A global electronic community: From the fifth-generation computer to the internet

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Abstrak

The rapid development of computer-based communication technologies, typified by the advent of the Internet, is said to be giving rise to a novel form of community. The paper considers, primarily in reference to the Japanese context, whether such an electronic community can really claim universality, allowing individuals to communicate with each other across the existing boundaries of nation-states, corporations, and the family and how it will affect the existing socio-political structure. One focus of discussion is a government-funded Japanese project, the 'Fifth Generation Computer System Project' (FGCSP), which was carried out over a decade beginning in 1982. A critical assessment of the project bears out that its failure should not be ascribed, as is often done, to its having concentrated on developing hardware technologies with limited applicability, but rather to a serious flaw in its basic design, namely its misperception about 'universal language'. In the electronic community as it exists now, English is essentially accorded the status of the 'universal language', the one indispensable for access to the Internet. It is argued here, however that such a state of things, if allowed to continue, is bound to hinder fruitful communications among various societies with diverse natural languages and social and cultural values peculiar to them, and to create, for the non-English world, a problem of 'language discrimination' by driving a wedge between the elite few proficient in English and the non-English-speaking majority.