

Report on Participation in Thai Field Trip

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From a Western viewpoint, it is always precious to be reminded of how rich and varied Asia is. Previous to this field visit in the Bangkok region, I was fortunate enough to have travelled across Asia, and even to work in some Asian cities. Although undeniably contemporary urban areas do share commonalities worldwide, representing the forefront of homogeneous economic globalization at work, each city is home to unique cultures, mind-sets, and philosophies—not to speak about the food! Bangkok's street food mazes were every night a delightful experience in itself.

Confronting local particularities, the non-universal conditions of human beings, and the realities of existing institutions (if not to bumps on the road), makes us aware of several differences, but these become reasons for dialogue amongst academic peers. Even within the academic sphere, universities have different historical roots that are still reflected in the current ways of teaching or sharing knowledge. All of these kind and open-minded meetings flourished with questions tickling our assumptions and as such these encounters turned into learning opportunities in themselves.

On the first day, we were taught about global frameworks to spur development, first at Thammasat University and later at UN ESCAP. In the morning, the collective discussion about the state of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 4 years after their creation underlined two elements. First that within international institutions like UN, it is possible to agree on a common definition of the goal the whole humanity should aim at (and this is highly impressive in itself). And second that the highly diverse initial conditions of the 193 countries turn the implementation of these goals to be heterogeneous, and moreover, very hard to monitor. If we consider strategy as "the practice by which an organization strives to perfect itself through critique" (Holt, 2018), these SDGs successfully embody the discursive part of the critique but may lack in the current state of affairs the capacity to produce evidence-based critique in 2030. Additionally, these SDGs are owned eventually by each country, and they need resources to implement these goals. The UN ESCAP team shared with us how appropriate trade, investment and innovation policies could enable developing countries to finance both their development and intend to sustainable forms of development.

On the second day, we had the opportunity to learn about the regional ASEAN frameworks for inclusive and sustainable development. While the common cultural roots connect the population and land across the ASEAN community, Vinnit ATISOOK, from the Ministry of Agriculture, insisted that the cross-cutting issue at the foundation of ASEAN was 'narrowing the development gap'. For my European eyes, it was interesting to be reminded of how much conflictual and politically divergent an economic community could be at first. Moreover, even if ATISOOK stated that Europe remained the reference, the paths to overcome these differences may lead the ASEAN countries to explore new ventures and models. In the afternoon, we then heard about the potential of e-money and cryptocurrencies from the Bank of Thailand and discovered the history of currencies in South East Asia region at the Museum of the Bank to Thailand.

On Saturday, we all went on an excursion to Bang Krachao, an agricultural piece of land on the West bank of the Chao Phraya river. The out-door setting opened up to discussion with Kasetsart University professors about the economic sustainability of the communities living there. That excursion was a preamble before learning about the Sufficient Economy philosophy on the following Monday. That model of long term sustainable rural development advocated by the King Bhumibol Adulyadej Rama IX is framed to be applied to any business or organizations. However, the alternative Sufficient Economy might also lead the rural population to face poverty traps. Indeed, if the communities that implement this philosophy are surrounded by capitalist-driven governments, they could be left out of access to expensive healthcare or education amenities.

In the afternoon, Akkharaphon THONGPOON shared with us his life after his Kyoto University master and inspired us with

multiple ways to engage with building a better world, may it be with academic research, teaching, activism, social entrepreneurship or political adventure.

On the last day, we were allowed to present our current research to Kasetsart university professors and students. From the comments and feedback I got, I will be able to clarify my research topic, by highlighting the singularities of my research field in Japan, as well as by stating my hypothesis and objectives. Some presentations from other students were inspiring examples of how to articulate problem-gap-theoretical framework and findings.

In 'developed' economies like Japan or European countries, it is sometimes assumed naively that emerging countries are all to follow our footsteps. Instead, without negating the forms of progress that have been achieved, I am always curious to discover new possible paths to development. Further on in my research and career, I plan on learning from the socio-economic dynamics at play in emerging economies.

Holt, R. (2018). *Judgment and Strategy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199671458.001.0001>