(1) Nurturing Culture – A Balancing Act?

Culture refers to a dynamic sum total of material and spiritual activities and products of a group that distinguishes it from other groups. Although 'Asian cultures' do exist, 'Asian culture' however, does not, since the term involves the simplification of the cultural diversity found in this geographical area. In this vein, 'Western culture' is not referred to.

The recommendations deal with solutions to problems pertaining to culture in six Asian countries – Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, The Philippines, Singapore and Thailand.

Common Observations Among The Six Countries

Government Policies

1. The importance of government policy in developing culture within a country:

    a. Importance of government policy in instilling national pride and national consciousness.

    b. Importance of policies which inadvertently hurt the status of local languages vis-à-vis that of foreign languages (mostly English).

    NGOs and the Private Sector

2. Need to involve non-governmental organizations and private interests in the effort to nurture local culture.

' Soulless in Asia'

3. There is in Asia and in general, a lack of national pride amongst Asian people.

The government agenda

4. It is important for governments to recognize that although economic and political issues remain of vital importance now, there are serious long-term detriments involved in ignoring cultural issues and the cultural impacts of other policies.

Country-specific solutions

5. Each solution, however, has to be catered to each particular country.

(2) The Environment – Protection and Progress?

The haze that struck South-East Asia in 1997 was a timely wake-up call for regional governments. The haze, while causing widespread damage to countries, was

unfortunately only symptomatic of a deeper problem – poor forestry management.

Forestry Policies

1. Asian states have now realized that existing forestry policies need to be changed in order to prevent future environmental problems. Fighting the haze in itself is insufficient if the root cause that perpetuates and creates the haze is not dealt with comprehensively as well.

Regional cooperation

2. A higher degree of regional cooperation between the Asian states is necessary if this region as a whole is to successfully tackle and eliminate the haze.

Short and long term solutions

3. While the reasons that created the haze have always existed, it was not till recently that the changing socio-economic and political conditions have changed sufficiently to create the necessary political will to overcome the regional inertia. Realizing this unique opportunity, an integrated regional action plan is proposed; both long term as well as short term to deal effectively and continually with these root problems that perpetuate the haze.

    Proposed short-term solutions will consist of:

Improving enforcement mechanisms (logging license revocations, making logging/plantation companies pay damages and the inclusion of local NGOs as watch-bodies), tightening controls on logging licensing, eliminating the largely abused replantation fund and requiring logging companies to replant trees.

Proposed long-term solutions to sustain the positive effects of the short-term solutions include:

increased democratization

a more active role for ASEAN

changing the International legal framework regarding trans-boundary environmental concerns.

The student participants believe that if implemented, the proposed system can serve as a springboard for future measures in dealing with possible environmental crises in the Asian region by setting a positive precedent for regional cooperation.

(3) Technology - What role must Asia play?

The young leaders feel that "Asia must take one step back to move ten steps forward"

Technology is known as the application of application of practical, mechanical sciences, technical methods, skills, knowledge that are used to assist everyday life. Technology in its various forms should be used for the welfare of the people.

Recommendations focus on five main areas of Technology: Infrastructure; Human resource Development; Governance; Dependence on foreign technology; and Social effects.

Infrastructure:

1. Many rural areas in Asia do not have the infrastructure to allow communication and transportation. As a result, communication and transport problems surface. We suggest providing more walkie-talkie sets and telecommunication centers for the tribes. The use of satellite phone technology and electrical generating systems could be explored.

Human Resource Development:

2. The importance of nurturing and developing human capital is integral to growth. These are the areas explored: non-progressive education system; access to technology; human resource flight and under-utilization of human resources. Among the suggestions are:

adoption of a school by the private sectors

a revamp of the education system to include the maximum utilization of technology;

encouragement of entrepreneurship to create our own market for intellectual human resource

Governance:

3. Asian nations moving towards democratization have been facing setbacks. There has been minimal participation from public. Three 'creations' are proposed to help alleviate the problem: creation of the "e-society", the "e-government", and a fairer election process.

    Over-dependence on foreign technology: Asians tend to undervalue their own traditional wisdom. We recommend the international legal framework/patenting regulations to appreciate the locals in further development of traditional wisdom. At the same time, companies who conduct research should share a certain amount of profit with the locals and allow locals to retain the rights over the development.

    Social and cultural aspects of technology: The current social-cultural system tends to weaken face-to-face human relationships. Japan, while advanced, has been troubled by a generation of 'hikikomoris' *(*People who have withdrawn from society) who pay more attention to hi-tech entertainment gadgets than family members. While Technology has a potential to solve problems, it can also be abused. It should be used to connect people but not as a replacement for face-to-face communication. Asia must take an active role to bring Technology to

her people and use Technology to the best of her ability.

Through the young leaders' findings, Asia takes one step back to identify the problems and then take steps forward to solve these problems and advance. This is to form an Asia that cares for its people through technology.

Hitachi hopes this report will provide you with an insight into the opinions, concerns, hopes and aspirations of the future leaders of Asia. Hitachi believes Asia's future depends on wise, inspirational leadership – whether at grass roots, business or government levels.

We hope the collective voice of these potential leaders of Asia will be given due consideration in developing existing and future frameworks, policies and guidelines in Asia.