# International Informational Flows:

# The Case of Thailand and Japan

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## ABSTRACT

This paper examines the international flows of information between countries. Its specific focus is on the reasons why some countries send more information than they receive. Historical reasons, such as military conquests and unequal industrial development, as well as social and geographic factors are examined. A specific case of an imbalance in information flows, the case of Japan and Thailand, is used to explain why this imbalance occurs. The paper ends with a discussion of the reason why improved channels of information and more balanced between country flows of information provide global benefits.

## INTRODUCTION

We often take information for granted and assume that information flows between individuals or across national boundaries occurs without any friction inhibiting the process.[1] The internet system, satellite communication systems, and easy access to both printed and visual information results in most people feeling that they are being overloaded with information rather than suffering from an information shortage.[2] This makes it difficult for many people to accept the notion that international information flows are inhibited and that they could be improved. In fact, research has shown that people often get so much

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[1]Frambach, Rudd T. "An integrated model of organizational adoption and diffusion of innovations." European Journal of Marketing, Vol. 27, (1993): 22-41.

[2]Wagner, Mitch. "Intranet 'pushes' data among departments." Computerworld, Vol. 31, (March 10, 1997): 61-63.

information that they develop rules and schemes to help manage and minimize it.[3] Often times they make decisions based on a limited examination of what is available, because time pressures make examining all evidence impossible. In other cases the sheer mass of available information creates more confusion than clarity. However this perspective confuses quality with variety, and ignores issues related to the source of the information. People may be getting more information than they need, but it tends to coming from a narrower range of sources and reflects a limited set of subjects.[4] This may not be much of a problem at the personal level, but at the national and international level the issue is more serious because information can have an impact on social, political and economic development.[5]

As a society we all have a vested interest in knowing about what is happening in other countries. This does not just relate to scientific or technological information, but also includes information about culture, literature, art, language, political systems, religion, and family life. Having enough information of understand these factors affects the ability of people in one country to understand those in another, which can also facilitate the degree to which they can benefit from more tangible technological and scientific discoveries in other countries. Obviously, there are financial incentives available that encourage the building of informational flows related to scientific and technological information. However, other types of international information flows are equally important but tend to receive less attention.

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[3]For example see Van Bruggen, Gerrit H., Ale Smidts and Berend Wierenga. "Improving decision making by means of a marketing decision support system." Management Science, Vol. 44, (1998): pp. 645-658. and Simon, Herber A. "Infomraton 101: It's not what you know, its how you know it." Journal of Quality and Participation, Vol. 21 (4), (1998): pp. 30-33.

[4]For example, see Bloom, Jennifer K. "Information crush shifting execs into overdrive." American Banker, Vol. 163, 1, (August 14, 1998) and Kahn, Barbara. How consumers cope with informaton overlead." Financial Times, Marketing Supplyment, (Oct. 5, 1998): p. 10-12.

[5]Ducatel, Ken and Ian Miles. "Internationalization of information technology services and public policy implications." World Development, Vol. 20, (1992). 1843-1857.

This paper attempts to examine some of the major issues related to the flow of information between countries. It begins by looking at international information flows, in a contemporary and historical context. The analysis then moves to a more specific case, which relates to the nature of information flows between Japan and Thailand. This two-nations information flow highlight many of the factors that affect international flows of information, such as the nation's level of wealth, stage of industrial development, culture, education, and political systems. It also helps to illustrate the role of society in general in the dissemination of information.

The degree to which the Thailand-Japan case can be generalized is discussed, as well as the implications to these countries and others characterized by unequal flows of information. Finally, the paper ends with a discussion of ways countries can helps reduce large gaps in their between nation flows of information.

## INFORMATIONAL FLOWS

Understanding why information flows occur is central to understanding the specific nature of flows of information between countries. It is also important to understand why information flows are not balanced. That is, there my be two-way communion channels but one channel may be carrying much more information than the other, or information that is more valuable. This imbalance can be accidental or purposeful and it is important to understand why this imbalance occurs. Finally, what information actually flows through existing channels is important because the quality of the information determines the value of the channel. The international communication channels may contain a certain amount of friction, but this friction may be useful if it allows less essential information to flow while hindering the transmission of more important and essential information.The tendency to spread the word

Information and the ability to deliver information can be acquired and used to maintain power in some settings.[6] This is quite common in business and political organizations. However, in general there is a tendency to want to "spread the word," rather than restrict the flow of information. Some might make fun of people who gossip, but they are really just serving as efficient channels for communication, even if the information may be somewhat trivial.[7] People want to know about what is going on around them and sharing information with others often involves a reciprocal exchange.

The need for information underlies our institutionalized vehicles for information, such as newspapers, magazines, radio and television. These communication channels are also reciprocal in another sense, except that money is more directly exchanged for the information they provide.

The problem with existing forms of information communication is that receivers have little control over the coverage. That is publishers, television and radio executives, and movie producers and others decide what information to disseminate based on what they think people want to know or based on advertisers willingness to pay. They are probably fairly accurate in their assessment, but this ignores the wide variety in individuals' interests. The media presents information that either targets some mean group of people, or some large segment. Their choice may be the best one for them to make based on commercial criteria, but it probably only fully satisfies a small portion of the population. They must also ignore certain types of information because its commercial value to their readers, listeners or viewers is not high enough.[8]

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[6]Pfeffer, Jeffrey. Managing with Power: Politics and Influence in Organizations. Boston: Harvard Business School Press. (1992).

[7]For example see Jackson, Tim. "Profit from gossip." Financial Times, (August 12, 1996). 13-14, and Waddell, Janet T. "You'll never believe what I heard." Supervision, Vol. 57(8), (1996): 18-21.

[8]For example see Lieberman, David. "The rise and fall of 24 hour local news." Columbia Journalism Review, Vol. 37(4), (1998): pp. 54-57, and Trigoboff, Dan. "No news and a show about nothing." Broadcasting & Cable, Vol. 128 (47) (1998): p. 51.

While "spreading the word," at the individual level, may be the most convenient way to let information disseminate it must be supplemented by some directional pull. People often have information needs that cannot be filled in a spontaneous fashion. Obviously, modern search mechanisms such as computerized library databases and the World Wide Web facilitate the information acquisition process. However, people also have needs for information about which they are unaware. For instance, when confronted with a new piece of medical information, we may respond by having a checkup for some ailment that we did not think was serious. This would be a case where we benefit from the information for which we never would have engaged in an active search.

When we consider the flow of information between populations of different countries, the flow of information become much more complex. "Spreading the word" takes on a whole new dimension, which is not likely to be sufficiently effective at serving the larger information needs at the national level.

**The direction of information flows**

The issue of "who spreads the word" and "who receives the word" also applies at the national level. Just as countries have balances in their international trade, they also have positive or negative balances in their international flows of information. At the individual level, people should be receiving and disseminating information, although there is probably wide variability at the level of the individual. That is, many individuals will have steep credit or debit balances in their information flow accounts because some individuals are inclined to seek out information while others avoid it. This is also true with respect to sending information because some people enjoy spreading information more than others do. However, at the national level this would balance out in a completely closed society. However, countries that are not isolated have a vested information in being information recipients as well as information disseminators, with respect to the quantity and value of information.

All countries can learn from other countries and all countries possess information that is valuable and useful to others. What is important is that mechanisms exist so that the informational flows between countries work in both directions. This means that an individual

country may have to develop information channels that either help others to learn about them, or which provide them with useful information about other countries.[9]

Obviously, some countries and individuals will be more proactive about spreading information than others. In some cases, this will be because it serves a narrow personal and national agenda. In other cases, it will be because they believe all countries or individuals should be aware of the information and their government is willing to make the expenditures necessary to ensure that this dissemination occurs. It yet other cases, it will be because these countries collectively or certain individuals take pride in disseminating the information. This certainly occurs at the national level where countries arrange cultural or artistic exhibitions because they believe individuals in other countries will appreciate them in the same way they do.

**What gets spread and what should get spread**

There has been an ongoing debate in many countries about the low quality of "news" and "information" that we get from television, magazines, and newspapers. This argument is based on the notion that society as a whole suffers when information channels are flooded with certain types of material. However, most individuals need frivolous and irrelevant information and lighter news mixed in with the more intense information communications.

At the international level information channels also have lots of noise. As information moves between countries, much of what is passed if not needed. This is irrelevant because these flows are not always free. Selectivity is more important to the degree that nations, or groups of nations attempt to support informational flows. That is, when countries begin to fund efforts to improve international flows of information, then the content of the information flows deserves more consideration.

Countries have a vested interest in obtaining information from others, but as with individuals this imposes some reciprocal obligations. This is one of the reasons why

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[9]Nur, Yosuf Ahmed. "Charisma and managerial leadership: The Gift that Never Was." Business Horizons. Vol. 41(4), (1998): pp. 19-26. Lee, Jean. "Culture and management: A study of small Chinese family business in Singapore." Journal of Small Business Management, Vol. 34, (1966): pp. 63-67

countries have always been proactive in developing international information flows. These can range from travel, student exchanges, meetings, cultural exchange programs, to very proactive activities such as spying. The key here is that it is good for both countries when the information flows in both directions.

## HISTORICAL INFLUENCES AFFECTING INFORMATION FLOWS

Obviously, the means and motivation for information flows between nations has changed over time. The ways nations seek to dominate other nations has changed, and this has affected what is communicated and how it is communicated. Historically, information flowed from the powerful to the weak nations and the powerful nations were very proactive in its dissemination. Today, this may be less true as power and wealth are often associated as much with information gathering as its dissemination.

### The Conquerors

For thousands of years nations have been conquering each other. Conquest was accompanied by new laws, new languages, new ways of doing things, and often a new religion. The information channel was wide and blunt and the essentials were transferred immediately. The information transferred was essential to survival as the weaker nation can under the domination of the strong. The Romans built a "Roman" empire by transferring the knowledge and information about Rome to their new subjects[10]

The problem with conquest as a means of information transfer is that it is very one sided. In addition, the absorption of some nations by others does not solve the international information flow problem. There were nations outside the Roman Empire, and these nations had information, cultures, languages, and technologies that could have benefited the Romans. In addition, military conquest and occupation imposed new informational demands on these countries as they attempted to maintain cohesive empires and maintain control.

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[10]Dyson, Stephen L. The Creation of the Roman Frontier. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press. (1985)

The colonial powers in more recent centuries had the same types of problems. Information flowed from the motherland to the colonies. However, it was seldom assumed that there was much of interest in the colonies, except to those with very specific scientific interests. The informational flow was one way and involved how things were to be done, and in some case information designed to convert the indigenous population to a new religion.

**The Technologists**

If there ever was a golden age of technology, it has been during the past 200 years. Most of these inventions came from industrialized countries. Thus, there was a natural flow of technological wonders from the industrialized and rich nations to the power nations. This also resulted in a one way flow of information. That is not to say that scientists did not study about the problem, history and natural history of other countries, but the flow of information was out of balance on a nation to nation basis.

These scientific and technological discoveries also had commercial value. Thus, absorbing the costs associated with communicating their qualities to others was warranted by the returns. In addition, because many of these inventions were far beyond the scope of what had been previously considered possible, and news about them was in high demand. Exhibitions were arranged so they could be viewed and so that people could see what they could accomplish.[11] The notion that the richer and more industrialized countries would benefit from a similar flow of information, coming from poorer and less industrialized countries, was not considered.

**Proponents of Governmental and Political Systems**

The current century has witnessed one of the most unusual nation-to-nation information flows. The conflict between communist countries and many non-communist countries resulted in a systematized flow of ideological information. The Soviet Union and the United Stares spent vast sums of money circulating information about themselves and the advantages of their political systems to others. No doubt, they were motivated by the

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[11]Rydell, Robert W. World of Fairs: The Century-of-Progress Exhibitions. Chicago: University of Chicago Press. (1993)

belief that individuals in other nations wanted to know about them, and that information contents and flows could be especially useful in manipulating political choices in other countries.

The outcome of the cold war suggests that this was probably not a well thought out tactic, but it did provide many countries with libraries, books, radio service and other forms of technology that enhanced their ability to be part of the international communication network. In the case of the United States and the Soviet Union, it also increased the level of interest about what was going on in other countries. Government efforts, in many of those countries participating in the ideological battle, also included budgets for foreign languages and regional studies. Thus, the unintended side effect was probably, at least in the case of some countries, that nation to nation flows of information were relatively balanced.

## JAPAN-THAILAND INFORMATION FLOWS

The information flows between Japan and Thailand are especially interesting because these two countries have many similarities, including the fact that they were able to maintain their independence during the colonial period. They are also both Buddhist countries, which should result in them having a larger number of shared interests. In fact, many Japanese tourists who come to Thailand have tour itineraries that include many Buddhist temples.

On the other hand, these countries also are sufficiently different that they need good channels of communication. Size, culture, economic and political differences exists. In addition, because Thailand has a porous borders and many of its citizens speak Laotian, Malay, Vietnamese and Khmer, they have more traditional and direct communication links with neighboring countries than does a island nation such as Japan.

From the Thai perspective the information flows from Japan to Thailand are seen as adequate. This perception may be somewhat inflated because Japanese comic books and children's television shows, business and government supported language classes gives a distorted picture of the flow of information. Many Japanese expatriates play the role of

cultural ambassadors when stationed abroad.[12] However, Thais see the information flow in the opposite direction as rather minimal because there is little pull from the Japanese side.

### The Japanese and Positive Information Flows

There is little debate about the flow of information from Japan to Thailand being very large. However, most of the this positive flow of information is related to Japan's status as an economic "superpower." Information about Japanese products, Japanese technologies, and Japanese manufacturing and quality control techniques are widely disseminated to Thailand, as they are to other countries with a large Japanese commercial presence. This commercially based flow of information has also resulted in additional information flows, which were related to a much broader range of topics.

The information flowing from Japan to Thailand also reflects Japanese industrial investments in Thailand. As Japanese firms established stand-alone operations and joint ventures in Thailand, the information flow between Japan and Thailand increased. Some of the information was functional operating information, technological information, and information about corporate expectations all had to be transferred for these businesses to operate efficiently.

Japanese corporate executives were also sent to Thailand in large numbers. As with any expatriate group, their presence produced additional flows of information. This resulted in the appearance of many of the goods and services that they had in Japan. Some of this was quite basic because Thai entrepreneurs wished to benefit from their presence. To do so they had to learn more about Japan and the Japanese.

The heightened interest by Thais in Japan resulted in the Japanese government responding by establishing a cultural center and encouraging more Japanese-Thai links. In fact, the Japanese government, and some businesses were very proactive about filling this information void. In this respect that acted in a fashion similar to other investing countries,

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[12]Eyal, Ben Ari. Japanese enterprises abroad and images of the global order: Japanese executives in Singapore. Management Japan, Vol. 28(2), (1998): pp. 25-32.

although their status as an "Asian Nation" may have resulted in Thais having greater interest in Japan and the Japanese.

For instance, the Japanese system of education was credited as being especially important to their economic growth. This was especially true with respect to the large numbers of engineers it produced. The Japanese and Thai governments began to provide financial support so that Thai students could go to Japan for a university education. When these students returned to Thailand they were able to supplement existing channels of information with detailed information about Japan and life in Japan.

Thais were also extremely interested in the Japanese political system. The Japanese government, although it changed Prime Ministers often, seemed to have a higher degree of political and policy stability than was true in Thailand until quite recently. The government also seemed to have the ability to work in ways that supported Japanese business interests. Thai business executives and academics were especially interested in the activities of Japan's Ministry of Industry and Trade, and material about Japan was produced and printed in Thai and widely available.

On the cultural and artistic side of the equation there was also a large flow of information. Twenty years ago Japanese television shows were shown in large number in Thailand, although the are a minor presence today. Japanese cultural shows and events are available in Thailand, but as with many foreign productions they are heavily patronized by expatriates. However, they are available and Thais have access to this cultural information.

While much of the Japanese flow of information to Thailand is a function of their commercial investments, there is a significant amount that results from the interests of Thai people about Japan. Despite the high cost of travel to Japan and the difficulty in obtaining a visa, large numbers of Thais visit Japan. There is a strong demand pull side to this information equation because Thais are exerting pressure for more information about Japan. This is not unusual in between country information flows, but it does not characterize all country-to-country information flows.

### The Thai Deficit in Information Flows

While it is well recognized that tremendous amounts of information flow from Japan to Thailand, information flows in the opposite direction are smaller. This results in Thailand have a large imbalance with respect to its information flows with Japan. Some of this imbalance is understandable. Industrial investment and economic strength will result in an imbalance in technical and scientific information, as information flows from the investor country. However, in addition to this imbalance, the demand pull side of the information flow equation seems to be weaker in Japan. That is, the Japanese are just not as interested in the broader aspects of Thai life and society.

Part of this lack of information pull may have nothing to do with Thailand. It may reflect the inward focus of the Japanese people. Clearly, after World War II the Japanese people had to focus on rebuilding their country. They did not have the luxury to focusing on esthetic things from other countries. The war also diminished their global interests because they had to concentrating on rebuilding the domestic infrastructure. Their rebuilding effort was so successful that this acted to confirm their notions about the correctness of the ways that they were doing thing. In contrast to their previous global ambitions and its disastrous outcome, the focus on domestic prosperity brought a much more pleasant outcome.

Individual Japanese did attend universities in other countries, but it would be a rare occasion for a Japanese student to pursue a university education in Thailand. In addition, learning about Thailand or any other country was not central element in the Japanese educational curriculum. Just the opposite was true in Thailand where students competed vigorously for the opportunity to study in other countries.

There was also little pull being exerted by Japanese to learn about Thai governmental or political issues. The Japanese public was focused on domestic politics, and not on political developments in other countries, except in cases that directly related to Japanese security. This interest in events in other countries is clearly the type of information flow that has to occur at the individual level. Newspapers, magazines, and television stations will respond to the public's demand for information, but they are not very proactive in creating an appetite in the public for news about political events in other countries.

Thai language, culture and the arts were also of little interest to most Japanese. Japanese who learned to speak Thai generally did so for business purposes, although some Japanese academics use their language skills for academic purposes. Japanese culture and arts were the focus of ordinary Japanese, although younger Japanese generated a flow of Western popular music, movies and televisions shows. Even as Thailand developed into a large trading partner with Japan and a country that was extremely important to its ongoing economic prosperity, interest in Thailand was not sufficient to balance the information flows between the two countries. Japanese became more interested in Thailand but this had little affect on the balance of information flows because Thai interest about Japan was growing at a faster rate.

## THAILAND-JAPAN, SPECIAL OR TYPICAL CASE

The issue of more general concern is whether the information flow imbalance between Thailand and Japan is a special case or if this situation characterizes the relationships between all economic and military superpowers with other countries. If this is the typical case, then efforts to improve between nation information flows may require a global approach. It is clearly in the interest of most countries that the economic and military superpowers have good information flows with respect to all other countries. However, if the problem is more severe with respect to Japan than with other economic superpowers, the problem can be addressed locally.

### Rich to Poor

The first issue to consider is whether the information flow imbalance between Thailand and Japan is simply characteristic of all "richer to poorer" country relationships. There probably is a tendency to want to know more about big, rich, or powerful countries. However, some of these countries seem to have a heightened interest in Thai literature, culture, politics and education even if they have less of an investment posture in Thailand. In the case of the United States this might be attributed to the several hundred thousand ethnic Thai living in the United States and the many Thais who have studied at U.S. universities. However, Thai language courses are available at many U.S. universities and several

universities offer graduate programs in Southeast Asian studies. American academics began arriving in Thailand before World War II, and increased in number after the war. In addition, Thai books, music and movies are reasonably available in the U.S. and several U.S. universities have extremely large collections of Thai material.

The large number of English language books that are published makes it somewhat easier to obtain information about Thailand in English speaking countries, and this accounts for some of the flow of information from Thailand to these countries. However, one of the reasons that these books are being produced is because there is intense interest about Thailand. In addition, it is not that individuals in some countries are just interested in Thailand, but they have a broad and deep interest in what is happening in other countries and want to learn more about other countries.

Japan and the Japanese appear less interest in the art, culture and politics of other countries, at least when this requires proactive behavior on their part. Obviously, many individual Japanese have a keen interest in these areas, but the lack of broad based interest means that institutionalized channels of information flow are less developed. It is not that rich countries are not interested in what is happening in other countries, but rather a case of one rich country that is more inwardly focused, which helps account for the positive information flow balances it has with other countries. Indeed Japan is not the only inwardly focused rich country, because the United States, Russia and China are often characterized as not being sufficiently international in their outlook.

**Information Push versus Information Pull**

The second aspect of imbalances in information flows relates to the need to have forces that both push and pull information. On the Thai side this push-and-pull works quite well. Japan is pushing large quantities of information, especially related to commercial activities, to Thailand. In addition, Thais as a collective society are demanding more information about Japan, which acts as an information pull. This results in a supplementary information flow.

While the Japanese people and government are not demanding great amounts of information about Thailand, neither are individual Thais or their government pushing information towards Japan. The absence of a Thai push and a Japanese pull account for the size of the information imbalance. Thais are pushing less information to Japan, in part because there is not a substantial technological or information flow from Thailand to Japan and the Thai government lacks the funds to support institutional efforts to establish information flows related to other areas. The Japanese are exerting very little pressure for information about Thailand. This appears to suggest that a combined push and pull model is required to maximize two-way information flows. However, a balanced model, where each country exerts the same pressure on or demand for information, is needed to keep the information flows in balance.

Of course, this presents an interesting dilemma for countries. Obviously, maximizing inputs of information is important. However, one also needs to test one's culture, political system, education, arts and technological achievements against others. To do this effectively information has to flow in the other direction. Outsiders are more likely to question and test assumptions that we take for granted. This means that it is important to ensure that country-to-country communication flows are both balanced and maximized as part of the global improvement process.

**Island Mentality and Looking Inward**

It is possible that geography also impacts the informational flows of countries. Clearly, an island nation, such as Japan, was very isolated before modern forms of electronic communication. For periods of time, they were even able to isolate themselves from external sea contacts. This geography impact was also true of the United States, which was very isolationist until it was forced to be more international as a result of several world wars and its emergence as an economic and military superpower. This may have also happened in Japan, except for their experiences in World War II.

However, in addition to being an island nation, they have less ethnic diversity than many continental countries, and outsiders have seldom successfully been fully integrated into Japanese society. Their inability to integrate foreigners is very different form the U.S.

experience, where national rather than ethnic identity forms the basis of cohesion. It may well be that the physical geography that isolates countries physically also acts to isolate them from information, although modern technology is likely to minimize this type of impact in the future.

### Continental Mentality and Looking Outward

Thailand, like most countries is physically linked to others. Myanmar, Laos, Cambodia and Malaysia border directly and the historical nature of these borders and trade routes means that contact with India, China and Vietnam were common. National and personal survival required having some knowledge about other countries. In addition, knowledge about what was happening in these countries could lead to commercial gain, which provided an additional incentive to engage in exchanges of all types.

The continental countries in the region were less capable of closing themselves off from others. China tried to limit its external contacts, but they were not very successful. The commercial activities and trade routes that passed through Thailand would have made any such effort impossible. The very nature of their continental experience helps explain why Thais may have a more natural interest in what is happening in other countries, and why they are comfortable with large information flows. People in Thailand have a longer history of establishing and building information flows with other countries.

## THE BALANCE OF INFORMATION GAP

There is likely to always be information imbalances between countries. In fact, the imbalance between Japan and Thailand is likely to continue well into the future. However, what needs to happen is for more attention to be given to information flows, especially by countries with the financial and technical resources to improve these flows.

### Implications of an Information Gap

The real implication of the information imbalance is that the Japanese know a lot less about the Thais, that the Thais do about the Japanese. This has implications for both societies. One might take the view that the country on the receiving end is getting more than

its fair share of information from existing flow channels and should be satisfied. Technical and scientific information is being transferred, and they are also becoming more aware of other factors in Japanese society. Why should they worry if the Japanese are not getting the same benefits from Thailand?

However, there is an internal development side to the equation. Thai science, technology, medicine, education, and culture are not receiving as broad a circulation as possible. As information flows to other countries it is supplemented, corrected, and in some cases refuted. This testing and refutation are extremely important with respect to scientific and technical information. Thus, it is just as important for the country on the receiving end of an information flow imbalance to improve between country flows of information.

The sending country, in this case Japan, also benefits from the information feedback mechanisms. Invention, knowledge creation, and innovation are probabilistic, which means that they can occur anywhere. It is the total volume of effort that determines the speed of invention and innovation, but the location is often a function of luck. Information flows between country become extremely important with respect to solving global problems.

Information flows represent an important mechanism in global development and improvement. Although science and technology are the major foci, this process also occurs in the arts. Music, theater, literature, poetry, and almost every aspect of each country benefit from what happens in other countries. Thus, the process requires a high level of information contribution by all countries, and good channels of information flow between countries

**Closing Informational Gaps**

The task of closing between country information flow gaps is complicated by the fact that we want countries to increase these flows. We want those with deficit information flow balance to increase at a faster rate. We do not want those with positive balance to slow down their existing flows. However, the countries with this positive balance are probably in the best position to further increase their flows of information to other countries, which means that increased flows in both directions may lead to even larger imbalances.

Thus, the surplus balance countries need to help those in deficit positions. In some cases this just requires that they encourage a broader perspective in education and the arts among their own citizens. This will result in the pull side of the equation increasing. For instance, if Japanese citizens start seeing Thai television, theater, and movies this would act to increase demand to see more. The same is true about books.

A country such as Japan may also want to institute more exchange programs. In the past these typically involve Thai students going to Japanese universities. However, exchanges in the other direction may do more to restore the balance to the information flows between Japan and Thailand.

The Japanese government might even think about taking up the position of global leader in this effort. Educational exchanges would involve more than doctoral students going to Thailand to collect data for their dissertations. In fact, it might make more sense to send students from primary school to other countries, including Thailand as a way to broaden their exposure.

The Japanese may also want to think about funding Thai cultural exhibits and performance in Japan. Obviously, Thailand has to play a role in this process as well, although they are less well positioned to play a financial role. However, there are many things in Thailand and many Thai artistic productions that would be of interest to the Japanese people, and the Thais can play a role in identifying and organizing this material.

Ultimately, information exchanges involve a certain amount of person-to-person communication. Ways to enhance this type of communication will require efforts on the part of both Thailand and Japan.

## CONCLUSIONS

This essay, as is true with most, cannot prescribe a complete solution to the information flow imbalance that exists between Thailand and Japan. Structural, economic, geographic and political issues underlie this imbalance. It is unlikely that it will be solved in

the short-term, and mechanisms designed to increase the information flow from Thailand to Japan are likely to be effective in the longer term.

What this paper does do is attempt to show that international and between country information flows are the concern of all society, not just the countries affected by an informational imbalance. If between country informational flows are not effective, the international flow of information cannot be effective.

Japan should pay more attention to what is happening in Thailand and to the broader social and cultural aspects of Thai society because knowing this is good for Japan. Thailand should encourage the process because it benefits from the flow of information about itself. Other countries should encourage and assist in this process because we need better ways to enhance between country information flows, and all countries have a vested interest in this process.