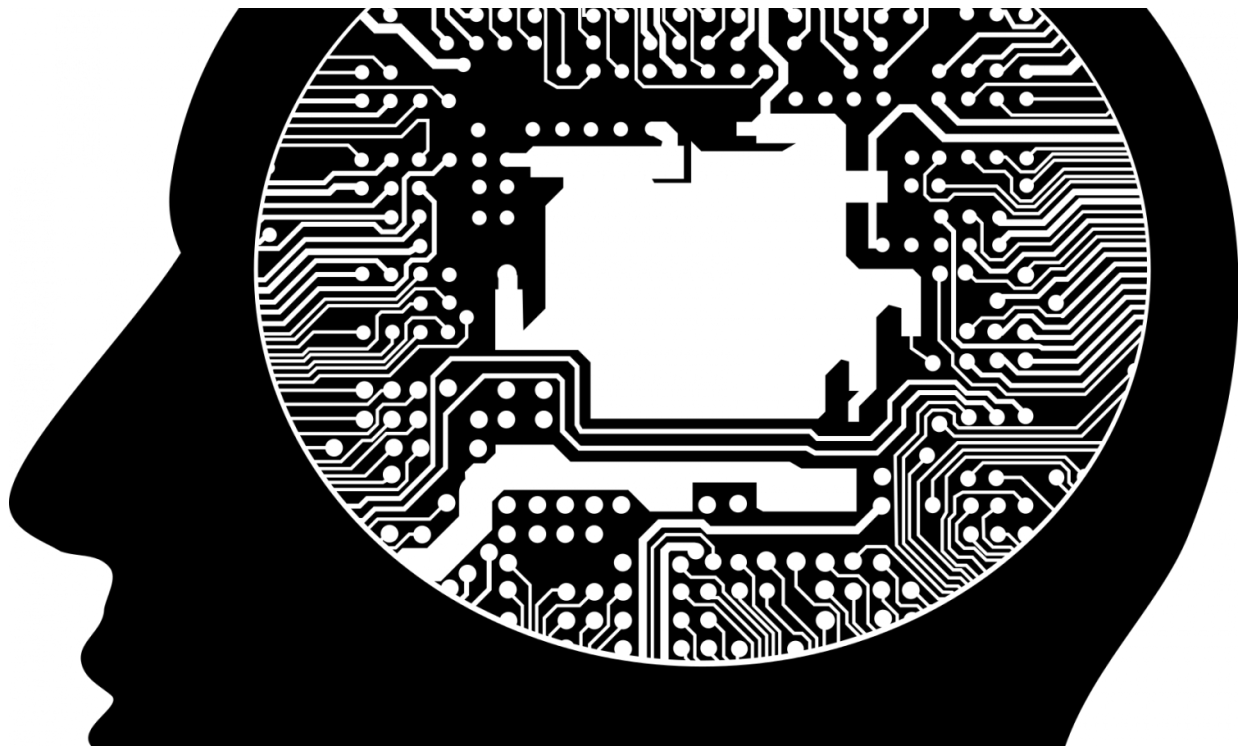


# Microsoft, Alibaba AI programs beat humans in a Stanford reading test

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First, they beat us at chess. Then it was Go. Now it's basic reading comprehension.

The robots are coming.

Two artificial intelligence programs [created by Chinese e-commerce giant Alibaba](#) and Microsoft beat humans on a Stanford University reading comprehension test, Alibaba said recently. Alibaba took the honors as creator of the first program to ever beat a human in a reading comprehension test, scoring 82.44 percent out of a perfect 100 and narrowly edging past the human's 82.304 percent.

A different program built by Microsoft scored higher than Alibaba's at 82.605 on the same test, but that score was finalized a day later, according to Bloomberg.

The test, known as Stanford Question Answering Dataset or SQuAD for short, asks contestants—human and robot—to provide exact answers to more than 100,000 questions drawn from more than 500 Wikipedia articles. The test is designed to see if artificial intelligence can process large amounts of information before fully comprehending it and offering precise answers.

Some of the Wikipedia articles from which questions were drawn covered a wide range of topics, from Super Bowl 50 ("Where did Super Bowl 50 take place?" Answer: Santa Clara.) to Doctor Who ("What planet is Doctor Who from?" Answer: Gallifrey.).

"These kinds of tests are certainly useful benchmarks for how far along the AI journey we may be," Microsoft spokesperson Andrew Pickup told CNN. "However, the real benefit of AI is when it is used in harmony with humans."

Major technology companies in the United States and China have invested billions of dollars in artificial intelligence to gain a foothold in what may be the next technological frontier. The Chinese government has outlined a plan to create a \$150 billion AI industry by 2030 in partnership with private companies such as Alibaba and Tencent.

Microsoft in December announced its "AI on Earth" project to help the planet become more environmentally sustainable using the company's in-house AI infrastructure. Microsoft will invest \$50 million over the next five years, according to Microsoft CEO Brad Smith.

"At Microsoft, we believe [artificial intelligence](#) is a game changer," said Smith. "As we enter the world's Fourth Industrial Revolution, a technology-fueled transformation, we must not only move technology forward, but also use this era's technology to clean up the past and create a better future."

With comprehension skills now arguably better than a human's, Alibaba's chief data scientist said the new breakthrough will be applied to helping human customers.

"The [technology](#) underneath can be gradually applied to numerous applications such as customer service, museum tutorials and online responses to medical inquiries from patients, decreasing the need for human input in an unprecedented way," Luo Si, chief scientist for [natural language processing](#) at Alibaba's Institute of Data Science of Technologies, told Bloomberg.

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