C08: What's Different About Asian Localization?

Praxis
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Management and culture
Asian localization tends to use in-country single language vendors while European localization can more easily use multilingual vendors. Costs, culture, communication in local languages and quality are the main concerns. This typically increases the project management; however, labor costs in Asia are typically lower than similar functions in Western Europe. In terms of the localization costs, using in-country SLVs allows the lowest cost for engineering and translation (China < Korea < Taiwan < Japan).

There are many challenges in establishing teams in local countries, especially in China, which lie in infrastructure, remote management, communication in English, company culture, labor laws, hiring. Local team-workers have strong technical background and motivation to work hard, and they also have advantages in dealing with local governments, but there is also need to develop leadership, professional skills, and retention mechanism in local companies. It's also important to have R&D presence in local countries.

Typically in Asian cultures, relationships and introductions are very important. To get the best service, companies need to focus on long term relationships with vendors and partners. Sometimes cost is not the overriding factor. For this reason, you can typically expect high loyalty from your in-country staff there if you have this perspective.

What's different in Asia?
Asian countries are different from the US and European countries in many ways, such as banking system and technology standards. It's important to know when the Asians will reach for their wallets.

Code set standards: test matrix/time. There is need for more test cases and more complex test matrix to verify the following Asian specific features:

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1) Codesets in CJK: GB2312/GBK/GB18030/CNS11643/BIG5/EUC-KR/Johab/EUC-JP/PCK/HKSCS
2) More than one native locale in each language in Solaris/Linux: EUC/CSI
3) Input Method: Complex intelligent input methods
4) Unihan: Many glyphs are available for the same Unihan characters
5) Printing: No Chinese, Japanese, and Korean fonts in most of the printers
6) Date/Time format: YYYY year MM month DD day, AM 7:00 etc.

It is mandatory to comply with national standards, for example, no products can be sold in China without GB18030 certification. It is beneficial for companies if local teams get involved in national standard bodies. One of the requirements to be a member is that the company must have a local office in that country. Another example, support of HKSCS is a must in the checklist of HK government bids.

There are local de facto standards for things such as the input methods and fonts as well as vendors for those that imply better market acceptance, which often make the software test matrix more complex. In terms of QA testing, there are many differences in Asian and European languages, such as spaces between characters, sentence structure, default setting and grammars. Therefore it is necessary to make language-specific rules.

DTP and Translation
Using the same font size, Asian characters look 10-50% bigger than English words. Therefore, if a text consists of both English and Asian words, then it's necessary to use a different font size for the two languages. There are many conventions to follow when doing desktop publishing, including alignment, paper size, punctuation, line breaks, etc.

In terms of tool support, there are some problems. For example, some higher versions of programs are not available; many tools support single-byte languages first. The next language to support is most likely Japanese, while Korean and Chinese support lags behind. Examples include FrameMaker and TM tools.

There is also a problem of lack of standardized glossary, especially for non-desktop software, such as server, developer tools, etc. Customers complain about translation quality, for example, inconsistency and mistranslation of terms.

Some devices and systems are different between countries; therefore, it's difficult to create standardized terminology. Also, clients in different countries have different requirements for dealing with terminology; for example, some prefer to maintain the original terms in the translation, while some tend to translate them into their native languages.

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