

Report on Participation in Overseas Field Research in Thailand

Simon, Justin Gutierrez
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Graduate School of Economics: Economics
Kyoto University

My participation to the one-week overseas field research trip in Thailand was absolutely important in learning how diverse ways of thinking from a myriad of sources with distinctive backgrounds lead to creative and numerous ways to solve certain problems and gaps in society. Equally as important, the trip allowed us to expand our networks and improve our goals while also having experiences that were enjoyable, valuable, and purposeful.

As a citizen of a Southeast Asian Nation myself and considering the distance of Thailand to my country, this is my first time to travel to Thailand and even my first time to experience an overseas research trip. With that in mind, I have had high expectations of the trip. Even then, I was surprised that I gained so much learning outcomes, memorable experiences, and interactions with friends and colleagues in such a short time during the trip. These gains, I believe, would potentially useful both in my civil service and academic career. During the trip, the thematic approach to daily activities was one aspect that was effective in maximizing my learning. In this report, I would briefly summarize what I learned from some of the activities and share some of my insights.

Our first trip activity started with an Introduction to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) presented by Mr. Marvin Renelle Rollo of the Young Sustainable Impact Southeast Asia (YSISEA) which was immediately followed by presentation of the results of studies made by students in Thammasat University on SDG progress of Southeast Asian Nations. The anecdotes of the students from their studies gave more meaning to the results they presented during the session. The discussions revolve around various epistemologies and explored easily implementable small-scale solutions to combat the negative directional effects from each SDGs done by the students which I find interesting in terms of local economic development in Southeast Asian Nations. The activity fitted well as a start to our research trip and allowed us to jump-start our creative thinking.

Following the first activity, some highlights of the Asia-Pacific Trade and Investment Report (APTIR) 2019 Trends were presented to us by Dr. Witada Anukoonwattaka of United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). It is fascinating to note that the presented econometric model that they use to evaluate the progress of nations in fulfilling the SDGs paints a picture that borders in inclusively considering other paradigms and ideologies on how to implement achieving SDGs or sustainability. It is also notable that the model presented is useful in analyzing the international relations between nations in Asia and the Pacific. I think that there might be potential future collaborations with UNESCAP to augment various ideas in sustainability in the econometric model that they use that would also be sensitive to the diplomatic role of UNESCAP to countries under Asia and the Pacific.

While the previous lecture provided an example of frame of reference on how an International Organization views changes in areas and nations they monitor, the lecture given by Mr. Vinit Atisook of the Office of Agricultural Economics of Thailand on the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) examined Agricultural Liberalization and Thailand's role and views international relations at the national level. The discussion of Thailand's implemented Free Trade Agreements and the critique to the various methods available to ASEAN member states to facilitate trade have shown us some areas in trade where ASEAN member states may contradict some of its goals regarding trade liberalization which I find striking as these areas might potentially be a barrier towards trade policy convergence. On the other hand, I think caution must also be exercised since these contradictions may be easily used to further individual national political agenda in the region or disrupt the current power balance between member states. As

the lecture focuses more on the ASEAN Economic Community and its current agreements, potentially discussing the World Trade Organization (WTO) rules and agreements may provide some reasons to the contradictions presented.

We delved deeper into Thailand's Economy through a lecture about digitalization of financial services and the implications for monetary policy in Thailand presented by the Bank of Thailand from which we learned about monetary stance and new regulatory schemes on e-payment and digital currency. I find it remarkable how the Bank of Thailand adapts to the contemporary ways how its people spend and supports its people in their spending behaviors. We also learned about the history of Thailand's currency and learned a lot about how the current designs of coins and banknotes have been shaped by and shape Thailand's history, culture, and society.

Relating on how the Thailand's history and culture influence Thailand's society, the lecture about Sufficiency Economy presented by Assoc. Prof. Isriya Bunyasiri of Kasetsart University greatly exemplifies the convergence of economy and philosophy. It is remarkable for me that the idea of Sufficiency Economy was introduced by their late King Bhumibol Adulyadej and incorporated Buddhist teachings in the economic model. Buddhist principles of moderation, reasonableness, and prudence serve as guides in characterizing what a rational economic decision should be and how optimal levels of happiness in the society becomes part of the economic goal of any actors of the market. It is fascinating for me how cultural and moral structures could be creatively integrated to economic models and I think this kind of creativity and positive moral structures could be emulated to implementing ways to be sustainable.

To conclude, the string of different activities that we experienced during the trip lead me to a more profound understanding of the views of the facts and realities locally and internationally by each actor. This led to my realization of that more than just going to places, the entire trip enabled me to acquire new paradigms that would enrich more my view on things in a way that is different from my previous approaches. At the same, the trip provided me opportunities to ponder and enrich my understanding of these newly acquired paradigms.

Being exposed to various activities, gave me some insights where my civil service and academic career could potentially and easily converge particularly in the local agricultural and social enterprise sectors. The research trip opened my mind to various creative ways on how could I implement these new ideas in the Philippines with the current resources I have. Although I haven't planned the specific details of each strategies, I have developed some schematics to guide me in the future. After my study under the EA Programme, I will return back to my country with fresh perspectives and potentially implement some of the ideas I learned in Thailand that would start my new journey in pursuing my goals.