Point of View

What Asia Brings to the Table



Tan Su Shan

Advanced manufacturing, trade, technology, and wealth creation give the region powerful advantages



When the world's central bankers and finance ministers return to Asia for the IMF and World Bank annual meetings in October, they will find a region transformed from when they last gathered here, eight years ago. Since the Bali meetings in 2018, the world has weathered a pandemic, tariff wars, geopolitical conflicts, and now an AI revolution. Asia has emerged from these tests more resilient. How has it managed it?

To unpack what Asia brings to a more fractured world, it's important to understand the hand Asia has—and it holds five favorable cards.

First, Asia has built genuine strength in industries that will power growth over the next decade. These include robotics, data centers, advanced manufacturing, electric vehicles, and renewable energy. That strength is now a structural source of growth for the region. Some of the world's largest and most recognizable brands in these sectors, from BYD to TSMC, are anchored in the region.

Asia accounts for about three-quarters of global industrial robot installations. China alone installed 295,000 robots in 2024, representing 54 percent of the global total. China is also a global leader in climate technologies, producing about 80 percent of all solar panels and 70 percent of wind turbines made globally, as well as more than 60 percent of EVs sold.

Best known for its prowess in services, India is also moving into advanced manufacturing. Tata Electronics is working with global partners to build the nation's first AI-enabled plant, with a capacity of up to 50,000 semiconductor wafers each month for AI, automotive use, and high-performance computing.

As Asia pushes deeper into new industries, its growth continues to be supported by its traditional commodity strengths. Malaysia and Indonesia together supply over 85 percent of the world's palm oil. Indonesia produces nearly two-thirds of the world's mined nickel, more than all other producers combined.

Strength to strength

Second, trade in Asia continues to grow from strength to strength despite multiple rounds of reciprocal tariffs with other parts of the world. Trade outside the United States, or "TOTUS," as we call it at DBS, now accounts for 92 percent of global trade, up from 89 percent at the end of 2025. Asia accounts for a significant share of that activity. Trade between North and South Asia has emerged as a structural growth area; China-India trade, for instance, has nearly doubled since 2020, reaching a record $155 billion last year. Southeast Asia has also become an increasingly prominent trading base as companies diversify supply chains.

Third, Asia's population is mostly digitally native—it grew up using new technology. Southeast Asia's digital economy is estimated to have surpassed $300 bil-

COURTESY TAN SU SHAN

Illustration by Dan Bejar

lion in 2025, with more than 60 percent of all payments made digitally. The use of AI will likely become second nature in Asia—in fact, consumer interest in AI topics is three times higher there than the global average, with many countries from the region ranking among the world's top 20 for interest in multimodal AI. Asia is well positioned to leapfrog other parts of the world in its use of AI both personally and professionally.

Fourth, momentum for equity capital markets is shifting toward the region. Asia's share of global IPOs has risen to nearly 50 percent in the past decade, up from about 30 percent in the 2000s, and that trend shows no signs of slowing. Hong Kong SAR, for instance, reclaimed the top spot globally for IPO fundraising last year.

Fifth, unprecedented wealth creation is emerging as a structural growth driver for the region. Asia posted the world's highest wealth growth in 2025, with the wealth of high-net-worth individuals rising by over 10 percent. Asia's wealth pool—made up of households with investable assets of between $100,000 and $1 million—is projected to reach $4.7 trillion this year. Adding to this is Asia's largest-ever intergenerational wealth transfer, with an estimated $11 trillion expected to change hands over the next two to three decades. This presents an unprecedented opportunity to help families build cohesive, comprehensive estate and legacy plans.

Region of reliability

But for Asia to convert its strong hand into a play that delivers lasting advantage, it must capitalize on three opportunities.

First, Asia must establish itself as a region of reliability in a more contested and unpredictable geoeconomic landscape. This is best achieved through greater policy consistency and clarity. Many economies and corporations are rewiring their operations for flexibility and resilience; Asia can capture a greater share of global investment and supply-chain shifts, which both involve long-term decisions, by demonstrating its reliability in a world beset by disruption.

Greater harmonization of cross-border regulations will also encourage the growth of emerging areas, such as digital assets. Jurisdictions are taking different approaches to regulating stablecoins and tokenized deposits. A level regulatory playing field would allow these assets to complement existing payment, trade, and investment ecosystems rather than compete with them piecemeal.

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Asian economies leading the digital asset space, including Singapore, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, and Korea, are setting the pace with forward-thinking regulatory frameworks. The opportunity lies in integrating those frameworks across borders so that the region's advantage compounds rather than fragments.

Second, Asia must continue to build on its early successes in driving regional integration. One case in point is how it has connected domestic payment wallets. The ASEAN Integrated QR Code Payment System aims to link national systems to facilitate cross-border transactions, with successful connections including Singapore (PayNow) with Malaysia (DuitNow) and Singapore with Thailand (PromptPay). Instant transfers between Singapore and India are also possible through the PayNow-UPI linkage.

Could the same success extend to foreign exchange? Many Asian currencies continue to be shaped by capital controls and restrictions on foreign access. These constrain offshore investors' access to deliverable foreign exchange markets and shift activity into offshore non-deliverable forward (NDF) contracts. This fragments liquidity and price discovery. Allowing offshore investors controlled access to domestic funding would improve liquidity. The efficiency of the NDF market could also be strengthened by enhancing infrastructure, accelerating digitalization, and improving fixing methodologies.

I see similar opportunities in equity markets. Hong Kong SAR and mainland China built Stock Connect to link both markets. Southeast Asia attempted to establish a common stock market in 2012, though it never realized its full ambition. Asia may now be ready for a more complete version of that idea.

Building trust

Finally, Asia needs to foster trust and predictability. These qualities, once structural features of the global order, are increasingly scarce. In an AI world, Asia can show collective leadership in guarding against bad actors, particularly in the areas of data protection, privacy, and cybersecurity, as well as financial crime.

DBS aims to be an AI-enabled bank with a heart that takes a fundamentally optimistic view of what AI can do for people. It's with that same optimism that I see Asia becoming an AI-enabled region with compassion for humanity. Asia can build bridges, deepen understanding, and offer an alternative blueprint for growth and progress. That, I believe, is what Asia truly brings to the table. F&D

TAN SU SHAN *is chief executive of DBS, Southeast Asia's largest bank.*