The Diffusion of IT in the Year 2000: The Asia Pacific Context

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Without exception, all nations in the Asian Pacific region see IT as a competitive weapon that will propel them to a new era of economic prosperity. To help their organizations adopt the next wave of IT, most Asian nations are adopting, although some have already adopted, a Year 2000 IT Vision. For each of their visions to be realized, these countries have strategized an information technology infrastructure and policy to commission the achievement of their IT mission. The government of the Republic of China has recently formulated development strategies to upgrade IT competitive capabilities and industry infrastructure. In particular, the Republic of China seeks to promote coordinated research among universities and government-sponsored R&D institutions. IT education, establishment of hardware and software standards, and applications software emerge as top priorities. Singapore has adopted a National Information Infrastructure plan to develop a strong export-oriented IT industry. The government of Hong Kong has significantly increased its budget for higher education and research in IT to transform its economy from a labor-intensive production economy into a knowledge-based service economy. Malaysia and Vietnam have recently adopted the concept of the information-rich society. They seek to increase national productivity in all sectors by promoting widespread application of IT.

The trend toward building “intelligent dragons” has, however, opened a number of research and implementation issues:

• What type of IT diffusion model should the Asian Pacific countries adopt? Should the model be the same for all the “dragons”?

• What should be the role of government in establishing standards and enforcing protection of intellectual property right? How much governmental intervention is enough?

• Should there be an Asia-Pacific information superhighway? What would it consist of? Who should manage it? How should it be financed? Who would benefit most from it?

• Asian cultures place more emphasis on family values and less on individual values than do Western societies. Are these values compatible with those of an information-rich society? How would an Asian information-rich society differ from a Western one?

• Two of the “intelligent dragons,” Hong Kong and Singapore, are city-states. How can information technology help them become global cities (alongside New York, London, and Tokyo) in the twenty-first century?

• The People’s Republic of China may well become the world’s largest economy early in the twenty-first century. Japan is already an economic superpower. Hong Kong’s sovereignty will be transferred from Britain to the P.R.C. before the end of the century. How will information technology in the Asia Pacific nations influence and be influenced by this dynamic environment?

• Should Asian Pacific countries adopt the same language for technical communication (i.e., English as an international
language), or should they promote their own linguistic environment?

- How do Asian Pacific countries compete against leading American, European, and Japanese IT industries?
- Should Asian Pacific countries compete against themselves or should they form strategic alliances?

Based on their research and consulting experience in dealing with IT in the Pacific region, panelists will briefly state their position on the above questions in such a way that stimulates debate and discussion.