

# NTU joins forces with Alibaba for AI research

**Jose Hong**

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A new institute will look into how artificial intelligence (AI) can help to improve the delivery of services such as healthcare and city plan-

ning in Singapore.

Chinese technology giant Alibaba Group and Nanyang Technological University (NTU) announced a multi-million dollar collaboration yesterday which will involve 50 researchers from both organisations.

The Alibaba-NTU Singapore Joint Research Institute will be based on the university's main campus as part of a five-year partnership and is due to open soon.

Alibaba chief technology officer Jeff Zhang said the laboratory will research areas such as the diagnosis and prevention of diseases like arthritis and tuberculosis – possibly using AI technology to record and analyse people's daily activities to help detect problems.

A memorandum of understanding was signed at the university.

The laboratory is said to be the largest investment in NTU from a company to date, though both the university and Alibaba declined to reveal the total amount.

It will be Alibaba's first research institute outside China and the company hopes to use NTU's AI expertise to push the boundaries of its existing technologies.

These include natural language processing, an area of AI dealing with the interpretation of human speech, and machine learning, which involves the development of computer programs that learn on their own by making sense of vast amounts of data.

Mr Zhang said Singapore provides a natural base for the com-

pany's research efforts as the Republic is Alibaba's regional base in South-east Asia, has a strong research tradition and a multilingual population.

Ms Liu Xiangwen, director of Alibaba's technology strategy department, said: "Our partnership with NTU demonstrates the close alignment of Alibaba's strategic vision with Singapore's Smart Nation initiative to leverage technology for the good of the community."

NTU president Subra Suresh said that linking its faculty and students to the Internet giant would "give them an opportunity to connect their basic research in the lab with real life applications that have immediate societal impact".

Professor Lam Khin Yong, NTU's vice-president of research, said: "Our research expertise will complement Alibaba's extensive business and technological experience to tackle challenging problems in their business ecosystem."

Senior Minister of State for the Environment and Water Resources and Health, Dr Amy Khor, was the guest of honour at the signing.

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