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China in Its 15th Five-Year Plan Period: Advancing High-Quality Development and Creating New Opportunities Together

Symposium on AI Industrial Application

(Panel Discussion Section II)

Hosted by the Development Research Centre (DRC) of the State Council and organized by the China Development Research Foundation (CDRF), the China Development Forum 2026 took place at the Diaoyutai State Guesthouse in Beijing from March 22 to 23, 2026. As part of the forum, the Symposium on AI Industrial Application was held on the afternoon of March 23. Section II of the panel discussion featured ZHOU Bowen, Director and Chief Scientist of Shanghai AI Lab, Christophe De Vusser, Worldwide Managing Partner, CEO, and Chairman of the Board of Directors of Bain & Company, Vivek Badrinath, Director General of GSMA, and ZHU Qiuguo, Founder and CEO of DEEP Robotics. The symposium was co-chaired by MA Mingjie, Director-General of the Department of Innovation Development, Development Research Centre of the State Council, and "Xiao Zhi," an AI host. This was the first time the forum had used human-machine synergy to co-chair a symposium.

Addressing the theme of the symposium, **ZHOU Bowen** discussed the role of AGI innovation in driving development. He identified three major trends in AI technology: the integration of generality and

specialization, the shift from problem solving to task execution, and the positioning of scientific discovery as the optimal application and ultimate test for AI. He noted that the AI Plus initiative has fostered a new variety of business models that integrate AI with science and technology, consumption upgrading, and public welfare, and so on.

To better address challenges in implementing the AI Plus initiative, ZHOU proposed focusing on four "dimensions," three "effects," and four "how-tos." The four "dimensions" include greater breadth of input information, greater task reasoning depth, increased agent collaboration density, and faster self-evolution rate. Advances in these dimensions will catalyze a new wave of breakthroughs and underscore its values manifested in three "effects." These "effects" are: (1) the incremental effect, which is a capability breakthrough achieved by applying new quality productive forces in traditional and emerging sectors; (2) the transformative effect, which reshapes production, decision-making, and combinations of factors to drive industrial upgrading; and (3) the multiplier effect, which enhances productivity and the rate of upgrading exponentially through AI's self-learning and self-evolution capabilities.

China's 15th Five-Year Plan calls for the full implementation of the AI Plus initiative. Against this backdrop, ZHOU emphasized the need to focus on four "how-tos." First, how to effectively integrate AI. Efforts are needed to identify suitable applications, scenarios, and data to achieve AI scenarios that are both solidly founded and highly specialized. Second, how to deepen AI integration. Cross-sector, large-scale indigenous AI industry clusters are needed to enable leapfrog development of China's AI industry. Third, how to ensure stable AI integration. Access rules should be established across domains, and the service value of data and models should be emphasized. Fourth, how to ensure smooth AI integration. Efforts are needed to strike a balance between innovation and risk prevention and facilitate coordinated, chain-wide development of AI across industry, government, academia, research, and applications.

Christophe De Vusser mainly discussed the transformation of companies in the AI era. He noted that AI presents historic opportunities unseen in a century, which are fundamentally reshaping industries and will change the logic of competition between companies. He emphasized that companies are exploring ways to upgrade AI from a standalone productivity tool into an underlying operating system and a core source of innovation.

De Vusser highlighted a significant gap between the capabilities of AI technology and the actual improvement of corporate competitiveness, emphasizing that success does not come from simply applying the technology but from positioning AI as a profound business transformation. Many AI initiatives develop technologies before identifying use scenarios, resulting in numerous pilot projects with few large-scale applications. In contrast, a few leading companies focus on core value chain segments and use AI to fundamentally redesign their business processes, thereby creating greater competitive advantages. Consequently, AI models are emerging as a critical foundation for long-term corporate competitive strengths. He illustrated with examples that to achieve scalable value, companies must combine their unique business insights, proprietary data, and industry expertise to conduct their own secondary development on the basis of general-purpose models.

De Vusser emphasized that a successful AI transformation requires a coordinated reinvention of business processes and individual capabilities that considers both the technological and human factors. He added that companies must provide targeted reskilling for their workforce and recognize that AI is intended to empower employees rather than replace them. In his view, AI is evolving much faster than any previous technology. Only by proactively exploring the possibilities of transformation and making all-out efforts to advance its implementation can companies seize the significant opportunities presented by industrial reinvention.

Within the information and communication technology (ICT) sector, **Vivek Badrinath** stated that scaling AI is as important as continuous innovation. The development of AI on a large scale has created new arenas while reshaping the way we live, work, and solve problems. This transformation is in full swing in China.

Badrinath highlighted three imperatives for responsible and trustworthy AI scaling: connectivity, reliability, and collaboration. First, connectivity. Communications infrastructure is the foundation for AI systems. Their connectivity enables AI to function. As AI projects transition towards large-scale deployment, networks must be able to meet new demands, such as 24/7 stable connectivity, real-time responsiveness, and security. Therefore, the comprehensive roll-out of 5G is essential for establishing an AI network. Second, reliability. Trust is an indispensable prerequisite. In fact, many AI models fall short of industry-specific requirements. They are likely to misinterpret communications network data and even make incorrect responses or conclusions. It is thus imperative that we improve AI accuracy. Third, collaboration. In order to achieve global scaling in the ICT sector, operators, tech companies, and industry partners must work together on a global scale. Close collaboration between industry and policymakers is also required.

Commenting on China's policies on the intelligent economy and AI development, **ZHU Qiuguo** noted that a priority of high-quality development is to bring AI out of the laboratory and into the real economy. This approach uses technology to address practical industrial challenges and meet genuine market needs. He shared three insights. First, industry pain points should be addressed by adapting technology to real-world scenarios. As a type of embodied AI, robots essentially use technology to recognize scenarios and define technology through scenarios. They can be used for power inspections, emergency responses, and firefighting, etc. to help humans perform tasks in dangerous or harsh environments. Second, a solid technological foundation must be

established to support industrialization through independent innovation. This requires a full-chain technical system that covers perception, decision-making, and execution, as well as breakthroughs in core technologies, such as multimodal environmental perception and cross-scenario embodied navigation. Third, a collaborative ecosystem should be developed to unlock the industry's value through openness and coordination. AI industrial application is not a solo endeavor. Rather, it is a systematic undertaking that requires concerted efforts from all parties across the industrial chain. He emphasized his company's commitment to collaborating with partners from all sectors to create an industrial ecosystem that benefits all. He concluded that as embodied AI becomes embedded into industrial development through deeper integration, openness, and collaboration, it will guide the AI industry towards a more sustainable future with deeper and more expansive development.

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— Background Information —

The China Development Forum (CDF) is hosted by the Development Research Centre of the State Council and organized by the China Development Research Foundation. Since its inception in 2000, the Forum has been dedicated to the mission of "engaging with the world for common prosperity." It has served as an important platform for high-level, professional dialogue among China's senior government officials, global business leaders, representatives from international organizations, as well as scholars from both China and around the world.

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