

Report on Participation in Overseas Field Research (Thailand)

Mariz Cortinas Eduardo
Year level 2
Graduate School of Economics
Kyoto University

The nine-day Overseas Field Research to Thailand with the EA program was an excellent opportunity to get to know my peers better as well as to be engaged in thought-provoking discussions with them, accompanying professors as well as students and experts in Thailand. The activities attended during this time allowed me to recall lessons, theories and questions posed in my three semesters at Kyoto University. Some instances of this included KU Prof. Lambino's assessment of ASEAN's connectivity agenda and its similarity with that of Chiang Mai University RSCD Director Dr. Chayan Vaddhanaphuti, who delivered a thoroughly detailed presentation on development efforts in the Greater Mekong Subregion (one of my favorite activities of the trip). Also in Chiang Mai, we got a chance to learn more about Hmong tribes and efforts to preserve their rural population centers through tourism (an initiative researched by a CMU student) and farming (the famed Royal Project, which we also visited). Cultural protection of minorities and stimulation of rural economies are two issues prevalent throughout Southeast Asia also previously addressed by Prof. Lambino's courses in Kyoto. On our final day in Chiang Mai, the visit to Sunsweet's KC corn processing and packaging facility (where 3% of the world's sweet corn is processed!) allowed us to witness first-hand why Thailand is positioning itself as one of the world's leading processed food exporters – from technological prowess to competitive trading.

In Bangkok, my peers and I were impressed with the size of Thammasat University's Rangsit campus although I struggled to see an educational aspect of the extensive tour we were provided. Nonetheless, Dr. Chanin Mephokee's lecture on Thailand's economic hurdles was very insightful and touched upon issues of demographic, macroeconomic and political nature previously addressed at KU. TU's MAPS program students, who are predominantly from other countries in Southeast Asia and have diverse backgrounds in the governmental and non-for-profit sectors, were a fun and interesting accompanying group. With them we visited UN ESCAP's headquarters, where we were given UN career advice (which I found very useful) as well as a lecture by the heads of the Trade, Investment and Innovation division (certainly contrasting economically liberal views to those of many KU professors!), and attended a presentation by a UNIDO staff member. The latter was very informative but presented little new information for those of us who had attended Edward Clarence-Smith (former director of UNIDO's Bangkok office) superb course at KU before.

The final part of the trip, however, felt more like a vacation rather than a study trip. The GranMonte Winery came across as a pet project of a Thai rich family catering to domestic wine demand among Thailand's upper-middle class as well as a poor attempt on ecotourism (complete with waiters unaccustomed to serving wine and a recently-hired Australian tour guide to wow foreign visitors). This was particularly disappointing given that the winery is located only a few kilometers away from the Khao Yai National Park, which we did not visit. Learning about conservation efforts at the park, for instance, would have been more insightful. Additionally, stepping foot in a winery that repurposed agricultural land for the benefit of a privileged few and spending the night at a resort of questionable environmental footprint begs to question whether our program's focus on 'sustainability' was present in the planning of the Khao Yai leg of the journey – although, credit where it's due, the hotel marked a nice and relaxing end to the trip.

I am thankful to Kyoto University for organizing this overseas visit which, on the whole, I found insightful, rewarding and stimulating – both academically, as laid out above, and professionally, as I am currently considering various career

options following the completion of my master's.