

Chinese Go player Ke Jie is
beaten by Google's artificial
intelligence program
AlphaGo in the latest round
of human versus machine. AP

The might of AI

THE MUCH-ANTICIPATED ROUND Two bout between AlphaGo and a human Go player once again caught the world's attention recently. This time, the challenger was Chinese Go champion Ke Jie, and the match was also held in China, the birthplace of Go.

Alas, AlphaGo proved too strong for Ke, as the match soon turned into a one-sided affair.

Ke provided little resistance as he dropped a 0-3 decision, and soon after the victory, the creator of AlphaGo announced that the program would now retire from the game for good.

The might of artificial intelligence was on full display, and many wonder whether this spells the doom of the human race, or is it a blessing in disguise? I, for one, am and will always remain an optimist in this argument.

Human beings have created many technological advances throughout our history, and AI, like its predecessors, is set to bring breakthroughs we have not seen yet, just like automobiles and airplanes. As the saying goes, the "only thing to fear is fear itself."

While AI does many things better than human beings, we still possess many qualities that the former cannot simply replicate.

Current AI technology relies on big data and logic analysis, while human beings thrive on creativity and imagination – two qualities that are unique to us.

Our mind and soul empower us to think critically and innovate, and it is precisely from these qualities where we made scientific discoveries and timeless works of art.

While AlphaGo may be the superior Go player, it is human beings who invented the idea of Go and devel-



Out of the Box

Tony Chan Fan-cheong is president of the Hong Kong University of Science and Technology. He has spent his life pursuing his dreams relating to teaching and research, and has unique views on education, scientific and technological development, and nurturing the young.

oped a culture around its beauty through generations – a feat that cannot be done by AI alone.

Setting religion aside, some have argued that the human being itself is nothing but a "machine" created by a combination of different elements. Others would go further and say that our brains are controlled by some sets of pre-programmed electronic commands.

Maybe there will come a day when AI will possess its own brain and mind, just like some recent

Hollywood movies suggested, but for now, life and its origin remain the biggest mystery. Pessimists may worry that AI will take away our jobs and eat our lunch, but they have forgotten that the same has been said and told in times before, and that new jobs will always be created alongside technological advances.

Indeed, some optimists have already predicted that the advancement of AI will lead us to the fourth industrial revolution, which will profoundly change the way of life as we know now.

Ultimately, whether one sees AI as a threat or an opportunity comes down to a matter of perspective.

After the demolition by Alpha Go, Ke seemed to have found another gear in his game, defeating handily a Korean Go Master just a week later. For him, surely, the challenge AlphaGo presented has made him a better player.

Are we ready to rise to the challenge and use AI to our advantage, or are we going to turn our back to the future and try to turn back the clock?

The choice will be ours to make.