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Digital Economic Integration Under RCEP: China-ASEAN Collaboration Opportunities, Challenges, and Pathways

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China and ASEAN have emerged as close partners in the digital economy, with extensive cooperation in key areas such as digital infrastructure, 5G technology, artificial intelligence, and big data. The comprehensive implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has provided institutional guarantees and regulatory benefits for China-ASEAN digital economic collaboration. This framework has enhanced the marginal effects of their digital economies, unlocked the potential of the digital market, and facilitated digital transformation and regional socio-economic development. Nevertheless, challenges remain, including the incomplete harmonization of trade rules and standards among ASEAN member states, uneven development of digital infrastructure, and the increasingly complex landscape of digital economic cooperation. To address these issues, future efforts should focus on creating a more conducive digital environment, accelerating the construction of digital infrastructure, fostering industrial innovation and complementary development, and promoting cross-sectoral collaboration in digital services.

Keywords: digital economic integration, RCEP, China-ASEAN

Introduction

In 1996, American scholar Don Tapscott first introduced the concept of "digital economy" in his book *The Digital Economy: Promise and Peril in the Age of Networked Intelligence* (Tapscott, 1996, pp. 156-168). With the continuous development of information and communication technologies, the concept of digital economy has been endowed with new connotations. At present, digital economy refers to economic activities driven by digitalization of information (including data elements), with internet platforms as the primary information carrier, and with innovation in digital technologies as the key driving force (Chen, Li, Song, & Wang, 2022). According to estimates by the World Bank and IMF (2023), the digital economy accounts for 15%-20% of global GDP, with growth rates 2-3 times higher than traditional sectors. The digital economy also plays a pivotal role in advancing the digital transformation and fostering high-quality development of the global economy (Li, 2019).

The implementation of the RCEP in 2022 has created unprecedented opportunities for digital economic cooperation and development between China and ASEAN member states. The RCEP helps bridge the digital economy gap between China and ASEAN by reducing barriers to digital trade, enhancing regulatory alignment,

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and promoting technological collaboration. It accelerates regional digital market integration, provides institutional support for SMEs to engage in digital supply chains, and leverages China's technological strengths to drive ASEAN's digital transformation, narrowing the regional "digital divide". However, significant challenges persist, including disparities in digital infrastructure development, inconsistent regulatory frameworks, and fragmented digital trade rules across the region. These structural barriers hinder the full realization of the digital economy's potential and pose substantial risks to sustainable regional integration.

Current Status of Digital Economic Development Between China and ASEAN

Digital economic cooperation is a key component of the China-ASEAN Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and an important direction for high-quality joint construction of the "Belt and Road Initiative" between China and ASEAN countries (Zhang, 2023). In November 2020, both sides signed the China-ASEAN Initiative on Establishing a Digital Economy Partnership and its action plan, agreeing to seize digital opportunities and build a mutually trustworthy, inclusive, innovative, and win-win digital economy partnership (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2021).

Currently, China's digital economy is among the largest in the world, with significant advantages in policy, application, technology, and industry development. In contrast, the digital economy development in the ASEAN region remains relatively underdeveloped. In 2023, China's digital economy reached a scale of 56.1 trillion RMB (approximately 7.8 trillion USD), accounting for 41.5% of its GDP (China Academy of Information and Communications Technology, 2024). It holds a global leadership position in infrastructure sectors such as 5G and cloud computing, with 3.3 million 5G base stations, representing over 60% of the global total. In contrast, ASEAN's digital economy is valued at around 300 billion USD, experiencing rapid growth, particularly in e-commerce, which has an annual growth rate exceeding 35%. However, a digital divide remains, with an average internet penetration rate of 75% across ASEAN, and countries like Cambodia and Laos having internet penetration rates of only 50%. Additionally, 5G infrastructure development in the region is still in its early stages. The data flow rules under the RCEP framework, such as Thailand's relaxation of foreign ownership limits in e-commerce to 70%, effectively catalyze cooperation between China and ASEAN (Table 1). This collaboration leverages China's technological output (e.g., Huawei's deployment of over 50 data centers in ASEAN) and aligns it with ASEAN's market potential, working together to achieve three key objectives: bridging the digital divide, accelerating industrial transformation, and improving the cooperation mechanism.

Table 1

Key Indicators of Digital Economy in China vs. ASEAN (2023)

Indicator	China	ASEAN
Digital economy size	¥56.1 trillion (~$7.8 trillion)	$300 billion
% of GDP	41.5%	7%-15% (varies by country)
Internet penetration	76.4%	Avg. 75% (Cambodia/Laos: 50%)
5G base stations	3.3 million (60%+ global share)	Early-stage (e.g., Thailand/SG: <10k)
E-commerce growth	10.8% (domestic)	35%+ (cross-border)
Digital payment coverage	Alipay/WeChat Pay: 90%+ users	Local e-wallets: ~40%

The Closing Digital Gap and Advancing Infrastructure

Driven by robust policy support, the digital divide between China and ASEAN has been progressively narrowing, accompanied by continuous improvements in digital infrastructure. Under the framework of the China-ASEAN

Initiative on Establishing a Digital Economy Partnership, both sides have focused on strengthening collaboration in digital infrastructure development. Key initiatives include the widespread deployment of 4G networks, the accelerated adoption of 5G technologies, and the expansion of high-speed internet access and connectivity. Additionally, nearly 20 exchange and cooperation activities have been conducted, such as digital epidemic prevention and control, artificial intelligence, and industrial digital transformation.

In January 2021, the ASEAN Connectivity Master Plan 2025 proposed building ASEAN into a leading digital community and economy driven by secure and transformative digital services, technologies, and ecosystems. The proposed initiative is designed to enhance cross-border e-commerce transactions within the ASEAN region through a comprehensive approach that includes improving regulatory transparency, coordinating data protection and privacy rules, and facilitating data flow and technological innovation.

In terms of infrastructure construction, China and ASEAN invest nearly $14 billion annually in 5G infrastructure. The two sides have cooperated in building the China-ASEAN Information Port, including cloud computing, data centers, and other foundational infrastructure, and have completed several international communication submarine cables and terrestrial communication optical cables (S. H. Wang, F. H. Wang, Liu, & Zhang, 2025). The six Mekong countries have jointly developed cross-border land and submarine cables, while the construction of the China-Singapore (Chongqing) International Data Connectivity Channel has significantly enhanced the interconnectivity of digital infrastructure between China and ASEAN.

The narrowing of the digital divide and the continuous improvement of infrastructure have provided strong support for regional digitalization process, thereby laying a solid foundation for promoting inclusive growth, innovation, and sustainable development.

Digital Transformation Advances With Full Force

The In September 2023, China and ASEAN launched the Digital Transformation Partnership Action Initiative, accelerating the implementation of five major action plans for digital transformation. These plans include digital empowerment of small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs), digital enhancement of public services, digital promotion of green development, digital support for industrial upgrading, and digital security for data protection. The China-ASEAN e-commerce cooperation platform has already covered all ten ASEAN countries, with over 10 million registered users (Wang & You, 2024). This platform provides digital services such as transactions, logistics, finance, and marketing for SMEs on both sides, supporting their digital transformation.

The application of digital technologies has driven the equalization, inclusiveness, efficiency, and convenience of public services, enabling the public to share in the benefits of digital economic development. The integration of digitalization with green development has enhanced production efficiency and energy effectiveness, contributing to reduced energy consumption and fostering a deeper integration of digital technologies with the real economy, thus achieving high-quality and sustainable development. Digitalization serves as a key driver for the transformation and upgrading of traditional industries, facilitating closer connections between traditional manufacturing and market demand, fostering new business models, and optimizing internal manufacturing structures through intelligent industry, thereby supporting industrial transformation and upgrading.

In a digitalized environment, the use of efficient encryption algorithms, key management services, and various data protection strategies ensures data security, preventing unauthorized access and data breaches. The ongoing efforts in digital transformation, through continuous technological innovation and industrial upgrading,

inject new vitality into various industries, driving high-quality economic development and enhancing regional competitiveness and sustainability.

Progressive Refinement of Digital Collaboration Frameworks

The cooperation mechanisms between China and ASEAN in the digital economy primarily include the China-ASEAN Information Port Infrastructure Cooperation Mechanism, the Free Trade Area and RCEP Trade Cooperation Mechanism, and the "Belt and Road" Financial Cooperation Mechanism, among others (Hu, Guo, & Chen, 2024). In terms of trade cooperation, the negotiations for the China-ASEAN Free Trade Area 3.0 were launched to foster new growth points and build a more inclusive, modern, comprehensive, and mutually beneficial China-ASEAN Free Trade Area. In infrastructure cooperation, leveraging Guangxi as a hub, the China-ASEAN Information Port is being developed to connect China and ASEAN through the "Information Silk Road".

In the field of science and technology innovation, the China-ASEAN Technology Innovation Partnership was initiated in 2021 with the goal of establishing a closer technological and innovation partnership. This partnership will jointly implement the China-ASEAN Action Plan for Building a Closer Technology Innovation Partnership (2021-2025), which includes the China-ASEAN Technology Innovation Enhancement Program, among other initiatives.

These mechanisms and their development have created a more multi-level dialogue and communication structure, signifying that cooperation in the digital economy has expanded from the government level to include businesses, research institutions, NGOs, and other sectors. It has also extended beyond traditional areas like e-commerce and internet finance to emerging fields such as artificial intelligence, big data, and cloud computing. Furthermore, cooperation has deepened from technical exchanges and trade collaboration to include talent development, policy coordination, and standard-setting, thereby providing broader space for China-ASEAN digital economy development.

From Agreement to Action: How RCEP Fuels China-ASEAN Digital Growth

The full implementation of RCEP will make a significant contribution to the growth of trade and investment, economic recovery, and prosperity development in ASEAN and globally. It will also bring more market opening opportunities and benefits to China, ASEAN, and other parties involved.

Providing Regulatory Assurance and Institutional Benefits

RCEP clearly outlines regulations and guidance for the digital economy between China and ASEAN. First, RCEP includes a separate chapter on e-commerce, covering aspects such as paperless trade, electronic certification, electronic signatures, online consumer protection, personal information protection online, domestic regulation, customs tariffs, and cybersecurity (Tao, 2024). In addition, RCEP includes provisions related to the digital economy in other chapters, addressing issues such as rules of origin, trade facilitation, service trade, investment, competition policy, and government procurement.

These provisions and measures aim to promote the facilitation and standardization of e-commerce transactions. They include requirements for proof of origin for e-commerce transactions, direct transport rules, the establishment of electronic single window systems, the use of electronic documents and signatures, market access and national treatment for e-commerce services, protection and promotion of e-commerce investment, formulation of competition laws and cooperation on anti-monopoly enforcement and ensuring transparency and non-discrimination in government procurement.

The implementation of these regulations and measures will help create a favorable environment for e-commerce, promoting the healthy development of e-commerce within the region.

Enhancing Marginal Effects and Unlocking Market Potential

The full implementation of RCEP will enhance the marginal effects of e-commerce and the digital economy, improve regional digital trade and governance, and create significant open market benefits for China-ASEAN cross-border e-commerce.

In terms of consumer protection, RCEP requires parties to protect consumers using e-commerce through laws, regulations, and competent authorities. Regarding personal information protection, RCEP mandates that parties safeguard the personal information of online consumers through laws and regulations and disclose relevant protective measures to prevent the misuse of personal data and ensure consumer privacy rights (X. Y. Xu, Du, & P. Y. Xu, 2023). In terms of electronic transaction regulation, RCEP requires parties to adopt or maintain a legal framework for regulating electronic transactions, taking into account international conventions and model laws on e-commerce, and strive to avoid imposing unnecessary regulatory burdens on electronic transactions.

To promote cross-border e-commerce, RCEP establishes provisions related to the location of computing facilities and the electronic transmission of information, ensuring compliance with regulatory requirements and protecting information security. For paperless trade, RCEP encourages parties to consider paperless trade, enhance acceptance of electronic trade management documents, and ensure their public availability, thus improving efficiency and transparency.

RCEP also introduces the principle of regional accumulation, allowing products processed across agreement member states to benefit from tariff concessions, as long as the value added exceeds 40%. This provision is important to facilitate coordinated industrial design within the region and the integration of manufacturing supply chains. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) helps digital and high-value service outsourcing industries grow. The agreement makes service trade and investment rules similar in member countries. This makes trade more open. It gives Chinese outsourcing firms more chances to grow abroad.

The agreement uses a pre-access national treatment model with a negative list. It also has stronger investment protection rules. These changes make things more stable and clear for digital service providers working in different countries. This helps them join global markets more easily. RCEP makes investment rules simpler. This creates a more stable environment for cross-border digital services.

Promoting Digital Transformation and Upgrading

The RCEP agreement establishes the first comprehensive set of high-standard e-commerce rules in the Asia-Pacific region. These rules facilitate e-commerce growth by enhancing policy coordination, regulatory alignment, and business collaboration among member states.

Statistics indicate RCEP will bring 120 million new internet users online while increasing internet penetration rates by 3.5 percentage points and improving connection speeds by 10%. These improvements will accelerate the development of technologies like IoT, cloud computing and AI, creating new opportunities across multiple industries. The agreement also stimulates digital innovation to further unlock the digital economy's potential.

RCEP enables China and other member countries to strengthen innovation networks. It promotes faster collaboration between industries, universities, and research institutions. This creates a more favorable environment for cooperation, optimizes the allocation of innovation resources, and reinforces the resilience of global innovation chains.

At the regional level, RCEP drives integration of high-tech industrial chains and supports China-ASEAN cooperation in technological innovation and industrial upgrading. The China-ASEAN Science, Technology and Innovation Partnership Action Plan (2021-2025) deepens collaboration in policy coordination, joint R&D, technology transfer, and talent exchanges. China will continue participating in follow-up RCEP negotiations to enhance its alignment with other high-standard trade agreements, thereby expanding opportunities for China-ASEAN digital economic cooperation.

Fostering Social Wellbeing

RCEP promotes the cooperative development of digital education within the region. Measures include sharing educational resources, conducting joint training programs, and facilitating exchanges between teachers and students. These collaborations contribute to enhancing the quality and diversity of digital education, meeting various levels and types of educational needs, and nurturing more talent. For example, shared educational resources provide more digital content and services, improving the quality and equity of education; joint training programs increase the availability of digital education courses, enhancing internationalization and innovation; promoting exchanges between teachers and students expands cooperation and interaction in digital education, increasing the openness and interactivity of education.

Additionally, the implementation of RCEP will help build an integrated digital education market in the region (Liang & Jiao, 2022). This market will foster the economies of scale and network effects in digital education, stimulating its vitality and potential, lowering transaction costs and market barriers, increasing competition and choices in the digital education market, and facilitating access to and sharing of digital educational information and experiences. It will also improve intellectual property protection and standardization in digital education, enhancing its brand and influence.

RCEP will also facilitate digital healthcare development in the region, enhancing medical service accessibility and quality, solving healthcare resource imbalances, and ensuring public health, as well as driving cooperation for medical data sharing, opening telemedicine services, and medical technology transfer promotion. It will improve the region's healthcare level and efficiency. Meanwhile, digital healthcare standards and regulations will safeguard digital health service security and privacy, facilitate mutual recognition and interoperability, and improve digital healthcare trust and coordination. The RCEP agreement's chapter on service trade commits at a high level to healthcare services, giving digital trade more comprehensive market space. Additionally, RCEP will promote digital healthcare innovation, encourage investment and research and development, and foster talent and business for the industry, creating a digital healthcare industrial chain and ecosystem, and thus enhancing competitiveness and impact.

In tourism, full RCEP implementation will improve tourist service convenience and diversification, satisfying various levels and types of tourist demand, as well as promoting cultural learning and communication. The RCEP agreement's chapter on investment trade commits at a high level to tourism services, providing more diversified opportunities for digital tourism cooperation. RCEP will promote cooperation for digital tourism within the region, including sharing tourism resources, conducting online reservations, and promoting tourism standards and regulations, thus enhancing region-wide tourism quality and standards.

In conclusion, RCEP will contribute to public welfare and social development by fostering cooperation in fields such as digital education, digital healthcare, and digital tourism.

China-ASEAN Digital Economy Friction Points Under RCEP

Divergent Trade Rules and Standards in RCEP Member States

Construction of the digital trade rules and standards within the RCEP region have not been fully unified, and there are certain discrepancies and divergences that may affect the smoothness and security of digital trade. Member states have differing legal regulations and technical requirements regarding data flow, data protection, cybersecurity, electronic certification, and electronic signatures. While the RCEP's chapter on e-commerce sets out general principles for these issues, it generally permits parties to adjust based on domestic laws and international treaties. Compared to CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership), there is more freedom available to member states to adapt digital trade rules to suit domestic environments under RCEP. Such freedom can, to a certain extent, add to cooperation costs and diminish digital economic cooperation efficiency between member states.

As for data flow, based on RCEP's e-commerce-related provisions, member states must permit data to move freely within and across territories. However, for public policy reasons, member states have the freedom to put in place necessary limits. Regarding data protection, member states must enact laws or measures to safeguard personal data involved in e-commerce, but they can decide on the actual protection levels and measures, subject to domestic laws and international treaties.

Regarding cybersecurity, member states must recognize the importance of cybersecurity for e-commerce and take reasonable measures to protect telecom networks and services from unauthorized access and use. However, there is no provision for fostering international cooperation on cybersecurity in the agreement.

When it comes to electronic certification and electronic signatures, member states must authorize their use within their territories to facilitate e-commerce. But member states have the freedom to decide on the specific standards and procedures for recognition and acceptance based on their domestic laws and international agreements.

Uneven Development of Digital Infrastructure

The development of digital infrastructure across the RCEP region is uneven, driven largely by differences in economic development, policy support, and market demand. According to the UNCTAD 2021 Digital Economy Report, the internet penetration rate in the region rose from 58.9% in 2019 to 61.1% in 2020, still below the global average of 64.2%. Within the RCEP region, there are significant variations in internet access, with rates ranging from 88.8% in Singapore to just 23.9% in Laos. In terms of broadband speed, the region's average download speed is 38.7 Mbps—higher than the global average of 33.6 Mbps—though disparities remain, with Singapore boasting 226.6 Mbps while Cambodia has just 9.4 Mbps. Mobile payment penetration stands at an average of 45.6%, below the global average of 55.4%, with wide variation; for example, China leads at 86%, while Indonesia lags at 19%. Regarding e-commerce, retail e-commerce in the RCEP region accounts for 4.9% of GDP, higher than the global average of 4.4%, yet still marked by differences, with China reaching 11.6% and Thailand at 1.8%. These gaps in digital infrastructure can impede the accessibility and efficiency of digital trade, limiting its growth potential.

Digital infrastructure levels directly affect digital trade supply and demand. For example, low internet access reduces the size of digital trade markets. Slow internet speeds lower transaction efficiency. Limited mobile payment systems shrink service availability. Weak e-commerce platforms restrict product variety. These factors reduce both supply and consumer interest in digital trade.

Poor digital infrastructure weakens security in online transactions. Network vulnerabilities increase data breach risks. These damage trust between buyers and sellers. Unclear rules for digital signatures cause legal conflicts. Unreliable digital contracts create uncertainty. These issues disrupt normal digital trade activities.

Digital infrastructure quality shapes innovation in digital commerce. Advanced tools like big data and artificial intelligence support new business ideas. Strong internet-of-things systems improve operational creativity. Smooth cross-border data sharing helps partners collaborate better. Efficient information exchange boosts joint product development. Without these conditions, cooperation becomes harder.

Disparities in digital infrastructure across the RCEP region create challenges. These gaps slow digital trade growth. They also reduce its effectiveness. Solving these problems remains critical for regional progress.

Increasing Complexity in the Competition and Cooperation Landscape of Digital Trade

Competition and cooperation in RCEP digital trade face is growing complexity. Multiple risks threaten its stability and future.

Differences in digital skills affect trade efficiency. RCEP countries differ in digital technology skills. Some excel in innovation, others lag behind. China, Japan, and South Korea lead in tech development. Many ASEAN nations are still catching up. This creates gaps in technology quality and trade value. China and ASEAN show strong digital industry potential. Japan and South Korea face crowded markets. These differences cause uneven industry structures. They also create unequal competition. China and ASEAN have high demand for digital market growth. Japan and South Korea have stable, mature markets. Such gaps raise trade risks and costs. Lower returns may weaken growth motivation.

Inconsistent rules disrupt digital trade. RCEP countries lack shared rules for digital trade. Laws on data flows vary widely. Personal data protection standards differ. Cybersecurity rules are not aligned. Electronic certification methods clash. Digital signature rules cause confusion. Intellectual property policies lack harmony. Digital tax systems create conflicts. Currency rules for online payments differ. These mismatches increase legal risks. They also raise trade costs. Trust between nations may decline. Cross-border cooperation becomes harder.

Uneven participation creates unfair trade outcomes. Major economies dominate RCEP digital trade. China, Japan, and South Korea control most activities. Many ASEAN countries play smaller roles. Benefits concentrate in advanced nations. China and ASEAN have growth opportunities. Japan and South Korea face market limits. This imbalance reduces fair access. Smaller economies get fewer chances. Growth potential becomes unequal. Regional inclusivity suffers. Long-term sustainability weakens.

Strategic Pathways for Enhancing Digital Cooperation Under RCEP

Over the past three decades, China and ASEAN have made significant strides in establishing dialogue and cooperation, with many of the easy wins already achieved. However, to build on this foundation, it is essential for both parties to deepen their partnership and broaden the scope of their collaboration. In light of this, the following policy recommendations are proposed.

Promote the Co-construction of a Facilitating Digital Environment

RCEP members must align digital trade rules and agree on shared standards. This builds a unified system for digital trade. Shared rules will reduce trade barriers. They also improve data security. Better data flows will boost trade speed.

Both sides should follow the China-ASEAN tech cooperation plan. This includes the 2021-2025 partnership action plan. Cooperation should focus on tech policies. Joint research projects need support. Sharing technology and exchanging experts will drive innovation.

RCEP's digital trade system should address cybersecurity problems. Consumer privacy in e-commerce requires attention. Removing digital trade barriers is critical. Protecting data safety ensures trust. Smoother trade processes raise efficiency.

Closer industry ties will power the digital economy. Both sides must combine strengths in digital infrastructure. Cooperation areas include AI, e-commerce, and telemedicine. Projects like the China-ASEAN Information Port need expansion. Cross-border cables and data channels should be prioritized. These steps improve connectivity. Stronger infrastructure supports digital growth.

Cultural exchanges can train digital talent. Both sides should support small businesses in digital projects. Entrepreneurs and NGOs need encouragement. Their involvement adds energy to cooperation.

Research groups and industry associations must work together. Partnerships between think tanks provide useful data. Shared knowledge aids sustainable digital development.

Accelerate Digital Infrastructure Construction

Investing more in digital infrastructure is vital. This reduces regional digital gaps. It also improves access for rural areas. Wider digital trade access allows more people to benefit. Better networks raise service quality. Strong infrastructure supports an inclusive digital economy.

Both parties should cooperate on 5G networks. Working together on IoT systems matters. Cloud computing projects need joint efforts. Upgrading digital infrastructure improves internet speed. Stable connections boost security. These steps strengthen technical foundations for growth.

Rural areas require focused network upgrades. Better maintenance closes technology gaps. Remote communities gain digital tool access. This ensures fair benefits from tech progress.

Policies for digital trade must lower costs and risks. Both parties must protect data privacy. Encouraging data sharing raises trade efficiency. Stronger rules prevent cybercrime. Illegal acts like online fraud harm trust. Fighting piracy and hacking ensures fair trade. Protecting rights maintains order in digital markets.

New digital business models create trade opportunities. Cross-border online shopping should expand. Internet-based education offers growth. Remote medical services can develop further. Digital tourism and entertainment open new markets. These areas increase trade value and competitiveness.

Both sides must plan new models together. Training programs improve innovation skills. Regular reviews ensure steady progress. Shared efforts strengthen digital economy development.

Foster Cross-Sector Collaboration in Digital Services

Promoting cooperation in digital education, digital healthcare, and digital tourism is important for the region. Using digital technologies can improve service quality and meet different needs of people. This will increase their happiness and encourage social and cultural exchanges.

First, both sides must strengthen coordination in digital education policies and resource sharing. Under the RCEP framework, they should work together on digital education planning, standards, and quality checks. Creating common rules for digital education will reduce barriers and ensure its effectiveness. They should share resources in educational content, online platforms, technology, and teacher training. Working together to develop

high-quality digital learning tools will help meet diverse needs across all education levels. This makes education more inclusive and accessible.

Second, both sides should focus on improving digital healthcare through innovation and service cooperation. They need to support the development and use of digital healthcare solutions. This will help modernize healthcare systems. Cooperation in medical data, equipment, medicine, and training is necessary. Building better digital healthcare infrastructure will raise care quality, meet public health demands, and improve people's well-being.

Third, both sides should expand the digital tourism market by creating new products. Under RCEP, they must encourage growth in digital tourism and support new markets and travel trends. They should cooperate more in tourism marketing, online bookings, payments, and reviews. Developing high-quality digital travel services will meet personalized needs. Better experiences for travelers will boost satisfaction and strengthen cultural exchanges.

Conclusion

The full implementation of the RCEP provides important institutional guarantees and regulatory benefits for China-ASEAN digital economic cooperation. It strengthens the impact of the digital economy, unlocks market potential, drives digital transformation, and promotes public well-being. However, the main challenge is to fully use the opportunities provided by RCEP. This is necessary to ensure the steady and sustainable growth of the regional digital economy.

To achieve this, academics must pay continuous attention. They can offer insights and research that guide future economic cooperation between China and ASEAN. By providing perspectives on digital trade, regulatory frameworks, and emerging technologies, scholars can help shape policies. These policies will support the long-term success of digital economic cooperation in the region.

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