeate various aspects of daily life, the experiences and lessons learned from Japan and Singapore's AI governance initiatives serve as valuable insights for other nations seeking to develop effective strategies for governing AI technologies effectively.

III. Comparing Soft Law in AI Governance Between Singapore and Japan

Soft law refers to instruments and mechanisms that are not legally binding, but nonetheless tie parties to substantive obligations. They are “systems or arrangements that create substantive expectations that are not directly enforceable.”²⁰ Soft law is most often used in various policy contexts to shape and influence norms and behaviors among private or public actors. Unlike hard law, which consists of legally binding treaties, statutes, and regulations, soft law instruments do not create legally enforceable obligations. Instead, they serve as frameworks for cooperation, guidance for expected behavior, or expressions of consensus among stakeholders.

The benefits of soft law are numerous, and are most pronounced in issue arenas where complex policy issues do not naturally lend themselves to easy, strict regulation. In particular, these benefits include:

- Establishing consensus-based foundations upon which future governance may be built;
- Creating flexibility and adaptation for governance and policy experimentation for still-emerging technologies;
- Providing opportunities for forestalling overly-prescriptive, knee jerk reactions from political forces;
- Offering greater transparency into traditionally closed regulatory processes; and
- Incentivizing compromise among various stakeholders, which in turn may lead to greater trust among different actors and the cultivation of more resilient governance outcomes.²¹

But no regulatory approach is without its tradeoffs, and soft law mechanisms can also incur costs, such as diminishing long-term legal clarity for market actors and subjecting agencies to critiques regarding the circumvention of traditional pathways for the approval of rules and regulations. Although soft law's costs can present challenges for companies looking to develop and deploy AI, the benefits make it attractive to policymakers looking to pursue AI policies that balance innovation and consumer protections. It is for this reason that so many countries, including Singapore and Japan, have adopted features of soft law governance for application in the AI regulatory arena.

²⁰ Gary E. Marchant & Braden Allenby, *New Tools for Governing Emerging Technologies*, 73 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* 108, 112. (2017)

²¹ Ryan Hagemann, “New Rules for New Frontiers,” *Washburn Law Journal*, 254-55, available at <https://contentdm.washburnlaw.edu/digital/collection/wlj/id/7163>.

Unlike approaches proposed elsewhere, these two leading economies have opted for soft law and soft law-adjacent approaches to AI governance. Despite a first-mover advantage in developing AI rules, very little attention has been directed towards these countries' experiences implementing these frameworks, the domestic socio-economic impacts, and their osmotic effects on other regional actors' approaches to AI regulation.

Singapore

Singapore's unique soft law approach to AI policy governance distinguishes it from traditional regulatory frameworks, emphasizing flexibility, adaptability, and stakeholder collaboration. In contrast to rigid legislative measures, soft law mechanisms in Singapore provide guidelines, best practices, and voluntary standards to govern AI applications.

At the heart of Singapore's soft law approach is the Model AI Governance Framework, a set of principles and guidelines developed collaboratively with industry stakeholders to promote responsible AI adoption. Rather than imposing strict regulatory requirements, the framework offers practical guidance for organizations to navigate ethical, legal, and societal considerations in AI development and deployment. By adopting a principles-based approach, Singapore aims to facilitate industry self-regulation and voluntary compliance, empowering organizations to adopt AI technologies while upholding ethical standards and mitigating risks. The government actively engages stakeholders through consultation processes, public forums, and industry partnerships to co-create policies and standards that reflect diverse perspectives and address emerging challenges. This collaborative ethos fosters trust and confidence in Singapore's AI ecosystem, enabling innovation to flourish while safeguarding against potential harms.

This Framework was recently buttressed with the release of the new draft Model AI Governance Framework for Generative AI, which expands on the original Framework with the goal of addressing newly-emergent issues, integrating concepts from previous discussion papers on generative AI to propose suggested best practices for evaluating the safety of generative AI models.²²

Overall, Singapore's soft law approach to AI policy governance represents a pragmatic and adaptive model that balances regulatory oversight with industry autonomy and innovation. By leveraging soft law mechanisms such as the Model AI Governance Framework and its Generative AI update, Singapore aims to create a supportive regulatory environment that promotes responsible AI adoption, fosters trust among stakeholders, and positions the country as a global leader in AI innovation and governance.

Initiatives such as the Model AI Governance Framework provide practical guidance for organizations to implement responsible AI practices, including measures for data governance, algorithmic fairness, and accountability mechanisms. Singapore's regulatory environment is

²² <https://aiverifyfoundation.sg/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Model-AI-Governance-Framework-for-Generative-AI-May-2024-1-1.pdf> <https://www.imda.gov.sg/resources/press-releases-factsheets-and-speeches/press-releases/2024/public-consult-model-ai-governance-framework-genai>

further strengthened by institutions such as the Personal Data Protection Commission and the Advisory Council on the Ethical Use of AI and Data, which play pivotal roles in shaping policies and standards to ensure the ethical and responsible development and deployment of AI technologies.

Japan

Like Singapore, the Japanese approach to AI policy governance is similarly predicated on soft law mechanisms — explicitly referenced as such by METI's best practices and guidance on the development and deployment of AI. METI's guidance, like the Model AI Governance Framework, reflects a pragmatic and collaborative strategy that emphasizes industry self-regulation, voluntary guidelines, and stakeholder engagement.²³ Unlike traditional top-down regulatory frameworks, Japan's soft law mechanisms provide flexible and adaptable guidelines to govern AI applications while fostering innovation and industry-led initiatives. This approach aligns with Japan's cultural emphasis on consensus-building and cooperation, allowing for the co-creation of policies and standards that reflect diverse stakeholder perspectives and address evolving challenges in the AI landscape.

At the forefront of Japan's soft law approach is the AI Ethics Guidelines, a set of principles and best practices developed collaboratively by government, industry, academia, and civil society stakeholders. Introduced in 2019 by the AI R&D Strategy Promotion Office, these guidelines outline ethical considerations and recommendations for the responsible development and deployment of AI technologies.²⁴ By adopting a principles-based approach, Japan has sought to encourage industry self-regulation and voluntary compliance, empowering and incentivizing non-governmental organizations and the private sector to take the lead in mitigating risks associated with AI, while leaving ample room for policy experimentation and regulatory flexibility.

Japan's approach to AI regulation reflects a balance between innovation and regulation, with a strong emphasis on collaboration between government, industry, and academia to drive AI research and development. While Japan has implemented regulatory frameworks and guidelines to govern AI applications responsibly, including measures to ensure algorithmic transparency, data privacy, and bias mitigation, its regulatory environment is characterized by a more nuanced approach that prioritizes industry self-regulation and voluntary compliance. The government's AI R&D Strategy sets out specific objectives and action plans to advance AI technologies across various sectors, prioritizing areas such as healthcare, mobility, and disaster prevention. Key initiatives include investment in AI research and development, fostering AI talent, and establishing AI ethical guidelines.

The AI regulatory environments in Singapore and Japan exhibit unique characteristics shaped by their respective socio-economic contexts and policy priorities. What both share in common,

²³ https://www.meti.go.jp/english/press/2024/0419_002.html

²⁴ https://www.meti.go.jp/shingikai/mono_info_service/ai_shakai_jisso/pdf/20220128_2.pdf

however, is a recognition of the importance of leveraging public engagement and multistakeholder initiatives in shaping AI governance policies, recognizing the importance of collaboration and cooperation in shaping effective AI regulatory environments that balance technological advancement with societal interests. By leveraging their respective strengths and experiences, Singapore and Japan can serve as valuable examples for other nations seeking to develop comprehensive AI regulatory frameworks to navigate the complexities of the digital age.

IV. Soft Law and Soft Power in International Engagements

Soft law AI governance is emerging as a significant tool of soft power in international affairs, reflecting the growing recognition of the importance of ethical AI practices and responsible technology development on the global stage. As AI technologies continue to advance rapidly, some governments are increasingly turning to soft law instruments to shape norms, standards, and regulatory frameworks that govern AI development and deployment.

This is partially because the use of soft law AI governance mechanisms allow policymakers to take advantage of regulatory arbitrage, allowing them to have more say in the global landscape of AI regulatory development. Soft law provides a platform for dialogue, consensus-building, and knowledge-sharing among diverse stakeholders, facilitating the co-creation of policies and guidelines that reflect shared values and address common challenges. By promoting transparency, accountability, and human-centricity in AI practices, soft law initiatives can enhance trust and confidence in AI technologies, fostering greater acceptance and adoption globally.

But AI, and emerging technology more generally, is also increasingly viewed as a key driver of national comparative advantage in international affairs – much in the same way that trade and defense have been viewed over the past few decades. As such, it should come as no surprise that nations are looking to leverage their soft power in international engagements as a means of promoting their own domestic AI policy efforts. The result is that soft law AI governance initiatives have increasingly begun serving as a tool of soft power in international affairs by enabling countries and organizations to exert influence and shape perceptions on the global stage. Through active participation in the development of soft law instruments, countries can demonstrate leadership, credibility, and a commitment to responsible technology stewardship without the cost of waiting for the development of broader hard law initiatives to take shape. Soft law also provides opportunities for collaboration and diplomacy, enabling countries to build partnerships, enhance cooperation, and project influence in emerging domains of strategic importance.

As AI governance becomes increasingly central to debates on global governance and technology diplomacy, soft law mechanisms offer a flexible and effective means for countries to advance their interests, values, and influence in the international arena — opportunities that both Singapore and Japan have leveraged to help catapult their international standing in AI policy conversations.

Singapore's Influence in ASEAN and Beyond

Singapore's influence on AI policy within the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is notable, reflecting its role as a regional leader in technology innovation and governance, but also its early foray into AI policy. As ASEAN member states navigate the challenges and opportunities presented by AI technologies, Singapore has played a pivotal role in shaping regional initiatives and frameworks to promote responsible AI adoption and governance.

One significant contribution is the ASEAN AI Guide, a set of principles and recommendations developed with Singapore's leadership to facilitate the responsible development and deployment of AI technologies across ASEAN countries.²⁵ This guide provides a framework for harmonizing AI policies and practices, fostering collaboration, and building capacity among ASEAN member states to harness the benefits of AI while addressing ethical, legal, and societal considerations — reflecting many of the same tenets expressed in Singapore's Model AI Governance Framework.

Singapore's influence on AI policy in ASEAN is further demonstrated through its leadership in regional forums and initiatives focused on technology cooperation and capacity-building. As the host of the ASEAN Ministerial Conference on Cybersecurity (AMCC), Singapore provides a platform for ASEAN member states to discuss cybersecurity challenges and opportunities arising from digital transformation, including AI-related risks and vulnerabilities.²⁶ Through initiatives such as the ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) and the ASEAN Digital Integration Framework, Singapore promotes knowledge-sharing, best practices exchange, and collaborative projects to harness AI and emerging technologies for sustainable urban development and economic growth across ASEAN.

But this influence extends beyond regional guidelines and regional multilateral fora, with Singapore's broader efforts on the international stage aiming to promote digital integration and cooperation through free trade agreements. For example, the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement (DEPA), a trilateral partnership between Singapore, New Zealand, and Chile, underscores Singapore's commitment to advancing digital trade and innovation within and beyond ASEAN.²⁷ As a founding signatory of DEPA, Singapore has championed principles such as data interoperability, digital identity, and e-commerce facilitation, which are relevant to AI governance and digital transformation efforts across ASEAN.

Singapore has also worked to develop stronger cross-border AI policy ties with leading economic powers, like the US. To that end, in late 2023, Singapore's IMDA concluded a policy "crosswalk" with the US National Institute of Standards and Technology (NIST). This effort was aimed at showcasing alignment between the Model AI Governance Framework and the NIST AI

²⁵ https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/ASEAN-Guide-on-AI-Governance-and-Ethics_beautified_201223_v2.pdf

²⁶ <https://asean.org/chairmans-statement-of-the-8th-asean-ministerial-conference-on-cybersecurity/>

²⁷ <https://www.mti.gov.sg/Trade/Digital-Economy-Agreements/The-Digital-Economy-Partnership-Agreement>

Risk Management Framework (AI RMF), with the goal of filling existing gaps in a lack of transnational regulatory harmonization on AI policy.²⁸ Although the “crosswalk”, like other soft law arrangements, bears no binding or enforceable redress mechanisms, it is nonetheless a notable step towards helping to alleviate the existing uncertainty in interoperability between different AI policy regimes.

Singapore's influence on AI policy in ASEAN is characterized by its leadership in developing regional guidelines, advancing digital integration initiatives, and promoting technology cooperation and capacity-building efforts. Through initiatives such as the ASEAN AI Guide and its participation in the DEPA, Singapore plays a pivotal role in shaping regional AI governance frameworks and advancing digital trade and innovation within ASEAN. As ASEAN member states continue to embrace AI technologies as drivers of economic growth and social progress, Singapore's leadership and expertise will remain crucial in fostering a conducive environment for responsible AI adoption and governance in the region.

Japan's International Engagement on AI

Like Singapore, Japan has been actively engaged in shaping international discussions and initiatives related to AI. As a leading innovator in AI research and development, Japan has sought to promote responsible AI adoption and governance on the global stage through various channels. One notable effort is Japan's participation in international fora such as the G7 and G20, where it advocates for principles and guidelines to guide the ethical development and deployment of AI technologies.

Throughout the country's 2023 tenure in its G7 Presidency role, Japan aimed to promote greater international collaboration and consensus in promoting an AI policy framework that more closely reflected the country's unique approach to AI governance. This effort culminated in the Hiroshima Process, which delivered a set of principles and an international code of conduct aiming to detail best practices and standards that AI developers should abide by when building the technology.²⁹ This process clearly possesses some staying power, as the G7 under the Italian Presidency recently reaffirmed its commitment to the Hiroshima Process and Principles with the 2024 Trento Declaration.³⁰

In addition to its work within the G7, Japan's influence on international engagements on AI is evident in its collaboration with multilateral organizations such as the United Nations (UN) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD). Japan actively contributes to the work of the UN's specialized agencies, such as the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) and the UN Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), to address AI-related challenges and opportunities. Through initiatives such as the

²⁸ <https://www.imda.gov.sg/resources/press-releases-factsheets-and-speeches/press-releases/2023/nist-imda-joint-mapping-exercise>

²⁹ https://www.japan.go.jp/kizuna/2024/02/hiroshima_ai_process.html

³⁰ <https://innovazione.gov.it/notizie/articoli/en/g7-ministerial-declaration-on-industry-technology-and-digital/>

OECD's AI Policy Observatory and the Global Partnership on AI (GPAI), Japan collaborates with like-minded countries to develop policy recommendations, share best practices, and promote international cooperation in AI governance.

Japan's efforts to influence international engagements on AI extend beyond policy advocacy to concrete initiatives aimed at fostering collaboration and capacity-building in AI research and development. For instance, Japan has established bilateral partnerships with countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, and Germany to promote joint AI research projects, talent exchange programs, and technology transfer initiatives. Through initiatives such as the Japan-UK AI Collaboration Hub, Japan seeks to leverage international partnerships to accelerate AI innovation and address common challenges in AI governance.³¹

In addition to its government-led initiatives, Japan's private sector has played a crucial role in influencing international engagements on AI through industry collaboration, technology partnerships, and knowledge-sharing initiatives. Japanese companies such as Toyota, Sony, and Hitachi are actively engaged in international AI research consortia, industry associations, and technology alliances to advance AI innovation and promote responsible technology development.³² By leveraging Japan's strengths in AI research, engineering, and manufacturing, these companies contribute to shaping global AI ecosystems and advancing ethical AI principles and practices on a global scale.

In conclusion, Japan's efforts to influence international engagements on AI reflect its commitment to promoting responsible AI adoption and governance while fostering collaboration and innovation in the global AI community. Through active participation in international fora, collaboration with multilateral organizations, bilateral partnerships, standardization efforts, and industry collaboration, Japan plays a leading role in shaping global AI governance frameworks and advancing shared values in AI ethics, transparency, and accountability. As AI technologies continue to evolve and permeate various aspects of society, Japan's leadership and expertise will remain crucial in shaping the future of AI on the global stage.

V. Conclusion: The Future of AI Governance in ASEAN and Beyond

The comparative analysis of AI governance approaches in Singapore and Japan highlights the distinct yet complementary strategies employed by both countries to navigate the complexities of AI technologies responsibly. Singapore's proactive stance on AI governance is characterized by its soft law approach, emphasizing collaboration, transparency, and human-centricity. Through initiatives such as the Model AI Governance Framework and the Digital Economy Partnership Agreement, Singapore seeks to promote responsible AI adoption and digital integration within ASEAN and beyond. By championing principles of ethical AI governance and

³¹ <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-japan-digital-partnership/uk-japan-digital-partnership>

³² See <https://aicenter.stanford.edu/>, <https://ai.sony/about/>, and [https://rd.hitachi.com/tags/AI %26 Data science](https://rd.hitachi.com/tags/AI%26Data%26science)

digital cooperation, Singapore positions itself as a global leader in shaping international engagements and advancing shared values in AI policy.

Similarly, Japan's soft law approach to AI governance reflects its commitment to innovation, collaboration, and ethical AI practices. By leveraging initiatives such as the AI Ethics Guidelines and international partnerships, Japan seeks to influence global discussions and initiatives on AI governance while promoting industry self-regulation and voluntary compliance. Japan's leadership in standardization efforts, technical cooperation initiatives, and industry collaboration further strengthens its position as a global leader in AI policy and innovation.

Both Singapore and Japan recognize the importance of soft law mechanisms in shaping international engagements and positioning themselves as global leaders in AI governance. As AI technologies continue to evolve and permeate various aspects of society, Singapore and Japan's leadership and expertise will remain crucial in shaping the future of AI governance and innovation worldwide. Through continued collaboration, knowledge-sharing, and engagement with international partners, both countries are well-positioned to continue playing an outsized role in global AI policy conversations.