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TRIANGULARITY OF NUCLEAR ARMS CONTROL: POSSIBLE IMPLICATIONS OF CHINA'S INVOLVEMENT IN NUCLEAR ARMS TALKS

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Abstract

Beijing explains its firm unwillingness to join the United States and Russia in nuclear arms control talks by the fact that China's nuclear arsenal is incomparable with respective potentials of the world's two leading nuclear powers. China urges Russia and the U.S. to go ahead with the nuclear disarmament process on a bilateral basis, and promises it will be prepared to consider the possibility of its participation in the negotiations only when its counterparts have downgraded their arsenals approximately to China's level. Washington finds this totally unacceptable and demands that China either join the existing Russian-U.S. strategic New START treaty right away or agree to enter into a trilateral nuclear arms control format. This article studies the prospects of China's involvement in nuclear arms talks and analyzes the true reasons behind Beijing's desire to avoid any nuclear disarmament deals at this point. The working hypothesis of this paper is that China's stance on the above issue is by no means far-fetched or propagandistic, and that it is driven by fundamental political, military and strategic considerations. Disregard for this factor and further forceful efforts to bring China to the negotiating table to discuss nuclear arms control will lead to failure.

Keywords: China, the United States, New START, Russia, nuclear arms control, China's nuclear doctrine, nuclear disarmament, no-first-use principle.

Introduction

In December 2019, the United States officially invited China to enter into a strategic security dialogue. The White House said it hoped Beijing's consent to this proposal might become the first step towards an international agreement encompassing all nuclear weapons of the United States, Russia, and China. As expected, this proposal was rejected. China said its nuclear arsenal was much smaller than those of the United States and Russia, and it would be able to participate in such talks only when their nuclear potentials were brought to parity with its own.

In March 2020, U.S. President Donald Trump once again declared his intention to ask Russia and China to hold such talks with the aim of avoiding a costly arms race (Reuters.com, 2020). The Chinese Foreign Ministry's response followed virtually in no time. Its spokesperson Zhao Lijian said that China had no intention of taking part in the so-called China-U.S.-Russia trilateral arms control negotiations, and that its position on this issue was very clear (ECNC.cn., 2020). He called upon the United States to extend the New START and to go ahead with the policy of U.S-Russian nuclear arms reduction, thus creating prerequisites for other countries to join the nuclear disarmament process. There is nothing new about China's stance. A year earlier Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Geng Shuang, while speaking

at a news conference in May 2019, made a similar statement. China refused to participate in a trilateral arms control agreement (Fmprc.gov.2019).

It is noteworthy that while advising the United States and Russia to downgrade their nuclear potentials to its level, China does not say what exactly this level is. One of the rare official statements (if not the sole one) on that score was the Chinese Foreign Ministry's statement, published on April 27, 2004, that China's nuclear arsenal was the smallest of all (Fact Sheet China, 2004). Even in that case the Chinese Foreign Ministry did not specify if it was referring to the quintet of the UN Security Council's permanent members. If so, China's nuclear arsenal, according to official statistics, consisted of no more than 190 warheads (Britain's level that year). Such (understated according to most analysts) estimates, have also been mentioned by a number of experts. For example, Harvard researcher Hui Zhang says China in 2011 had 166 nuclear warheads. There are other, higher estimates. For instance, Professor Phillip Karber of Georgetown University believes that China has 3,000 warheads at its disposal (Karber, 2011), while many other researchers call this in question.

The estimate offered by H. Kristensen and M. Korda of the Federation of American Scientists, who issue annual world surveys of nuclear arms potentials, is shared by most researchers and draws no objections from political circles in various countries, including the United States. According to their calculations as for April 2020, the United States had 3,800 deployed and non-deployed nuclear warheads, and Russia, 4,312 warheads. As for China, the same survey says it has 320 non-deployed nuclear warheads (Kristensen and Korda, 2020).

While underscoring the importance of nuclear arms cuts by the United States and Russia to China's level, Beijing does not specify if this idea applies only to strategic or all nuclear weapons. In the former case, if China's approach is to be accepted, Russia and the United States would have to slash their nuclear arsenals by 65%-75% (from 1,550 deployed nuclear warheads in compliance with the rules of the still effective New START). But if the total number of nuclear warheads on either side is to be counted, each country's nuclear potential would shrink by no less than 90%. Only after this will China be prepared to consider in earnest its participation in nuclear arms control talks.

The United States and Russia can hardly find this suitable. At the same time, these countries have not yet officially formulated their specific approaches to and basic provisions of hypothetical trilateral talks and a future agreement on this issue. For the time being, these issues are in the focus of experts' attention in a number of countries, and they have over the past few years offered a variety of possible formats and parameters of a future "multilateral" treaty. In most cases, experts delve into certain aspects of a future agreement that might be attractive to China. Very few think of what China might lose the moment it enters into nuclear arms control talks or what military-political consequences might follow if China eventually changed its mind regarding participation in such negotiations.

In my opinion, China's demand for achieving the "comparability" of nuclear potentials as a precondition for beginning a trilateral dialogue stems precisely from its evaluation of the consequences of its participation in the negotiations. This stance is neither far-fetched nor propagandistic, contrary to what some experts and politicians claim, but rests upon major political, military and strategic cornerstones. Disregard for China's arguments reduces to nothing all efforts, above all those taken by Washington, to engage Beijing in nuclear arms talks.

As far as the United States is concerned, the motives behind its attempts to persuade China to join nuclear arms talks are not quite clear. There may be several possible considerations that

the United States is guided by in its policy on the issue. One is that Washington may be looking for a way to obtain necessary information about the current state of China's nuclear potential and plans for its development in the future in order to be able to adjust its own modernization programs accordingly. Another explanation is that the United States may be reluctant to go ahead with the nuclear disarmament policy and hopes to use China's unequivocal refusal to participate in negotiations as a chance to blame it for the disruption of this process and for dismantling the nuclear arms control system as such. I believe both explanations may be true, but their analysis lies beyond the scope of this article.

Options of engaging China in nuclear arms control talks

“Americans performed three very different policies on the People's Republic: From a total negation (and the Mao-time mutual annihilation assurances), to Nixon's sudden cohabitation. Finally, a Copernican-turn: the US spotted no real ideological differences between them and the post-Deng China. This signalled a ‘new opening’: West imagined China's coastal areas as its own industrial suburbia. Soon after, both countries easily agreed on interdependence (in this marriage of convenience): Americans pleased their corporate (machine and tech) sector and unrestrained its greed, while Chinese in return offered a cheap labour, no environmental considerations and submissiveness in imitation.

However, for both countries this was far more than economy, it was a policy – Washington read it as interdependence for transformative containment and Beijing saw it as interdependence for a (global) penetration. In the meantime, Chinese acquired more sophisticated technology, and the American Big tech sophisticated itself in digital authoritarianism – ‘technological monoculture’ met the political one.

But now with a tidal wave of Covid-19, the honeymoon is over” – recently wrote professor Anis H. Bajrektarevic on a strategic decoupling between the biggest manufacturer of American goods, China and its consumer, the US.

Indeed, Washington has not formulated in detail its official stance on engaging China in negotiations yet. Disarmament experts consider a number of options that may be proposed in principle. These options may be grouped into three main categories. The first one is putting pressure on China with the aim of making it change its mind regarding arms control. The second one is the search for proposals China may find lucrative enough, which the Chinese leadership might agree to study in earnest. And the third one is a combination of these two approaches.

As far as pressure on China is concerned, the United States is already exerting it along several lines. For one, China is criticized for the condition and development prospects of its nuclear arsenal. Specifically, it is blamed on being the only nuclear power in the Permanent Big Five that has not reduced its nuclear potential. Moreover, as follows from a statement made in May 2019 by Robert Ashley, Director of the Defense Intelligence Agency, “over the next decade, China is likely to at least double the size of its nuclear stockpile in the course of implementing the most rapid expansion and diversification of its nuclear arsenal in China's history” (Adamczyk, 2019). Both officials and many experts have been quoting this postulate as an established fact requiring no proof.

China is also accused of the lack of transparency, that is, refusal to disclose the size and structure of its nuclear forces, programs for their upgrade, and other nuclear policy aspects. The U.S. leadership argues that this state of affairs by no means promotes strategic stability and international security. Some experts believe that China's involvement in negotiations

would help avoid some adverse effects, for example, another nuclear arms race under a Cold War scenario (Zhao, 2020). Rose Gottemoeller, U.S. Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security in the Barack Obama administration, believes it may be possible to “make a case for the Chinese to come to the table early on intermediate-range constraints of ground-launched missiles, because they are staring at the possibility of a deployment of very capable U.S. missiles of this kind” (Mehta, 2020).

Apparently, the United States had counted on Russia’s support in such matters, especially as the Russian leadership said more than once that the New START, signed in 2010, was to become the last bilateral nuclear arms reduction treaty and time was ripe for other nuclear states to join the nuclear disarmament process. However, in late 2019 Russia made a U-turn in its stance on China’s participation in negotiations. Speaking at a conference entitled “Foreign Policy Priorities of the Russian Federation in Arms Control and Nonproliferation in the Context of Changes in the Global Security Architecture,” held on November 8, 2019 in Moscow, Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov said that Russia respected China’s position concerning its refusal to participate in the talks. Moreover, he stated that declaring China’s consent to participate in the negotiating process as a precondition looked “openly provocative.” Thus Russia made it clear that it had no intention of putting pressure on China regarding the issue, but at the same time it would have nothing against the Chinese leadership eventually making a decision to join the United States and Russia in nuclear disarmament talks. Russia is unlikely to alter its position even under pressure from the United States, which has long harbored plans for using the prolongation of the New START as a factor for getting China involved in the talks in some way, or even securing its consent to become a signatory to the treaty. Specifically, the U.S. president’s National Security Advisor Robert O’Brian made an unequivocal statement on that score (Riechmann, 2020). Also, in May 2020, the United States came up with an ultimatum that it would not extend the New START until China agreed to participate in it. Moreover, the newly appointed special U.S. presidential representative for arms control, Marshall Billingslea, actually demanded that Russia “bring the Chinese to the negotiating table.”

The United States may exert (or is already exerting) pressure on China “indirectly,” for example by using such levers as the U.S.-Chinese trade war and China’s alleged “responsibility” for the spread of the coronavirus (which the United States regards as proven). Such pressures may be largely exerted covertly.

Some military and political experts believe that it is worth exploring compromise options of China’s participation in nuclear arms control. Such options may accommodate the interests of all partakers and match the specific structure and quantitative parameters of weapons subject to control. Establishing transparency in the given sphere would be one of the “simple” ways of involving China in the strategic dialogue. In other words, such transparency would imply mutual disclosure of information about the number of missiles and deployed warheads, their basic parameters, including range, and also specific locations and deployment sites (Tosaki, 2019). It must be noted that this seemingly “least painful” and easy-to-accomplish solution for making China join the international arms control dialogue is in fact least acceptable to it.

The long list of other proposals includes various options of a “mixed” approach to the control of missile systems. For instance, reaching an agreement on a common ceiling for intermediate-range ground-based and air-launched missiles or a similar restriction on any strategic missiles regardless of the type of deployment (ground, sea, or air launched), as well as the intermediate-range missiles of three nuclear powers—China, the United

States, and Russia. The proponents of this approach believe that this may provide an approximately equitable basis for talks among the aforesaid states (Zhao, 2020).

All the aforementioned recommendations—and a number of other ideas—for plugging China into bilateral or multilateral nuclear arms control talks are based on the past experience of negotiations on the issue. In the meantime, the specifics of China’s nuclear policy are left unnoticed or intentionally ignored. It is generally believed that inviting China to participate in negotiations is tantamount to official recognition of its status as a great power responsible, like the United States and Russia, not only for its own security but also for global security. This recognition is often considered a reason enough to expect China to consent to participate in such negotiations and the main problem is seen in the formulation of concrete proposals for discussion. In the meantime, such an approach looks erroneous.

The fundamental principles of China’s nuclear policy

China’s policy concerning nuclear arms and their role in maintaining national security has remained unchanged for more than 55 years, starting from its accession to the “nuclear club” in 1964. Central to that policy is China’s pledge not to be the first to use nuclear weapons or threaten to use them against non-nuclear countries and countries in nuclear free zones. It is believed that Mao Zedong made that decision personally in 1964 (Fravel, 2019).

In accordance with this pledge, China, as it reiterates, maintains its nuclear deterrence weapons at a required minimum by declaring its readiness for retaliation against an aggressor in the event of a hypothetical nuclear attack. China vows it does not participate in a nuclear arms race against any country. These provisions have remained unchanged for many years and can be found in many Chinese fundamental military and strategic planning documents, available from open sources (The State Council, 2019), and are repeatedly quoted by the Chinese mass media (Xinhuanet.com., 2019).

In contrast to the classical nuclear deterrence formula China does not demonstrate its retaliatory strike capabilities; on the contrary, it conceals them for various reasons. Enhancing the survivability of retaliatory strike systems is one. Such “existential” means of deterrence enables the country possessing a relatively small nuclear potential to keep a potential aggressor in a state of strategic uncertainty as it cannot be certain that its first strike would “disarm” the defending opponent by eliminating all of its nuclear weapons with a surprise counterforce strike.

To confirm its adherence to the no-first use principle, China declares that it limits its nuclear potential to the “minimum” defense requirements, while all upgrade programs are geared mostly to ensuring the survivability and reliability of retaliatory strike systems. China’s nuclear forces have become more survivable due to the creation and deployment of mobile ICBMs, and measures to shelter a considerable part of its nuclear potential, including mobile ICBMs and shorter-range missiles in a network of underground tunnels—the Underground Great Wall of China. Also, other means of hiding nuclear weapons are used, such as mock ICBM silos and shelters for nuclear submarines inside coastal rocks.

As the information about the condition, development prospects and size of China’s nuclear potential remains scarce, its nuclear policy issues are in the focus of attention of many specialists and think tanks in the United States and other countries. Most of them

(but far from all) believe that China's declared policy of no-first-use of nuclear weapons and estimates of its nuclear potential (around 300 warheads) agree with reality (Pifer, 2019). But other researchers maintain that under certain circumstances China may revise its attitude to the no-first-use principle and abandon the minimum deterrence concept in favor of gaining opportunities for conducting limited nuclear war. Such conclusions are made on the basis of data showing the growth of qualitative parameters of China's nuclear forces—greater accuracy of nuclear warheads, the deployment of MIRVs on ICBMs, forecasts for a considerable increase in the overall number of nuclear weapons at the country's disposal, etc. (Giacomdetti, 2014; Yoshihara and Bianchi, 2019; Schneider, 2019).

It should be acknowledged that the lack of official information about the condition and development prospects of China's nuclear arsenal and implementation of programs in the strategic field (creation of a heavy ICBM, research and development of a missile attack warning system, deployment of a missile defense, and others) afford ground for a variety of speculations over China's compliance with the professed principles regarding nuclear weapons. In the meantime, this by no means contradicts the fundamental principle of China's nuclear policy—no-first-use of nuclear weapons—which will remain unchanged in the foreseeable future. Even if one assumes that China does participate in the nuclear arms race (which is also a subject of speculations), it is by no means its instigator.

Certain changes are possible, though. China may acquire real capabilities for a limited response to a limited nuclear attack. In other words, the country's military-political leadership, empowered to make a decision to use nuclear weapons, will acquire extra opportunities and options for retaliation other than a massive nuclear strike against the enemy's major unprotected targets, such as cities and industrial centers. At the same time there is no reason to say that the improvement of parameters of China's strategic nuclear forces increases the risk of a first counterforce strike against a would-be aggressor just because the nuclear potentials of China and the two leading nuclear powers are incomparable. In this case size does matter.

Effects of arms control on China's nuclear strategy and policy

Should China agree to participate in negotiations or draft an agreement on control of its nuclear weapons, its nuclear strategy and policy will most likely undergo the most serious changes. And these changes, in the author's opinion, may be far from positive. They will result not from possible restrictions imposed on China's nuclear forces or disadvantageous terms of a future treaty forced upon China, but the very fact of concluding such an international treaty.

A close look at Soviet-U.S. and Russian-U.S. nuclear arms control agreements reveals how the parties' approaches to solving the problems of national security and strengthening strategic stability have been changing. At early stages the two sides managed to come to terms regarding the overall number of ground-based launchers of strategic ballistic missiles, SLBM capable submarines and SLBM launchers. Later, the class of strategic weapons was expanded to incorporate heavy bombers armed with long-range cruise missiles and gravity nuclear bombs. Some types of nuclear weapons, for instance, strategic air-launched ballistic missiles were banned. Next, there followed restrictions on nuclear warheads deployed on delivery vehicles and then their reductions.

A total ban was applied to ground-based intermediate- and shorter-range cruise missiles. An attempt was made to outlaw ICBMs with multiple warheads. Each clause of the concluded treaties was scrutinized by the expert community and drew worldwide interest.

In addition, efforts were made to develop a mechanism to verify compliance with the assumed commitments. The first Soviet-U.S. agreements SALT-1 (1972) and SALT-2 (1979) assigned the control function to “national technical means of verification”—intelligence satellites. The contracting parties pledged to refrain from creating impediments to their operation. Also, the signatories undertook “not to use deliberate concealment measures which impede verification by national technical means of compliance.” In the next agreements—the INF Treaty (of 1987) and, particularly, START-1 (1991) — a comprehensive system of control and verification was developed and adopted. It envisaged exchanges of data (including the geographical coordinates of each ICBM silo) and various notifications and on-site inspections, which made it totally impossible to conceal even the slightest violations of these agreements. This system of verification functions within the framework of the still effective Russian-U.S. New START, concluded in 2010.

It is hard to imagine a hypothetical agreement with China not including compliance verification procedures. And it is very unlikely that the system of verification in such an agreement will be “soft,” as was the case with the one established under the earlier SALT-1 and SALT-2 treaties. On the contrary, as follows from statements by U.S. officials, the United States is determined to pay the closest attention to the verification and control of compliance with all future agreements. U.S. Acting Under Secretary of State for Arms Control and International Security Christopher Ford has made an explicit statement on this score.

Even if such an agreement does not impose any obligations on China, requiring reduction of its nuclear potential, Beijing will be expected to provide exhaustive information about its nuclear weapons and deployment sites. Also, China will have to give up measures to conceal its nuclear forces, change the locations of mobile missile systems and allow foreign inspectors to visit classified facilities (including the Underground Great Wall of China) in order to confirm that the provided information is correct and proper action has been taken under assumed commitments. Besides, China will have to notify other signatories of the commissioning of new nuclear weapons and withdrawal from operational duty or elimination of older systems, the redeployment of weapons, etc. All these measures will make it possible to keep under full control China’s nuclear potential and nuclear arms delivery vehicles.

These measures, understandable from the standpoint of an arms control treaty, may have truly disastrous effects on China’s entire official nuclear policy. Information disclosure and control measures would make China’s nuclear arsenal totally vulnerable to a first nuclear strike and partially – to a non-nuclear strike. A potential aggressor, possessing a considerable advantage in nuclear weapons and full information about the deployment sites, will have a guaranteed capability to destroy the adversary’s entire nuclear potential. Theoretically, it would spend far more nuclear weapons than the victim of the aggression (in this particular case, China) would lose, but still retain an enormous attack potential. In a situation like this, there will be no weapons available to deliver a retaliatory strike. All this will mean that China’s declared no-first-use policy will lose credibility. In other words, it will turn into a propaganda slogan, with no real resources to rely on to implement this policy in practice.

Apparently, it is precisely these considerations that are behind China’s refusal to participate in nuclear arms control talks, and they will remain in place at least until the strategic situation in this field undergoes fundamental change. One of the most important conditions for China

to enter into such negotiations (it says so openly) is further reduction of nuclear arsenals by Russia and the United States to levels comparable with China's potential. As it has been already stated, this condition, described as a political one, has fundamental strategic, military and technical grounds.

Likely consequences of China's participation in a nuclear arms control treaty

As has been said above, China's consent to enter into nuclear arms control negotiations and conclusion of a corresponding agreement will be unlikely in the foreseeable future. Nevertheless, it is worth pondering on what decisions in the military and political field the Chinese leadership may adopt if it has to give in to U.S. pressure. One of the most important decisions is, to my mind, the possibility of China remaining committed to the no-first-use principle.

Currently, this principle is ensured not so much by the quantitative parameters of China's nuclear arsenal, but as its stealthy deployment, concealment measures, and refusal to provide relevant information. In order to retain a retaliatory strike potential in a situation where the information about the deployment sites of China's nuclear forces has been disclosed while the amount of nuclear arms available remains considerably inferior to those of the "partner" or "partners," China will have to exert major efforts to ensure the invulnerability of at least some of them. Doing this will be impossible without a major buildup of the nuclear potential, above all, of the least vulnerable strategic systems (mobile ICBMs and SLBMs). All of this will require considerable expenses and time. Even if the work on a new treaty takes two or three, or even five years, one can hardly expect any considerable changes in the quantitative and qualitative structure of China's nuclear forces by the moment this work is finalized.

The problem of strategic nuclear forces' vulnerability may theoretically be resolved (at least to a certain extent) by developing and deploying missile defenses around deployment sites. But this would entail heavy spending, too. Also, such a program can hardly be implemented within tight deadlines. The problem of greater vulnerability of China's strategic nuclear forces can also be resolved by adopting the "launch-under-attack" concept or "launch on warning" concept. Their adoption might be considered, although with great reservations, to conform to the no-first-use principle, but in this case it will be essential to build a warning system based on early warning satellites and radars. However, still there will be no guarantees that such a system will be able to issue a timely notification to the military and political leadership of a missile attack against China, if such a strike is carried out with U.S. SLBMs having short flight-in time and counterforce capability. Under such a scenario China's strategic forces will have to remain on high alert all the time. This means that China will be forced to give up keeping missile warheads in store separately and to deploy them on strategic delivery vehicles, thus demonstrating its readiness for instant retaliation in case of an attack warning.

The above arguments prompt the conclusion that China, if it agrees to the drafting and signing a nuclear arms control treaty, will certainly have to depart from the principle of no-first-use of nuclear weapons, with all the ensuing negative consequences. This may also trigger an enhanced arms race and induce China to adopt more aggressive nuclear arms concepts.

China finds it far easier to refuse to hold nuclear arms control talks than address the adverse military and strategic effects its participation in such an international agreement is bound to entail. In this situation the United States should give more thought to its policy of engaging China in nuclear arms control talks and focus on Russian-U.S. strategic relations, including the prolongation of the New START without any linkages and preconditions.

As far as Russia is concerned, its current policy of avoiding pressure on China to make it engage in nuclear arms talks looks reasonable. From the political standpoint—alongside with other considerations—a trilateral agreement would mean that Russia officially regards China, albeit formally, as a “partner” (if not a “potential adversary”), just as the United States, and that strategic relations among such parties are based on the concept of nuclear deterrence, the balance of nuclear forces, and their capabilities to deliver first and retaliatory strikes. Incidentally, China’s participation would have the same implications for Russia. Lending this dimension to bilateral relations hardly meets the interests of the two countries.

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THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS: IMPLICATIONS FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INTERNATIONALISATION IN MALAYSIA

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Abstract

The education process of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) has played an important role in higher education internationalisation since the establishment of ASEM in Bangkok, Thailand in 1996. The ASEM Education Process (AEP) consists of 53 ASEM partners and more than 15 ASEM education stakeholders who meet regularly for discussions on policies and reform measures. There are four priority areas and two transversal themes introduced in the AEP for policy direction and strategy implementation in the field of higher education. Malaysia has participated in the AEP since 2008 and has led and organised various initiatives and meetings on the internationalisation of higher education and global recognition. This study aims to explore the implications of the AEP for the process of internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia. A qualitative study with semi-structured interviews was conducted with fifteen senior officers of the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia and five Malaysian research universities. The data were analysed by employing the Qualitative Data Analysis software, the Nvivo version 11, to identify themes and categories. The findings reveal that the AEP can play a major role in internationalising Malaysian higher education through effective networking and strategic alliances. The four priority areas of the AEP has provided opportunities for Malaysia to work closely with European and Asian counterparts in the field of higher education. The findings can assist the Malaysian higher education stakeholder to participate actively in the inter-regional organisation to learn and share best practices and to formulate and revise policies on higher education internationalisation.

Keywords: ASEM Education Process, Internationalisation of higher education, Malaysian higher education system, NVivo and Networking

Introduction

The significance of higher education for local and global development was developed and enhanced through effective initiatives of international, intergovernmental and inter-regional organisations (Shahjahan, 2012). International and intergovernmental organisations such as the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and inter-regional organisations such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) place emphasis on the reform agenda for higher education internationalisation (de Wit, 2020). Among these organisations,

ASEM and APEC focus more on education and higher education cooperation between nations than the others. However, APEC, created in 1989, is mainly aimed at free trade and economic cooperation (Lee, 2012). Meanwhile, ASEM which was formed in 1996 in Bangkok, Thailand, has since then developed a platform for discussion and cooperation in three important global fields. These are political, economic and socio-cultural including educational matters (Le Thu, 2014). In the international arena, ASEM has been listed as one of the strongest inter-regional cooperation focusing on effective cooperation between Asia and Europe (Khandekar, 2018) among various organisations.

ASEM gives priority to mutual benefits and bridges the gap between Asia and Europe in terms of cooperation in various fields, including higher education (Reiterer, 2009). ASEM facilitates inter-regional cooperation between communities and higher education institutions of Asia and Europe (Lee, 2012), creating a platform to strengthen the higher education internationalisation of ASEM partners. In 2006, a decade since its inception, the education pillar was recognised and the first Education Ministers meeting was held in 2008 to enhance discussion and cooperation in tertiary education. In May 2008, the Federal Ministry of Education and Research, Germany hosted the first ministerial meeting on education (ASEMME1) in Berlin and this marked the birth of the ASEM Education Process (AEP). Since then, the AEP has influenced the development of higher education in Asia and Europe (Dang, 2013) and internationalisation of higher education became the major attention of the AEP. In particular, it has the abilities to guide the development of higher education in the both regions through the agenda-setting process (Dang, 2016).

The impact of globalisation and internationalisation has influenced human capital and talent development in Malaysia, especially through international cooperation (MOE, 2020). The agenda on internationalisation has been prioritised in the Malaysian higher education system after the establishment of a separate Ministry for higher education in 2004. Since then, various strategic plans have been introduced to enhance the quality of higher education, visibility and global recognition through internationalisation. From the beginning 2008, the Ministry of Higher Education, Malaysia (MOHE) has participated in the AEP through Ministerial and stakeholders level meetings and has organised several initiatives at Ministerial and stakeholders levels such as the Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME4) and the Third ASEM University Business Forum in Kuala Lumpur under the four thematic priorities of the AEP. Although Malaysia has participated in the AEP for the past decade, there appears to not have been tangible outcomes or policy development on international cooperation in the field of higher education. However, a few Asian countries such as Indonesia hosted the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) from 2013 to 2017. De Wit et al. (2015) stated that Malaysia's active engagement in the ASEM education cooperation since ASEMME1 can be seen to be a positive effort in enriching greater cooperation with Europe and Asia to enhance strategies and to tackle higher education internationalisation matters. Thus, this study aims to explore the implications of the AEP to the process of higher education internationalisation in Malaysia through semi-structured interviews with key personnel. The implications of the AEP is categorised in terms of its functions, contributions and the effects of the four thematic priority areas to Malaysian higher education development and internationalisation.

The article begins with a brief background of the AEP and its rationale for higher education internationalisation. It is then followed by a review of literature on the internationalisation of higher education and the higher education internationalisation process in Malaysia. Next, the research design and methodology employed for this study are described. This is followed by

the qualitative findings and discussion. Finally, the article presents the conclusion and implication of the study.

The ASEM education and internationalisation

The creation of ASEM brings a new status to Asia and it shows the recognition of the importance of Asia by Europe (Yeo, 1997). Since the Fourth ASEM Summit (ASEM4), ASEM has started to emphasise the importance of people-to-people contacts and education (Le Thu, 2014). Subsequently, in the Sixth ASEM Summit (ASEM6), ASEM Leaders endorsed a separate ministerial meeting for education (ASEM, 2006). After the first official ministerial meeting on education in 2008, the focus of the AEP was on four thematic priority areas, namely (1) quality assurance and recognition, (2) engaging business and industries in education, (3) balanced mobility and (4) technical and vocational education and training, including lifelong learning (ASEMME3, 2011). The four priorities reflect the common interests of Asia and Europe and are a fixed agenda for senior officials and ministers level meetings. A two pillar system (dialogue and results-oriented initiatives) was endorsed in the fifth ministerial meeting (ASEMME5). This system has increased the visibility of tangible outcomes for the success of higher education in Asia and Europe and for sustainability in the globalised world (AES, 2015). The Conclusions by the Chair is a key ASEM education policy document containing “*the ministers’ political viewpoints, the common goals, major achievements, new initiatives, and activities*” (Dang, 2018a, p. 262). It is a high-level document and adopted as a policy document for the implementation of various endorsed initiatives under the framework of the AEP. ASEMME1 set a pathway for the formation of initiatives under the AEP and encouraged ASEM partners to build a strong partnership to internationalise higher education in order to meet the 21st-century challenges (ASEMME1, 2008). As of December 2019, more than fifty initiatives and projects and more than 120 working and expert group meetings at stakeholders’ level have been held within Asia and Europe (AES, 2019).

As of 1st January 2020, seven ministerial meetings at the political level were held to shape higher education development in both regions. Although all the meetings emphasised the importance of the four priorities, digitalisation and sustainable development goals were included as two transversal themes to meet the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution (ASEMME7, 2019). The uniqueness of the AEP is the creation of a special rotation secretariat in 2009 to manage higher education collaboration between Asia and Europe (Gaens, 2018). So far, three nations (Germany, Indonesia and Belgium) have hosted the secretariat and the following term should be hosted by an Asian partner (ASEMME7, 2019). The secretariat has to effectively manage and coordinate the networking between ASEM partners and hosting of the political and stakeholders level meetings.

Currently, 53 ASEM partners and more than fifteen International organisations such as the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and the International Association of Universities (IAU) actively discuss, share best practices and identify reform measures through political and stakeholders level meetings (Nagarajan & Tozsa, 2018). Thus, the rationales of the AEP are to enhance the transparency of different higher education systems and make them more compatible. The AEP’s key objective is ensuring the quality and competitiveness of higher education systems and institutions to produce qualified and employable citizens and promoting economic growth in Asia and Europe (AES, 2013). The high priority of the AEP is to bridge the gap between diverse higher education systems through an informal political process of inter-regional cooperation which is supported and implemented by a series of initiatives and

concrete actions. Through this, the main aim of the AEP is to enhance cooperation and exchanges in higher education between Asia and Europe (AES, 2013).

Malaysia joined ASEM in 1996 and the AEP in 2008. Malaysia has hosted more than twenty ASEM events such as the Third ASEM Culture Ministers' Meeting (2008), the Fourth ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (2013) and the ASEM Symposium on Countering Radicalisation (2016) (ASEF, 2017). In terms of higher education, Malaysia has been a member of more than ten initiatives and has led the ASEM-AEI Summer School since 2015. Additionally, an officer of MOHE has been seconded to the Secretariat in Jakarta and Belgium to assist and share expertise for the progress of the AEP (ASEMME7, 2019). The participation and involvement of Malaysia in ASEM and the AEP strategically would enhance the political, economic, socio-cultural and academic development in Malaysia to internationalise Malaysian higher education. Thus, Gaens (2018) and Dang (2013) stated that the networking outlook of ASEM and in specifically, the AEP can be an exclusive prospect for ASEM partners, including Malaysia to enrich its global prominence in higher education.

The internationalisation of higher education

International education has developed as an industry. It has become an avenue for income generation and promoting quality education (de Wit, 2020). International education also creates a platform for delivering world-class education (Dumanig & Symaco, 2020). The rise of globalisation has influenced the higher education sector worldwide to embark on internationalisation to gain international recognition (Dumanig & Symaco, 2020). Thus, the internationalisation of higher education is seen as a transformation agent in higher education in developed and developing countries around the globe (de Wit, 2020). The understanding on the internationalisation of higher education has focussed to the impact of international and regional cooperation and intercultural and inter-regional capabilities (Morshidi, Samsinar, & Farhana Tahmida, 2019). The compelling pressure on intensifying internationalisation activities is driven by four key rationales occurring at both the institutional and national levels. These are the socio-cultural, political, economic and academic rationales (de Wit, 2011). However, the recent challenges in higher education internationalisation include the competitiveness in getting international students worldwide and in producing globalised skilled graduates to meet the requirements of industry and business (Robson & Wihlborg, 2019).

The internationalisation of higher education generally, emphasises the importance of embedding an international dimension in higher education for the benefit of a nation, academics, students and the wider public. However, the recent focus has been on the roles of International Organisations (IOs) and Inter-governmental Organisations in transforming the higher education system around the world (Shahjahan, 2012). Therefore, Knight's (2003) definition of the internationalisation of higher education at the national, higher education sector and institutional levels as the "process of integrating an international, intercultural, or global dimension into the purpose, functions or delivery of postsecondary education" (p. 3) was adopted for this study. The following section looks at the process of higher education internationalisation in Malaysia and the major transitions taking place in the country.

The Malaysian higher education system and internationalisation

After the British colonial era in Malaya, the higher education system in Malaysia was shifted from the British system to an exclusively Malaysian system (Selvaratnam, 1985) to supply

human resources for nation growth (Ismail & Mahani, 2002). The establishment of Universiti Malaya in Kuala Lumpur in 1959 marked the official beginning of the higher education system in Malaysia that has since shaped societal development in Malaysia. However, the development of the Malaysian higher education system has been much affected by the new phenomenon called the “internationalisation of higher education” (Morshidi, 2010). The development of higher education in Malaysia was significantly enhanced after the establishment of MOHE in 2004 (Dobos, 2011). Although MOHE was re-structured under the Ministry of Education, Malaysia several times, it has re-operated again under the *Perikatan Nasional* government starting March 2020 (BERNAMA, 2020).

The Malaysian higher education system encompasses public and private higher learning institutions. There are 20 government-owned public universities and more than 450 private higher education institutions operating in Malaysia to cater to the needs of local and international students (MOHE, 2018). After three years of establishment of MOHE, in 2007, the first policy document, the National Higher Education Strategic Plan (NHESP) 2007-2020 was introduced. The inauguration of this policy directed the starting point for enhancement of the Malaysian higher education system and the higher learning institutions in Malaysia (Norzaini, Morshidi, & Abdul Razak, 2014). The transformation of the higher education system through internationalisation for Malaysia to become a higher education hub was embarked on in 2007. Furthermore, Malaysia has the ambition to acquire a leading position as a regional higher education hub in the Southeast Asia region to recruit more international students and talents (Zayed & Ali, 2015).

Consequently, in 2015, Malaysia introduced a new higher education blueprint to position Malaysia as one of the international higher education hubs in the region with a goal of 250,000 international students by 2025 and to be recognised worldwide (MOE, 2015). The significant shift in the blueprint in this respect is Shift 8: Global prominence which emphasises the internationalisation of Malaysian higher education (Chang Da & Morshidi, 2017). The key goal is to produce human capital for economic growth (Morshidi et al., 2019). The blueprint aims to position Malaysian universities at the top in the global university rankings to achieve enhanced internationalisation. Furthermore, Malaysian research universities and several private universities have also embarked on internationalisation and implemented strategies to achieve high ranking in the international ranking system (Morshidi et al., 2019). A study conducted by Dumanig & Symaco (2020) shows that Malaysia is improving research activities and translating higher education policies into vision and mission statement of higher education institutions to champion internationalisation. In a nutshell, the efforts, strategies and plans developed by the Malaysian government encourage higher education institutions to compete in the global market (Abdul Rahman, Farley, & Moonsamy, 2012) to achieve world-class status to become an international higher education hub in the region (Grapragasem, Krishnan, & Mansor, 2014).

Data and Methodology

The sample for this qualitative study was selected through a non-probability sampling by applying the purposive and expert sampling methods (Etikan, Musa, & Alkassim, 2016). The internationalisation and inter-regional cooperation experts were selected through expert sampling to collect sufficient data. Based on both sampling methods, higher officials of MOHE, including its departments and agencies and Directors of the International Offices of five research universities as well as international experts on internationalisation were interviewed in their respective offices. The number of interviewees and their organisations are

as shown in Table 1. Eleven male and four female took part in the interviews. The semi-structured interviews were conducted by using an interview instrument with contents encompassing international and interregional cooperation, features of the AEP and the internationalisation of higher education. This interview instrument was verified by two internationalisation experts and endorsed by University of Malaya Research Ethics Committee.

Table 1: Number of interviewees and organisation

No	Organisation	Number of interviewees	Gender	
			Male	Female
1	Ministry of Higher Education	3	3	0
2	Department of Higher Education	3	2	1
3	Department of Polytechnic Education and Community Colleges	1	1	0
4	Malaysian Qualifications Agency	1	1	0
5	Education Malaysia Global Services	1	1	0
6	International Office –Research University	5	2	3
7	Internationalisation Expert	1	1	0
Total		15	11	4

Each interview session was held for approximately one to one and a half hours and an audio-recorder and iPhone-6S were used to record the interview sessions. The recording of each interview was transmitted into Qualitative Data Analysis (QDA) software (Nvivo-11) in word format. The volume of data was coded and analysed by concentrating on qualitative content analysis method (Schreier, 2012). The qualitative content analysis method provided an opportunity to conduct explanatory analysis and assisted coding rendering for interpretation, classification and analysis (Kuckartz, 2014). An inductive approach was employed to identify themes and categories and finally, the coding frame was developed according to key elements of the AEP and the internationalisation of higher education. The analysis of the qualitative data through Nvivo 11 software facilitated the production of an exact transcription and allowed the use of direct quotations in the results section (Kuckartz, 2014).

Findings

The results of the semi-structured interviews show that the impact of the AEP can be seen in six domains in the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia (Figure 1). These are international and inter-regional cooperation, networks and networking, exchange programmes, industry-academia collaboration, academic qualifications recognition and continuing and professional education. The insights and views of the interviewees are provided in the themes below.



Figure 1: The outcomes of the AEP in the higher education internationalisation in Malaysia

International and interregional cooperation

The first factor identified was the international and inter-regional cooperation feature of the AEP. Under this theme, interviewees highlighted that the AEP promotes regionalism and strategic alliances. An expert in the area of internationalisation and former Director-General of Department of Higher Education (DHE) stated that *“it is interesting to see Asia and Europe coming together to forge an alliance in higher education matters such as student exchanges, the flow of expertise, research collaboration and collaborative projects in higher education”*. The expert indicated that the strategic alliances through the AEP’s political and stakeholders’ level meetings offer a venue to meet various stakeholders and policymakers between ASEAN, East Asia and the EU. This is the reason why the AEP is vital for higher education cooperation between two important continents in the world, Asia and Europe. A respondent from one of the research universities in the Klang Valley with more than five years of experience in internationalisation said that *“inter-regional cooperation has improved our ability to accept or to interact with people outside ASEAN”*. Furthermore, strategic alliances by sharing and learning best practices contribute to enhanced collaboration between Malaysia and other ASEM partner countries as stated by two Senior Officers of the departments under MOHE as follows; *“Malaysia can work closely with Europe to enhance our higher education system because they have a good system”* and *“I think it can help to enhance the landscape of higher education system in Malaysia”*. In this context, a respondent believed that the international cooperation created via the AEP provides an effective platform for Malaysia to recruit more international post-graduate students from Asia and Europe, one of the key pillars to success in higher education internationalisation (Senior Director of DHE). However, a higher official of MOHE recommended that *“all stakeholders especially Foreign Affairs Ministry of Malaysia must take initiative and focus more on ASEM”* to maintain the effective international and inter-regional cooperation in higher education through the AEP and as a move to go beyond regional cooperation.

Networks and networking

The second theme observed by the interviewees was networks and networking. Interviewees believe that the AEP is the right platform to create more networks in higher education collaboration and would enable Malaysia to interact with networks in Europe and Asia. A respondent from a top research university in Malaysia indicated that *“we are a member of 40 networks, active in all networks and the benefits go to staff, lecturers and students and it finally influence the internationalisation”*. Meanwhile, another respondent from one of the research universities in the north of Malaysia highlights that networks can assist to enhance facilities (infrastructure and lab facilities) for the use of students and faculty members. The networks also assist higher education institutions to achieve community engagement goals. Another important element that makes networks stronger is the credit transfer system. According to a senior officer of an agency under MOHE, the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE) is an exemplary project under ASEM platform that strengthens system-to-system integration and facilitates ASEAN Credit Transfer System and ASEAN-EU Credit Transfer System. The interviewees appeared convinced that the credit transfer system within ASEAN, inter ASEAN-EU and among ASEM partners could enhance internationalisation efforts in Malaysian higher education institutions.

Meanwhile, in terms of networking, the AEP motivates exchanges and effective cooperation as well as provides a platform for improvement in understanding of other ASEM partner countries' higher education systems. Networking *“brings together leaders, researchers and policymakers within that region to collaborate and exchange ideas to face the challenges of the 21st century”* according to a respondent from a top university in Malaysia. *“The establishment of branch campuses of European universities in Malaysia shows the learning commitment between the two regions”* stated by a senior officer responsible for internationalisation in MOHE. The networking opportunities between the ASEM partners, including Malaysia, enhance inter-university cooperation. A senior administrator of a research university in the southern part of Malaysia indicated that networking becomes a part of internationalisation strategies such as benchmarking, reciprocal research and grant opportunities. The interviewees claimed that interregional cooperation such as the AEP helps the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysian higher education institutions. In supporting this, a senior director in charge for TVET and lifelong learning education said that *“the inter-regional cooperation is vital for the creation of relationship and networking. This will help our universities to bit external funding such as from Erasmus+. Besides that, strong networking will enhance the confidence and profile of lectures, staff as well as students”*. Under this development, a senior officer responsible for international relations opined that ASEM should move from cultural exchanges to academic exchanges so that the ASEM education cooperation can bring greater success in higher education cooperation in both regions which at the end can benefit Malaysian higher education internationalisation.

Exchange programmes

The movement of staff, students and faculty members from one country to another through various exchange programmes through the AEP becomes a third theme that can improve the internationalisation process in Malaysian higher education. Interviewees highlighted that international cooperation in higher education promotes exchanges such as joint research and short-term and long-term students and staff exchange programmes. A senior officer heading the strategic planning sector of MOHE expressed that the AEP encourages a working together attitude between two regions and mentioned that *“Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) is an example,*

how Asia and Europe working together for better future in higher education". AEI has conducted the AEI-ASEM Summer School programme since 2015 as a strategy to overcome mobility imbalance between Asia and Europe. Furthermore, a senior executive officer involved in managing an international student's agency commended the AEP: *"we acknowledge the role carried out by the AEP to promote the internationalisation of higher education. Malaysia has signed an MOU with UK-NARIC and has been receiving mobility students from Europe particularly from the United Kingdom, Germany and France"*.

Although exchange programmes could promote greater internationalisation, interviewees indicated that there is no clear definition of balanced mobility. An expert on internationalisation said that balanced mobility depends on a comprehensive understanding and an openness to explore other cultures. The expert added that this is a key reason why the balanced mobility indicators in global ranking matrices should be measured wisely to assess its impact on internationalisation. The importance of exchange programmes has been praised by many officers of MOHE and research universities. However, several interviewees have indicated that few higher education institutions in Malaysia are struggling to implement mobility programmes due to lack of funding and challenges in fulfilling the student's choice of destination country. For example, *"lots of students coming to Malaysia such as from Thailand and Indonesia, but our students don't want to go there"* stated by a senior officer of a research university in the southern part of Malaysia. Likewise, a senior director responsible for internationalisation at the DHE claimed that the regional programme, the ASEAN International Mobility Student Programme (AIMS) is more useful than other inter-regional mobility programmes. Nevertheless, according to an officer of a research university in Klang Valley, mobility programmes are one of the Key Performance Indicators (KPI) of public universities and they need to achieve the KPIs. The interviewees also explained that the private universities in Malaysia do not face any problems in conducting mobility programmes as they have good funding. In summary, an international expert on internationalisation suggested that the AEP initiatives such as the ASEM Work Placement programme and the AEI-ASEM Summer School programme could enhance higher education exchange programmes between ASEM partners, including Malaysia.

Industry-academia collaboration

The fourth factor indicated was the support of the AEP in facilitating industry-academia collaboration. A senior officer responsible for private higher education management at the DHE stated that Malaysia should focus on this theme to produce skilled graduates required by industry for the nation's growth. This is a new development and a significant priority for Malaysia because *"universities no longer providing knowledge but it's linking the knowledge with the skills requested by the industry* (international officers of two research universities in Klang Valley). Therefore, more collaboration with industries is needed to achieve the desired graduate employability. The AEP has emphasised the importance of university-business cooperation since 2011, thus an expert on research and planning of MOHE believed that Malaysia can improve collaboration with European countries by sending Malaysian students for internship and placement programmes at the top European multinational companies in Asia and Europe, including Malaysia. In other words, industry-academia collaboration is vital to enhance Malaysia's higher education internationalisation and for the country to become an international hub of higher education in the region. Indeed, the AEP can provide a platform to learn the best practices of European industry-academia collaboration, if not *"our higher*

education hub may not survive because everything is related to business” as stated by an expert in higher education internationalisation and former Director-General of DHE.

Academic qualification recognition

Academic and qualification recognition was observed as the fifth theme that contributes to enhancing the internationalisation of Malaysian higher education. Mutual recognition of academic qualifications between countries is very important for Malaysian graduates to work freely in other countries. Therefore, *“we want other countries to accept Malaysian students”* as mentioned by a senior officer of the DHE and this can be done by having mutual recognition between Asian and European countries through the AEP initiatives such as the ASEM Bridging Recognition Declaration. Nevertheless, a senior director of an agency under MOHE claimed that currently, mutual recognition is discussed and implemented through bilateral arrangements. Hence, the same director added that *“through the AEP network, Malaysia can find other countries in ASEM to work with Malaysian qualifications agency on quality assurance matters”*. This will ensure Malaysian higher education institutions curriculum are recognised worldwide and achieve global standards. An officer of a top research university also mentioned that their institution has very strict procedures to meet the quality assurance standard.

Thirty European countries are members of ASEM and have harmonised their higher education qualifications recognition by adopting the Bologna Process endorsed in 1999. Although Malaysia is a member of the ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN), a respondent from a strategic planning division of MOHE said that it is very challenging to harmonise the ASEAN qualifications recognition with Bologna Process because *“in ASEAN there are various languages or medium of instruction and different development stages of quality assurance and frameworks, so getting common reference framework is remain big challenges”*. However, a senior expert of internationalisation believes that the Malaysian Qualifications Agency has reached regional and international standards and it can contribute to the development of qualifications assurance and recognition in other ASEM partner countries. This statement is supported by a senior director of an agency under MOHE who stated that Malaysia has participated in qualifications recognition initiatives under the AEP, namely the ASEM Bridging Recognition Declaration. This initiative provides a platform for Malaysia to learn and share best practices to harmonise higher education qualifications recognition through the AEP.

Continuing and professional education

The final theme endorsed by interviewees was continuing and professional education. The interview results showed that in terms of Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) and Lifelong Learning (LLL), Malaysia can learn from Europe to develop and to update existing policies on both fields. *“Malaysia can work closely with Europe to enhance our higher education system in TVET and LLL because they have a good system”* according to a senior director responsible for TVET and LLL at MOHE. Thus, an international expert on internationalisation proposed that Malaysia should work closely with Europe through the AEP to learn best practices of Europe to enhance continuing and professional education in Malaysia. Nevertheless, whatever we learn from Europe *“need to cater and mould with local demand and culture”* as stressed by a senior officer of the DHE.

Currently, continuing and professional education is a major focus of polytechnics and community colleges in Malaysia. Therefore, a Director of the International Office of a research university in Klang Valley said that Malaysia needs assistance from IOs to enhance the TVET and LLL studies at universities level. The director added that *“in university TVET become very less attractive, so something that the AEP can contribute to the Malaysian higher education system on TVET and LLL”*. This indicates that the support of the ASEM Education Secretariat is vital to enhance collaboration in the field of TVET and LLL between Asia and Europe, including Malaysia. Furthermore, the Director-General responsible for TVET and LLL at MOHE also underlined the importance of collaboration on continuing and professional education for upskilling and reskilling TVET lecturers in Malaysia. Besides that, MOHE’s planning and research division senior officer expressed that the mutual understanding in the AEP can create a pathway for Malaysian students to attend short-term TVET and LLL attachment programmes in Asia and Europe to enhance their skills, knowledge and competence that needed by industry and nations. However, *LLL and TVET understanding and cooperation are more easily conducted within regional cooperation* as claimed by the same officer.

Discussion

The nature of ASEM as interregional cooperation, the networking power of ASEM and the four priority themes of the AEP appear to be the key factors that support the internationalisation of Malaysian higher education. Regionalism and strategic alliance were underlined as key elements under the international and inter-regional cooperation that influence Malaysian higher education internationalisation. The significance of regionalism on Malaysian higher education internationalisation efforts through the support of the AEP is in line with the findings of Cabanda, Tan, & Chou (2019). The findings showed that higher education development in the Asian region was influenced by the development in the West or in particular Europe through effective reflection by Asian countries. Similarly, the interview results revealed that the AEP promotes regionalism through stakeholders and political level meetings such as ASEMMEs and senior officials meetings. Dang (2017) specified that the AEP has created a pathway for the development of higher education regionalism in ASEAN. This has encouraged ASEAN countries, including Malaysia to redesign the landscape of higher education to internationalise and compete with other regions. The strategic alliances can be a driving rationale and an instrument for internationalisation (Knight, 2008) and it also can be a cooperative approach for networking (Teichler, 2009). The strong competition among countries is usually accompanied by strategic alliances with selected partners (Kehm & Teichler, 2007). Inter-regional cooperation creates a platform for cooperation and collaboration in the field of higher education with other partners in ASEM and with higher education institutions. The close cooperation with other countries will create an avenue to attract more international students to Malaysia (Arokiasamy, 2011) as interviewees stressed that through the AEP, Malaysia can attract more international post-graduate students.

The interviews emphasised the importance of networks and networking. The networks and networking are vital for the internationalisation of higher education in terms of interaction with other countries, research cooperation, exchange of ideas, credit transfer system, establishment of foreign branch campuses and intercultural understanding. The results are in line with the suggestions of Angress & Wuttig (2018b, 2018a) that networking between ASEM partners will enhance collaboration and strengthen dialogue and cooperation in higher education within the four thematic priorities of the AEP. Girdzijauskaitė et al. (2019) reinforced that strong networking between nations around the world can create multi-layered partnerships, including

the establishment of foreign branch campuses. Recently, in ASEMME7 held in Bucharest, Romania in 2019, the Ministers stressed the pivotal role of networking to enrich the higher education system of ASEM partners through effective cooperation and coordination (ASEMME7, 2019). Networking mostly occurs during the political and stakeholders level meetings. Therefore, the AEP political and the stakeholders' level meetings offer the best opportunities for Malaysian higher education sector to develop networking and gain the internationalisation benefits. The exchange programmes such as staff and student mobility and joint research programmes can enhance Malaysian higher education internationalisation through the support of the AEP. The findings are in line with the MEB (HE) 2015-2025 that states that the importance of expert consultations and professional attachment around the world in enhancing TVET and LLL exchanges through various mobility programmes (MOE, 2015). The Internationalisation Policy for Higher Education that was introduced in 2011 has emphasised staff and students' mobility, academic exchanges and research cooperation to enhance the internationalisation of higher education in Malaysia (MOHE, 2011b). In terms of research collaboration and mobility programmes, a study conducted by Mourato (2019) revealed that collaboration in research, exchange of researchers, staff and students and knowledge transfer has benefited Portuguese social development and economic growth. Thus, a strong collaboration between Malaysia and ASEM partners through the existing AEP initiatives such as the AEI-ASEM Summer School and the ASEF Summer University programmes will most likely benefit Malaysia.

The production of skilled graduates, university curriculum enhancement and internship programme were stressed by interviewees. In the AEP, the ASEM University-Business Forum has been organised since 2010 to develop policies and recommendations to enhance the industry-academia collaboration of ASEM partners (AES, 2019). However, after the fourth forum, it stopped. Malaysia, therefore, has the opportunity to organise the fifth forum to learn best practices from Europe and other Asian partners to produce skilled graduates and to identify strategies for internship programmes. The ASEM Work Placement Programme (AWPP) that was established in 2011 has enhanced graduates skills, capabilities and inter-cultural understanding through an international placement experience. Several higher education institutions in ASEM partner countries have benefited in terms of curriculum development (Angress, 2018). Furthermore, ASEM partners have learned strategies for human capital development and economic growth. Therefore, membership and active participation in the AWPP will assist Malaysia to enhance its industry-academia collaboration.

Mutual recognition on academic qualifications and harmonisation of higher education systems are the major elements of qualifications recognition. The ASEM Education Ministers has made quality assurance and recognition one of the priority themes in 2011. This theme was intended to develop and improve mutual recognition of qualifications and explore the viability of organising the ASEM convention on mutual recognition (ASEMME3, 2011). A study conducted by Shuai & Lang (2017) proved that many international students chose to study in Malaysia due to the recognition of academic qualifications. Meanwhile, Dang (2018b) revealed that the Asian stakeholders and Ministers were eager to learn and implement the Bologna Process for Asian and ASEAN level cooperation and the concept of Erasmus+ to enhance the cross-border mobility of students. Both elements have been stressed in the AEP since 2008, thus, Malaysia has good prospects to learn the best practices of the Bologna Process to harmonise the higher education system within the Asian and ASEAN region.

TVET and LLL policy enhancement and opportunities to learn from Europe are the key elements emphasised under continuing and professional education. Osborne and Borkowska (2017) specified that the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning (ASEM

LLL Hub) has provided information with regards to scholarships and opportunities in LLL research at higher education institutions in ASEM partner countries. Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (UKM), since 2009, has been the coordinator of the “Core Competence Network” that undertook research related to human capital competence (ASEM LLL Hub, 2019). Thus, effective coordination between MOHE and UKM and close collaboration with ASEM partners are imperative to develop policies on LLL in Malaysia. The AEP has placed a strong emphasis on TVET and continuing education to enhance its profile in Asia and Europe (Angress & Wuttig, 2018a). This is vital to meet the skills and knowledge required by employers to meet the challenges of the Fourth Industrial Revolution and it is in line with the aim of Malaysia to make LLL as the third pillar of human capital development in Malaysia (MOHE, 2011a).

Conclusion

The study explored the impact of the AEP on Malaysian higher education internationalisation by delineating the outcomes resulting from it. The findings underlined the significance of international and interregional cooperation, networks and networking, exchange programmes, industry-academia collaboration, academic qualifications recognition and continuing and professional education that influenced the internationalisation process in Malaysian higher education through the AEP. The findings support the imperative of networking and strategic alliances, close collaboration with ASEM partners to enrich staff and student mobility, recognition of academic qualifications, universities ties with industry and enhancement of TVET and LLL to enhance Malaysian higher education internationalisation. The implications of the study can be applied only to the ministry responsible for higher education and research universities in Malaysia. Thus, for future studies, other public universities in Malaysia can be included and the implications of IOs to Malaysian higher education can be conducted. The results of the study highlight Malaysia’s gains through its involvement in the AEP to increase collaboration and enhance the competitiveness of Malaysian higher education. It is hoped that this study has thrown some light on how inter-regional organisations are relevant in assisting the Malaysian national government and higher education stakeholders to learn and share best practices in order to formulate and revise policies on higher education internationalisation effectively.

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A POST-COVID-19 ECONOMIC RECOVERY PROPOSAL: THE NATIONAL DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AUTO-SUSTAINABILITY MODEL (NDEAS-MODEL)

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Abstract

The significant damage of COVID-19 on the world economy forces us to reconsider a deep restructuring domestically and internationally in the next few years. This paper suggests a Post-COVID-19 reconstruction model is called “The National Domestic Economic Auto-Sustainability Model (NDEAS-Model).” The NDEAS-Model proposes four economic platforms: (i) the domestic education and technical training standardization platform (P1); (ii) the domestic productive infrastructure and transportation platform (P2); (iii) the selective strategic trade, investment, and tourism protection platform (P3); (iv) the environmental and natural resources management platform (P4). The main objective of NDEAS-Model is to avoid imported massive pandemic diseases, non-sustainable and weak food security platforms, and job diversion, respectively.

Keywords: Economic Simulation, Massive Pandemics, COVID-19, Policy Modelling, Food Security

Introduction

The national domestic economic auto-sustainability model (NDEAS-Model) applies to any country worldwide. In proposing the application of the NDEAS-Model, this study presents a three-part analysis: (i) an introduction to the NDEAS-Model; (ii) the NDEAS-Model Platform; (iii) how the NDEAS-Model works?; (iv) the last part of the analysis aims to demonstrate the post-effects of NDEAS-Model implementation to generate strong economies after a massive pandemic contagious diseases, and thus, to integrate any country domestically and regionally more than globally. The NDEAS-Model is intended to be a proposal to offer a new economic model to avoid massive pandemic damage. The NDEAS-Model demonstrates the necessary conditions to succeed in any country in the case of worldwide pandemic diseases is essential to implement new economic platforms offered by NDEAS-Model. This research paper proposes the implementation of the NDEAS-Model to help any country reduce its vulnerability in the case of worldwide pandemic diseases anytime and anywhere. The NDEAS-Model will generate sustainable food security in any country. In turn, the job creation (less unemployment) effect will create a spillover effect in any economy in the short run. In the long term, this helps reduce import dependency and imported inflation, respectively.

An Introduction to the national domestic economic auto-sustainability model (NDEAS-Model)

The NDEAS-Model is an equitable and harmonious domestic and neighbor's economic scheme. It is based on the interaction between a series of economic platforms. More precisely, the implementation of the national internal economic auto-sustainability model (NDEAS-Model) involves the application and coordination of a series of economic platforms with social and economic implications at different priorities respectively as well as the use of a new socio-economic development model to replace the global economies integration through the globalization framework by a more robust domestic economies development under the Deglobalization framework. This said interaction is based on four economic platforms: (i) the domestic education and technical training standardization platform (P1); (ii) the domestic productive infrastructure and transportation platform (P2); (iii) the selective strategic trade, investment, and tourism protection platform (P3); (iv) the environmental and natural resources management platform (P4). The coordination and systematic control of these platforms can create favorable conditions to avoid pandemics (imported diseases) and thereby enables countries in any pandemic crisis to protect all nationals from import scarcity, price speculation, imported inflation, and jobs diversion.

As indicated above, the NDEAS-Model adapts its platforms to the requirements and characteristics of any country. The general objective of the NDEAS-Model is to increase the national and neighbors' trade through the increment of national productivity, efficiency, and competitiveness. The principles behind NDEAS-Model are nationalism, cooperation, tolerance, and respect. There are seven specific objectives of the NDEAS-Model theoretical framework:

- (i) Through the combination of its four platforms and the new focus on the support of domestic and neighbors' economies, the NDEAS-Model seeks to serve as a new approach suitable for integrating national economies in massive pandemics, prices speculation, imported inflation, and jobs diversion.
- (ii) The NDEAS-Model seeks to offer a primary mechanism to strengthen the weak areas of any country according to the social, economic, technological, and political situations in any country (Ruiz Estrada 2011) and (Ruiz Estrada and Park, 2018). It also takes into account the internal and external conditions of each country.
- (iii) With its emphasis on the new world order resurgence of Deglobalization, as well as its adoption of a new-functional and flexible structure, the NDEAS-Model presents a new focus for integrating any domestic economy with its neighbors' economies easily.
- (iv) Taking domestic education and training as the pillar of local human capital formation, the NDEAS-Model seeks to create a new type of economic system through the diversification of academic programs at elementary, high school, technical/vocational training, universities and research levels.
- (v) The NDEAS-Model seeks to generate equal benefits to any country. This is done by attaching much attention to firstly, the building of a more robust domestic physical infrastructure to help in the mobility of local goods and the local labor factor; secondly.
- (vi) The NDEAS-Model places much emphasis on the strategic national and neighbored trade, investment, and tourism protection issues.
- (vii) Through the control of natural resources management and pollution by different public institutions and NGO's on the national level.

The National Domestic Economic Auto-Sustainability Model (NDEAS-Model) Platforms

The Domestic Education and Technical Training Standardization Platform (P₁)

The first platform in the NDEAS-Model is the domestic education and technical training standardization platform (P₁). This program uses an action framework to create domestic high qualified human capital based on the standardization of education and training at the national level. In this platform, an action framework is used to standardize private education in the country and to concurrently create the conditions to produce highly qualified domestic labor with high productivity and competitiveness. This pool of capable human capital, in turn, provides goods and services with high added value that competes well in the domestic and international market, as well as serving as a primary tool to reduce unemployment and job creation.

There are four principal domestic activities in this program, namely:

1. Free education to raise their basic education level
2. National coordination and standardization of elementary and high school programs
3. Local development of technical training programs
4. Setting up any national university information network based on joint research and development projects capitalizes on these four activities (Ruiz Estrada, 2005)

This program's general objective is to lay a solid national education foundation for the younger generation in the country so that they can compete domestically and internationally.

At the tertiary level, the development of a domestic technical training program tries to join different academic programs in various scientific fields by exchanging educational programs at the national level, including the transfer of professors and experts and joint research and development (R) in different scientific areas. An exchange of regional professors (and experts) in various fields (for short courses and seminars) should be implemented.

This approach, accompanied by national scholarships at the Master's and Doctoral programs around the world, together with joint research and development (R&D) among universities in the same country, is more likely to meet with success. This approach should be complemented with the offer of national post-graduate scholarships among universities in the same region.

About national technical training, this program proposes a common strategy for the coordination and standardization of national training in different sectors such as agriculture, industry, and services to be put under the purview of national technical institutes and engineering faculties of the universities in the country.

Meanwhile, the national information technology platform should be considered the basis of national education development. It is instrumental in information exchange in the coordination and standardization effort of this education and technical training program. It is responsible for coordinating all programs using information exchange at different levels based on the knowledge and professional training standardization programs.

The Domestic Productive Infrastructure and Transportation Platform (P₂)

This section considers two types of infrastructure and transportation systems in the domestic public infrastructure: transportation and domestic private infrastructure and transportation. It is especially pertinent to pay attention to these two types of infrastructure and transportation

systems in countries with a limited infrastructure budget. This is because the inadequacy of infrastructures and transportation systems creates a constant poverty cycle according to this research and thereby inhibits the national production growth and domestic human development within the country concerned.

The general objective of this joint domestic infrastructure and transportation programs between public and private is to solicit financial support from regional technical and business organizations. These organizations may help to develop better local infrastructure in bilateral or regional negotiations. In this regard, this platform serves as a guide for developing domestic infrastructure and transportation mega-projects proposals to obtain credit from different local financial organizations.

The domestic social infrastructure and transportation systems aim to promote efforts relating to social well-being such as supplies of hospitals assistance in times of natural disasters, epidemics, public transportation systems, provision of schools and universities, as well as installation of national security infrastructures such as police stations, military quarters, and fire stations. All these efforts can significantly serve as a base for economic development in any country concerned: the favourable domestic socio-economic conditions resulting from the improvement of the internal social infrastructures and transportations systems in any country respectively, to reduce its vulnerability.

The other aspect of the platform of the productive infrastructures and transportations systems refers to communication services, public transportation, physical infrastructure cooperation (bridges, highways, railways, airports, and ports).

The Strategic Selective Trade, Investment, and Tourism Protection Platform (P₃)

The third program of the NDEAS-Model is the selective strategic trade, investment, and tourism protection platform (P₃). This platform's general objective is to concentrate efforts within any country and neighbors' countries to create a more reliable platform to promote trade, investment, and tourism at an intra-neighbor level.

More specifically, this module of the NDEAS-Model seeks to expand the national production and exports of any country in different neighbors' markets based on the increment of domestic productivity and competitiveness, as well as to attract into the region direct investment (RDI) and tourists from different neighbors' countries. This platform can also have interested to protect particular strategic food security and manufacturing sectors in case of war, pandemics, and national emergencies.

The efforts adopted for the above objectives include the classification of all essential food items and manufacturing sectors to build a stable food security platform. By participating and support a large number of small and medium producers technically and financially, all essential food items will be easily identified and organized according to a list of national food priorities. In turn, this enables them to produce enough in any national emergency, such as the case of a massive pandemic. It also becomes more comfortable for people to find stocks of food anytime and anywhere. As a result of the above, all small and medium producers who participate in this platform has the same opportunity to compete.

The Environmental and Natural Resources Management Platform (P₄)

The environmental and natural resources management platform (P₄) is the fourth platform in the NDEAS-Model. This module's central idea is to look for a solution to different problems in the environmental and natural resources management and planning of any country. This

module focuses on administrative procedures, legal framework, and institutional organizations to help improve the environment and uses of natural disasters, respectively.

Additionally, it is proposed here that specialized R & D centres be set up to provide consultation and advice to solve environmental and natural disaster management issues. At least three categories of R&D with their respective centres should be put in place:

1. Information and education about the environment
2. The creation of public, legal and institutional platform pro-environment and natural resources management
3. New technologies to benefit the environment and natural resources management

How the NDEAS-Model Works?

For demonstration, this study presents two countries, Country-A and Country-B and two scenarios (S), S1 (without pandemics), and S2 (with pandemics) in the application of the NDEAS-Model.

The Country-A with a secure link with globalization (attached firmly to free trade). The Country-B is also connected to globalization with a higher dependency on the free trade than Country-A ruling under the application of the GATT-international legal framework and the World Trade Organization (WTO) institutionally.

Country-A

It is postulated that the higher free trade. In the case presented here, however, Country-A is trying to attempt to attach more to the dynamic worldwide trade process under the framework of Globalization. The Country-A produces raw materials and some manufacturing products, that is, agricultural products in raw forms. As raw materials, Country-A has low added value and thus commands low prices in the international market. Similarly, the industrial structure of Country-A is minimal and limited in number. Although country-A exists relatively less environmental and pollution problems than Country-B in the short run, it lacks continuous massive exploitation of its natural resources exist a high probability of getting high levels of pollution in Country-A. The deficit in the balance of trade shows the trade dependency level of capital goods and intermediate goods imported from Country-B. In this case, we don't have any massive pandemic. Therefore, Country-A would have to depend on the Country-B for capital goods and intermediate goods. As a result, Country-A always has a higher deficit in its balance of trade about Country-B. Thus, Country-A still has a high debt in its balance of business, respectively.

Besides a high deficit in its balance of trade, Country-A also has a low income with low national productivity. Consequently, both the national saving level (saving = investment) and the domestic investment are low. In the case of investment is expensive and difficult to obtain by the private sector at the national and regional levels, because the interest rate is higher for the limited nationwide savings in Country-A. The limited savings face a series of obstacles in its attempt to increase investment for domestic production. Therefore, the export supply is smaller.

Additionally, the small export supply is also affected by poor add value and diversity of products and services. The high cost of production stems from the higher production cost. The

high cost of production affects the domestic and regional market prices directly. As a result, the local high qualified workers is lower; consequently, unemployment is higher.

Also, the infrastructure and transportation systems in Country-A is smaller. In this case, Country-A consumption is higher under free trade with Country-B in the form of trade liberalization under the assumption of non-existent imported inflation. Our assumption as to why the use in Country-A is higher is based on the import dependency and fragile national food security. Another issue affecting Country-A is the weak legal framework and justice, high financial speculation, income inequality, political instability, high corruption, high bureaucracy, and scarcity of information. About the country, small amounts of qualified labor supply, limited physical infrastructure. However, the cost of production in Country-A is higher from its significant dependency on imports from Country-B always. Country-A is faced with a high rate of unemployment. This constitutes a substantial obstacle to uplifting the standard of education in these countries and the reason behind the low labor productivity at the regional level. The smaller human capital high qualified supply also creates a significant obstacle to transforming the production sector of any country and hence, the quest to produce new goods and services with more high add value. In addition to the above shortcomings, Country-A has scarce physical infrastructure and transportation systems, a high gross population rate, a high level of poverty, and imbalance wealth distribution. As regard politics, Country-A experiences an unstable political instability. This is due to fragile democracies with a flexible legal framework and a lack of government institutions in Country-A. The economic elites also have a minimal interest to integrate within a single and sustainable national economic development model (see Figure 1).

Country-B

Country-B has a better scenario compared to Country-A. At the same time, Country-A has less advantage than Country-B. Country-A has a position with more natural resources and less pollution compared to Country-B with high pollution and vulnerable to get any time a massive epidemic. The Country-B economy is based on the high technology industries and services. In this case the production of Country-B shows high value-added, or in other words, the creation of industrial goods. Country-B has a comparative advantage based on the low production cost in terms of high productivity and a high number of qualified workers in the labor market. Therefore, Country-B employment is higher because the Country-B offers products with top value-added products to Country-A. However, the impact of a massive epidemic on Country-B can automatically stop to trade with Country-A (exports and imports) and starts to affect directly on the consumption of Country-A. If both countries stop to purchase, then Country-A can experience imported inflation effectively, and at the same time, jobs diversion from Country-A and Country-B. The crux of the problem comes about when, due to the comparatively higher cost of producing a commodity in Country-B due to higher labor cost (quarantine effect), Country-B experiences higher domestic inflation, at the same time higher unemployment simultaneously. Nevertheless, in the case of Country-A, the opposite situation is right to exist the possibility of closed trade with Country-B originated by a massive epidemic and open potential to job creation in Country-A (reduction of its unemployment) in the short-run (see Figure 2). This is, in effect, the situation before the implementation of the NDEAS-Model.

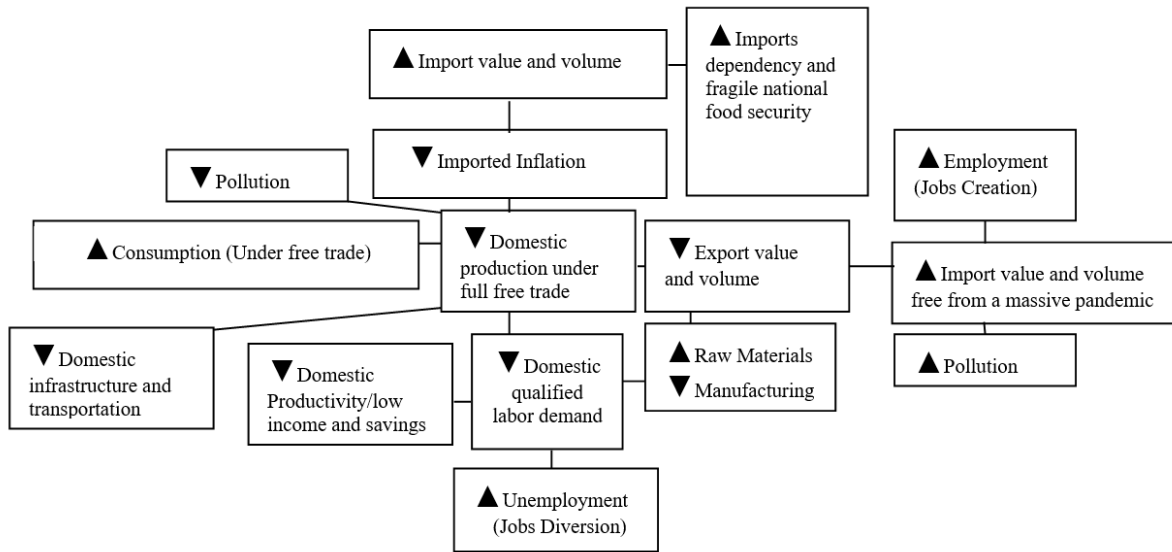


Figure 1: The Country-A Situation Without Any Massive Pandemic Diseases from Country-B

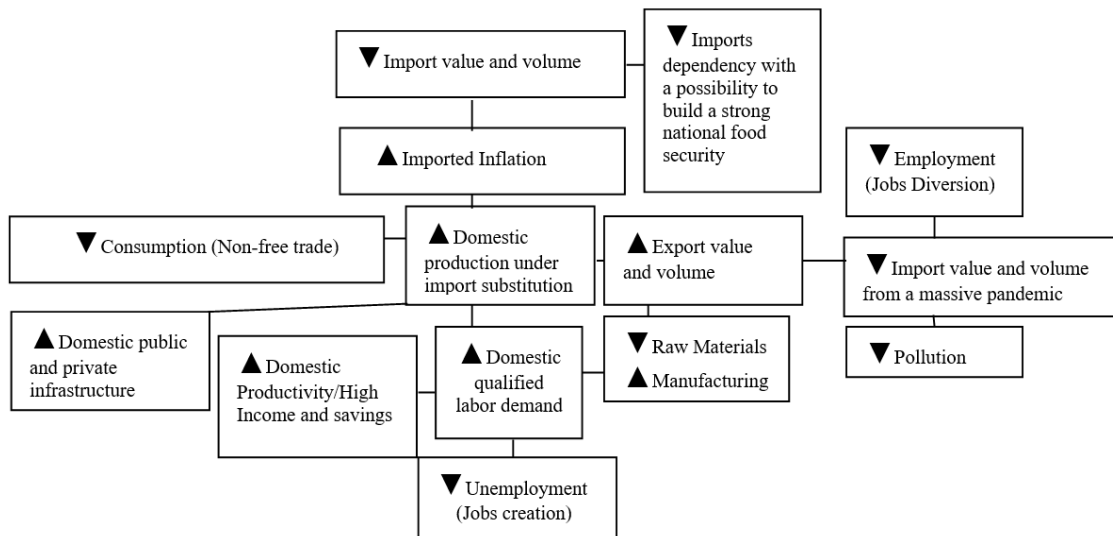


Figure 2: The Country-A situation With a Massive Pandemic Diseases from Country-B

▲ = Increase

▼ = Decrease

Source: The author

Post-Effects of the NDEAS-Model

Before the NDEAS-Model is applied in any country initiative around the world, it is recommended that an analysis of the following aspects as a whole be carried out: culture, history, stage of economic and social development, stage of the regional integration process, political situation, legal framework, local institutions available and the needs of each country. This research paper proposes the application of the four platforms to the analysis. These four platforms are used as a list of necessities and priorities that each country presents.

The four platforms of the NDEAS-Model, as explained in the earlier part of this paper are:

- The domestic education and technical training standardization platform (P1)
- The internal productive infrastructure and transportation platform (P2)
- The selective strategic trade, investment, and tourism protection platform (P3)
- The environmental and natural resources management platform (P4)

The NDEAS-Model Platforms Objectives

The Domestic Education and Technical Training Standardization Platform (P₁)

In this research paper, the general objective of the domestic education and technical training standardization platform (P1) is to increase the qualified local labor (soft technology) to enhance productivity and create new goods and services with high added-value for new market niches. It is based on innovation, strategies, and plans to develop new products and services for the local market. P1 can generate more jobs (jobs creation) with high productivity.

The above development, in turn, brings about a rise in the income and hence the savings among people in the country. The next positive result will then be an increase in the productivity derived from the P1 implementation. If productivity is higher, then the income and savings also can increase simultaneously. It pushes down the cost of production because the investment is equal to savings.

The Domestic Productive Infrastructure and Transport Platform (P₂)

This module is meant to create the conditions for the formation of domestic public and private infrastructure and transportation systems for the mobility of goods and labor domestically and internationally (import & export) of any country. The local public and private infrastructure and transportation systems can help increase domestic production and international trade of any country based on the implementation of better ports, airports, highways, railways, tunnels, and bridges. The (P2) can help considerably to generate jobs and attract investors domestically and internationally.

The Strategic Selective Trade, Investment, and Tourism Protection Platform (P₃)

In the light of the new international image of Country-A following the developments achieved through P1 and P2, the promotional programs in P3 further strengthen these developments by generating from the domestic market and thereby creates more business opportunities at the local and neighbor's level.

The P3 is based on work together in both the private and public sectors in the same country. Such an open atmosphere created in Country-A provides equal opportunity and equal conditions to all its local small and medium producers and neighbors producers in all aspects of the trade, investment, and tourism. This is manifested in the design of universal and equitable strategies for all local small, and medium producers are done efficiently.

In short, through P3, Country-A as a whole will have an improved food security program, but a shared identity as a capable country to survive in case of a massive pandemic. This platform demands the collaboration and coordination of industry and trade, exporters union (traditional and non-traditional products), chambers of commerce, tourism promotion agencies, ministry of agriculture, and ministry of foreign affairs in the same country.

The Environmental and Natural Resources Management Platform (P4)

The last platform, the environmental and natural resources management platform (P4), aims to look for a solution to different problems that any country faces while trying to decrease pollution and better manage natural resources through intensive controls institutionally and legally. This module will improve the administrative procedures, legal framework, and institutional organizations related to better management of pollution controls and pro-environmental policies.

Considerations in the Application of NDEAS-Model

The application of NDEAS-Model is slightly varied by country. It is important to note that the necessary step to take in the NDEAS-Model for integrating any domestic economy is to foster local production reorganization to solve the structural differences of any country. In the case of Country-A, it depends on the application of the NDEAS-Model four platforms geared towards robust partial import substitution in strategic food security items and manufacturing sectors in case of a massive pandemic. This is the first step towards helping local small and large producers that do not have sufficient credit and training to compete in the domestic market.

The reduction of import dependency is part of the strategic food security, and manufacturing sector reorganization is the deciding factor for the priority step to take in the NDEAS-Model. Any country with an excellent strategic sustainable food security plan with less import dependency generates less national crisis consumption and more job creation under the domestic level. In the case of a common massive pandemic disease, the success of any country needs to seek a new flexible and sustainable production model, respectively. The NDEAS-Model offers the implementation of its four platforms. On the other hand, for any country whose imports are higher and exports are small, due to their little diversity of products and services with low added value. Their priority should be to implement the partial import substitution model than open trade. This is the step to be taken in any country to reduce risk in case of massive pandemic diseases like COVID-19.

Conclusion

Through the NDEAS-Model, this research paper recognizes the importance of less dependency on imports and national food security in the case of worldwide pandemics. The NDEAS-Model is a showcase of how the negative impact of trade liberalization could be analyzed using the

concepts of jobs-creating effect and jobs-diverting effect. It is concluded here that for the NDEAS-Model, the job-creating effects at the semi-import substitution model could be causal by a deep restructuration in the actual trade liberalization under globalization the implementation of the NDEAS-Model. Specifically, a sustainable food security model is achievable through the full support of a semi-open economy more than an open economy.

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Opinion

UNAVOIDABILITY OF SINO-AMERICAN RIFT: HISTORY OF STRATEGIC DECOUPLING

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Abstract

Does our history only appear overheated, while it is essentially calmly predetermined? Is it directional or conceivable, dialectic and eclectic or cyclical, and therefore cynical? Surely, our history warns (no matter if the Past is seen as a destination or resource). Does it also provide for a hope? Hence, what is in front of us: destiny or future?

Theory loves to teach us that extensive debates on what kind of economic system is most conducive to human wellbeing is what consumed most of our civilizational vertical. However, our history has a different say: It seems that the manipulation of the global political economy (and usage of fear as the currency of control) – far more than the introduction of ideologies – is the dominant and arguably more durable way that human elites usually conspired to build or break civilizations, as planned projects.

Keywords: US, China, decoupling, geopolitics, technology, money, freedoms, multilateralism

Introduction

Americans performed three very different policies on the People's Republic: From a total negation (and the Mao-time mutual annihilation assurances), to Nixon's sudden cohabitation. Finally, a Copernican-turn: the US spotted no real ideological differences between them and the post-Deng China. This signalled a 'new opening': West imagined China's coastal areas as its own industrial suburbia. Soon after, both countries easily agreed on interdependence (in this marriage of convenience): Americans pleased their corporate (machine and tech) sector and unrestrained its greed, while Chinese in return offered a cheap labour, no environmental considerations and submissiveness in imitation. Both spiced it by nearly religious approach to trade.

However, for each of the two this was far more than economy, it was a policy – Washington read it as interdependence for transformative containment and Beijing saw it as interdependence for a (global) penetration. In the meantime, Chinese acquired more sophisticated technology, and the American Big tech sophisticated itself in digital authoritarianism – 'technological monoculture' met the political one.

But now with a tidal wave of Covid-19, the honeymoon is over.

(These days, many argue that our C-19 response is a planetary fiasco, whose size is yet to surface with its mounting disproportionate and enduring secondary effects, causing tremendous

socio-economic, political and psychosomatic contractions and convulsions. But, worse than our response is our silence about it.¹

E.g. *Le Monde Diplomatique* – while examining the possible merge between tech oligopoly and political monopoly – claims: “Political decisions have been central in shaping this tragedy — from the destruction of animal habitats, to the asymmetric funding of medical research, to the management of the crisis itself. They will also determine the world into which we emerge after the worst is over.” Over the past 30 years, every critical conjecture had a similar epilogue: pardon and enhancement for the capital, a burden and suppression for the labour. The C-19 is no exception to it: Ever since early lockdowns of March 2020, the (gross) capital flows unhindered while the labour, ideas and humans are under the house arrest. The XXI century frontline is the right to health and labour, privacy and human rights. (LMD, IV20))

Still to be precise, the so-called virus pandemic brought nothing truly new to the already overheated Sino-American relations and to the increasing binarization of world affairs: It only amplified and accelerated what was present for quite some time – a rift between alienated power centres, each on its side of Pacific, and the rest. No wonder that the work on the C-19 vaccine is more an arms race than that it is a collaborative humanistics.

Would it be about an expansion of techno-totalitarian model of government as an alternative to liberal democracy? Devolutionary singularisation into techno-feudalism? And, is now a time to return to the nation-state, a great moment for all dictators-in-waiting to finally build a cult of personality? Hence, will our democracy be electro-magnetised and vaccinated for a greater good (or greedier ‘god’)?

This text examines a prehistory of that rift; and suggests possible outcomes past the current crisis.

¹ It is an established fact that the quintessence of Nazism was not Hitler and the circle of darkness around him. It was rather a commonly shared ‘banality of crime’ atmosphere: an acceptance of ordinary village people living next to Auschwitz, Treblinka, Dachau ... The day when questioning stops and silent acceptance becomes a ‘new normal’ is a day when fascism walks in a big time. Or, manufacturing consent through choice architecture, of a fear-imprisoned psychology. So, our C-19 response illustrates – the argument goes – nothing else but a social pathology: the non-transparent concentration of power and our overall democracy recession – further bolstering surveillance and social control systems; lasting consequences of cutbacks, environmental holocaust, privatisation of key intergovernmental and vital national institutions, ill-fated globalisation on (overly allopathic, mandated drugs -centred) healthcare, and lack of public data commons. Pandemic or *plundermic* ...

Early lockdowns, mid-March 2020, were justified by a need to *flatten the curve* of the ‘sudden’ virus impact, since there were *no enough hospital beds*. In the meantime, the lockdowns were extended and widened, curves not arguable changed. Still, for the past 9 months, there is hardly any new hospital built in the EU although the non-essential medical services are by and far suspended. Nor, there is any massive investment into general health prevention. The only visible infrastructure growth is in 5/6G networks expansion.

Following a simple ratio that *the one’s level of health is genetic expression of life-style choices made*, it is no surprise that there are also growing speculations if the lockdown – as the most notorious expression of monofocal perspective and rejection to any scientific debate-based integrated judgment, is invasion or protection: Whether the aim is a herd-immunity or herd loyalty (and to it related growing, yet still unrefuted, rumour that the eventual C-19 vaccine might contain biohacking nano-properties which establish backdoor interface via extensively set 5/6G). And, if there any back-to-normal exit from the crisis or will this disaster ‘turned into planetary terror, through global coup d’état’ be exploited to further something already pre-designed (with a fear, not as a side-effect, but rather as a manufactured tool to gain control) – more related to bionics and demographics, than to health and economics or any common social purpose.

Origins of Future

Does our history only appear overheated, while it is essentially calmly predetermined? Is it directional or conceivable, dialectic and eclectic or cyclical, and therefore cynical? Surely, our history warns (no matter if the Past is seen as a destination or resource). Does it also provide for a hope? Hence, what is in front of us: destiny or future?²

Theory loves to teach us that extensive debates on what kind of economic system is most conducive to human wellbeing is what consumed most of our civilizational vertical. However, our history has a different say: It seems that the manipulation of the global political economy (and usage of fear as the currency of control) – far more than the introduction of ideologies – is the dominant and arguably more durable way that human elites usually conspired to build or break civilizations, as planned projects. Somewhere down the process, it deceived us, becoming the self-entrapment. How?

One of the biggest (nearly schizophrenic) dilemmas of liberalism, ever since David Hume and Adam Smith, was an insight into reality: Whether the world is essentially *Hobbesian* or *Kantian*. As postulated, the main task of any liberal state is to enable and maintain wealth of its nation, which of course rests upon wealthy individuals inhabiting the particular state. That imperative brought about another dilemma: if wealthy individual, the state will rob you, but in absence of it, the pauperized masses will mob you.

The *invisible hand* of Smith's followers have found the satisfactory answer – sovereign debt. That 'invention' meant: relatively strong central government of the state. Instead of popular control through the democratic checks-&-balance mechanism, such a state should be rather heavily indebted. Debt – firstly to local merchants, than to foreigners – is a far more powerful deterrent, as it resides outside the popular check domain.

With such a *mixed blessing*, no empire can easily demonetize its legitimacy, and abandon its hierarchical but invisible and unconstitutional controls. This is how a debtor empire was born. A blessing or totalitarian curse? Let us briefly examine it.

The Soviet Union – much as (the pre-Deng's) China itself – was far more of a classic continental military empire (overtly brutal; rigid, authoritative, anti-individual, apparent, secretive), while the US was more a financial-trading empire (covertly coercive; hierarchical, yet asocial, exploitive, pervasive, polarizing). On opposite sides of the globe and cognition, to each other they remained enigmatic, mysterious and incalculable: *Bear* of permafrost vs. *Fish* of the warm seas. Sparta vs. Athens. Rome vs. Phoenicia... However, common for both (as much as for China today) was a super-appetite for omnipresence. Along with the price to pay for it.

Consequently, the Soviets went bankrupt by mid 1980s – they cracked under its own weight, imperially overstretched. So did the Americans – the 'white man burden' fractured them

² Flow and irreversibility (as well as the non-directionality and the Boltzmann's unfolding) of time is one of the fundamental principles that governs visible (to say; comprehensible) universe. If and when so, the Future itself must be certain, but unshaped. Hence, Future is a manifestation of the second law of thermodynamics (one of the fundamental principles of chemo-physics that governs us), but it also has to be (a net sum of) our collective projection onto the next: Collapse of the (multivectoral) probability and its realisation into (a four dimensional) possible tomorrow. For a clerical reason, we tend to deduce future events from human constructs (known as the theoretical principles) or to induce them from deeply rooted/commonly shared visions (known as past experience).

already by the Vietnam war, with the *Nixon shock* only officializing it. However, the US imperium managed to survive and to outlive the Soviets. How?

The United States, with its financial capital (or an outfoxing illusion of it), evolved into a debtor empire through the Wall Street guaranties. Titanium-made *Sputnik* vs. gold mine of printed-paper... Nothing epitomizes this better than the words of the longest serving US Federal Reserve's boss, Alan Greenspan, who famously quoted J.B. Connally to then French President Jacques Chirac: "True, the dollar is our currency, but your problem". Hegemony vs. *hegemoney*.

House of Cards (Forever $r > g$)

Conventional economic theory teaches us that money is a universal equivalent to all goods. Historically, currencies were a space and time-related, to say locality-dependent. However, like no currency ever before, the US dollar became – past the WWII – the universal equivalent to all other moneys of the world. According to history of currencies, the core component of the non-precious metals' money is a so-called promissory note – intangible belief that, by any given point in future, a particular shiny paper (self-styled as money) will be smoothly exchanged for real goods.

Thus, roughly speaking, money is nothing else but a civilizational construct about imagined/projected tomorrow – that the next day (which nobody has ever seen in the history of humankind, but everybody operates with) definitely comes (i), and that this tomorrow will certainly be a better day than our yesterday or even our today (ii).

This and similar types of collective constructs (horizontal and vertical) over our social contracts hold society together as much as its economy keeps it alive and evolving. Hence, it is money that powers economy, but our blind faith in constructed (imagined) tomorrows and its alleged certainty is what empowers money.

Tellingly, the universal equivalent of all equivalents – the US dollar – follows the same pattern: Bold and widely accepted promise. For the US, it almost instantly substantiates extraterritorial economic projection: American can print (any sum of) money without fear of inflation. (Quantitative easing is always exported; value is kept home.)

(Empire's currency loses its status when other nations lose confidence in ability of that imperial power to remain solvent. For the pre-modern and modern history, it happened with 5 powers – two Iberian, Dutch, France and the UK – before the US dollar took the role of world reserve currency. Interestingly, each of the empires held it for roughly a century. The US century is just about to expire, and there are already contesters, territorial and non-territorial, symmetric and asymmetric ones. On offer are tangibles and intangibles: gold, cryptocurrencies, and biotronics/nano-chemoelectricals.)

But, what does the US dollar promise when there is no gold cover attached to it ever since the time of Nixon shock of 1971?

Pentagon promises that the oceanic sea-lanes will remain opened (read: controlled by the US Navy), pathways unhindered, and that the most traded world's commodity – oil, will be delivered. So, it is not a crude or its delivery what is a cover to the US dollar – it is a promise that oil of tomorrow will be deliverable. That is a real might of the US dollar, which in return finances Pentagon's massive expenditures and shoulders its supremacy.

Admired and feared, Pentagon further fans our planetary belief in tomorrow's deliverability – if we only keep our faith in dollar (and hydrocarbons' energized economy), and so on and on in perpetuated circle of mutual reinforcements.

(Supplementing the Monroe Doctrine, President Howard Taft introduced the so-called 'dollar diplomacy' – in early XX c. – that “substitutes dollars for bullets”. This was one of the first official acknowledgements of the Wall Street – Pentagon symbiotic link.)

These two pillars of the US might from the East coast (the US Treasury/Wall Street and Pentagon) together with the two pillars of the West coast – both financed and amplified by the US dollar, and spread through the open sea-routes (Silicone Valley and Hollywood), are an essence of the US posture. Country that hosts such a dream factory, as the US does Hollywood, is easy to romanticize – though other 3 pillars are to take and to coerce.

This very nature of power explains why the Americans have missed to take the mankind into completely other direction; towards the non-confrontational, decarbonized, de-monetized/de-financialized and de-psychologized, the self-realizing and green humankind. In short, to turn history into a moral success story. They had such a chance when, past the Gorbachev's unconditional surrender of the Soviet bloc, and the Deng's Copernicus-shift of China, the US – unconstrained as a *lonely superpower* – solely dictated terms of reference; our common destiny and direction/s to our future/s.

Winner is rarely a game-changer

Sadly enough, that was not the first missed opportunity for the US to soften and delay its forthcoming, imminent multidimensional imperial retreat. The very epilogue of the WWII meant a full security guaranty for the US: Geo-economically – 54% of anything manufactured in the world was carrying the *Made in USA* label, and geostrategically – the US had uninterruptedly enjoyed nearly a decade of the 'nuclear monopoly'. Up to this very day, the US scores the biggest number of N-tests conducted, the largest stockpile of nuclear weaponry, and it represents the only power ever deploying this 'ultimate weapon' on other nation.

To complete the irony, Americans enjoy geographic advantage like no other empire before. Save the US, as Ikenberry notes: “...every major power in the world lives in a crowded geopolitical neighborhood where shifts in power routinely provoke counterbalancing”. Look the map, at Russia or China and their packed surroundings. The US is blessed with its insular position, by neighboring oceans. All that should harbor tranquility, peace and prosperity, foresightedness.

Why the lonely might, an *empire by invitation* did not evolve into empire of relaxation, a generator of harmony? Why does it hold (extra-judicially) captive more political prisoners on Cuban soil than the badmouthed Cuban regime has ever had? Why does it remain obsessed with armament for at home and abroad? Why existential anxieties for at home and security challenges for abroad? Eg. 78% of all weaponry at disposal in the wider MENA theater is manufactured in the US, while domestically Americans – only for their civilian purpose – have 1,2 small arms pieces per capita.)

Why the fall of Berlin Wall 30 years ago marked a beginning of decades of stagnant or failing incomes in the US (and elsewhere in the OECD world) coupled with alarming inequalities. What are we talking about here; the inadequate intensity of our tireless confrontational push or about the false course of our civilizational direction?

Indeed, no successful and enduring empire does merely rely on coercion, be it abroad or at home. The grand design of every empire in past rested on a skillful calibration between obedience and initiative – at home, and between bandwagoning and engagement – abroad. In XXI century, one wins when one convinces not when one coerces. Hence, if unable to escape its inner logics and deeply rooted appeal of *confrontational nostalgia*, the prevailing archrival is only a winner, rarely a game-changer.

How did we miss to notice it before? Simply, economy –right after history– is the ideologically most ‘colored’ scientific discipline of all.

To sum up; After the collapse of the Soviet Union, Americans accelerated expansion while waiting for (real or imagined) adversaries to further decline, ‘liberalize’ and bandwagon behind the US. One of the instruments was to aggressively push for a greater economic integration between regional and distant states, which – as we see now, passed the ‘End-of-History’ euphoria of 1990s – brought about (irreversible) socio-political disintegration within each of these states.

A Country or a Cause, Both or None?

Expansion is the path to security dictatum, of the post-Cold War socio-political and (hyper-liberal) economic mantra, only exacerbated the problems afflicting the *Pax Americana*, which acidified global stewardship; hence oceans, populations and the relations to the unbearable levels. That is why and that is how the capability of the US to maintain its order started to erode faster than the capacity of its opponents to challenge it. A classical imperial self-entrapment (by the so-called bicycle theory: keep pedalling same way or topple over).

Clearly, the US post-Cold War preponderance is now challenged in virtually every domain: America can no longer operate unrestrained in the traditional spheres of land, sea and air, not in newer ones like the (near and deeper) outer space and cyberspace. The repeated failure to notice and recalibrate such an imperial emasculation and retreat brought the painful hangovers to Washington, the most noticeably, by the last two presidential elections.³ Inability to manage the rising costs of sustaining the imperial order only increased the domestic popular revolt and political pressure to abandon its ‘mission’ altogether. (E.g. during the peak times of its longest – still ongoing – foreign intervention, the US was spending some \$110 billion per annum in Afghanistan, roughly 50% more than annual American federal spending on education.) Perfectly hitting the target to miss everything else ...

In short, past the Soviet collapse Americans intervened too much abroad, regulated too little at home, and delivered less than ever – both at home and abroad. Such model attracts none.⁴ No wonder that today all around the globe many do question if the States would be appealing ever again. Domestically, growing number of people perceive foreign policy mostly as an expensive

³ Average American worker is unprotected, unorganised/disunionised, disoriented, and pauperised. Due to (the US corporate sector induced) colossal growth of China, relative purchasing power of American and Chinese labourer now equals. At present, the median US worker would frictionlessly accept miserable work conditions and dismal pay, not too different from the one of the Chinese labourers – just to get a job. The first to spot that and then wonderfully exploited it was the Trump team.

⁴ “A rogue superpower ... colossus lacking moral commitments ... aggressive, heavily armed, and entirely out for itself. ... some US security guaranties have started to look like protection rackets. ... participates in international institutions but threatens to leave them when they act against US narrow interests; and promotes democracy and human rights, but mainly to destabilize geopolitical rivals” – enumerates some in the long list of contemporary US sins prof. Beckley (Beckley, M. (2018) *Unrivaled: Why America Will Remain the world’s Sole Superpower*, Cornell University Press).

destruction, divinized trade and immigration as destroyers of jobs and communities. Its political system is unable to decouple and deconcentrate wealth and power which suffocates the very social fabrics.

Hence, Americans are not fixing the world anymore. They are only managing its decline. Look at their footprint in former Yugoslavia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Georgia, Libya, Syria, Ukraine or Yemen – to mention but a few. Violence as a source of social cohesion is dying out.

When the Soviets lost their own indigenous ideological matrix and maverick confrontational stance, and when the US dominated West missed to triumph although winning the Cold War, how to expect from the imitator to score the lasting moral or even a temporary economic victory?

Dislike the relationship with the Soviets Union which was on one clear *confrontational acceptance* line from a start until its very last day, Americans performed three very different policies on the People's Republic: From a total negation (and the Mao-time mutual annihilation assurances), to Nixon's sudden cohabitation. (Withdrawal of recognition from Formosa to Beijing formally opened relations between the two on 1 January 1979. On a celebratory tour to America later that very month, Deng Xiaoping recommended that China and the US were 'duty bound to work together [and unite] to place curbs on the polar bear').

Finally, a Copernican-turn: the US spotted no real ideological differences between them and the post-Deng China. This signalled a 'new opening' – China's coastal areas to become West's industrial suburbia. Soon after, both countries easily agreed on interdependence: Americans pleased their corporate (machine and tech) sector and unrestrained its greed, while Chinese in return offered a cheap labour, no environmental considerations and submissiveness in imitation. However, for both it was far more than economy lubricated by sanctified free trade, it was a policy – Washington read it as interdependence for transformative containment and Beijing saw it as interdependence for (global) penetration. Americans were left in a growing illusion that the Sino growth is on terms defined by them, and Chinese – on their side – grew confident that these terms of economic growth are only accepted by them.

The so-called Financial crisis 2008/09 (or better to say the peak time of Casino economy) undermined positions of the largest consumer of Chinese goods (US), and simultaneously boosted confidence of the biggest manufacturer of American products (PRC). Consequently, soon after; by 2012, Beijing got the first out-of-Deng's-line leadership. (One of the famous Asia's Bismarck dictatums was 'hide the capabilities, bide your time' – a pure Bismarckian wisdom to deter any domestic imperialism in hurry.)

However, in the process of past few decades, Chinese acquired more sophisticated technology, and the American Big tech sophisticated itself in digital authoritarianism.

But, as America (suddenly) returns home, the honeymoon seems over now.

Why does it come now? Washington is not any more able to afford treating China as just another trading partner. Also, the US is not well situated to capitalize on Beijing's eventual belligerence (especially with Russia closer to China than it was ever before).

The typical line of western neo-narrative goes as: 'The CCP exploited the openness of liberal societies and particularly its freedom of speech as to plunder, penetrate and divert'. And; 'Beijing has to bear the reputational costs of its exploitative practices'.

Accelerating collision course already leads to the subsequent calls for a strategic decoupling (at best, gradual disengagements) of the two world's largest economies and of those in their orbits. Besides marking the end of global capitalism which exploded since the fall of Berlin Wall, this may finally trigger a global realignment. The rest of the world would end up – willingly or not – in the rival (trade) blocks. It would not be a return to 1950s and 1960s, but to the pre-WWI constellations.

Epilog is plain to see: Neither more confrontation and more carbons nor more weaponized trade and traded weapons will save our day. It failed in our past; it will fail again any given day.

Entrapment in Imitation

Interestingly, China opposed the I World, left the II in rift, and ever since Bandung of 1955 it neither won over nor (truly) joined the III Way. Today, many see it as a main contestant, a leader from the global South. But, where is a lasting success?

There is a near consensus among the economists that China owes its economic success to three fundamental factors. Firstly, it is that the People's Republic embraced an imitative economic policy (much like Japan, Singapore, Taiwan or ROK did before) through Deng-proclaimed opening. Second goes to a modest domestic consumption, and German-like thick home savings. Finally, as the third factor that the economists attribute to Chinese miracle, is a low production costs of Sino nation – mostly on expenses of its aging demography, and on expenses of its own labor force and country's environment.⁵ In short, its growth was neither green, nor inclusive, nor sustainable. Additionally, many would say that Beijing mixes up its nearly obsessive social control, environmental negligence and its dismal human and minority rights with the *right to development*.

Therefore, many observers would agree that the so-called China's miracle is a textbook example of a highly extractive state that generates enormous hidden costs of its development, those being social, environmental and health ones as much as expanding and lasting. And indeed, energy-intensive exports (especially carbon footprint) from China as well as its highly polluting industrial practices (overall ecological footprint) were introduced to and then for a long while tolerated in People's Republic by the West.

Further on, China accepted a principled relation with the US (Russia, too), but insists on transactional one with its neighbors and BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) clients. This reduces the choice (offered by the two protagonists) on selection between the colonial democracy and authoritarian paternalism.

None of the above has an international appeal, nor it holds promise to an attainable future. Therefore, no wonder that the Imitative power fights – for at home and abroad – a defensive

⁵ High tech and know-how appropriation via mandated/forced technology transfers and copy-cats, joint ventures, discriminatory patent-licencing practices and cross-sectoral state-led industrial modernisation have lifted China up the value chain. No wonder that its GDP per capita has jumped from \$194 (1980) to over \$9,000 (2019). Beijing is modernising its navy, and is engaged in international economic expansion and geopolitical projection via its Belt and Road Initiative, and so far has bought, built or is operating 42 ports in 34 countries. In the meantime, Washington is publicly lamenting return to a 'worker-focused trade policy' – as the US Trade Representative Robert E. Lighthizer calls it – and openly objecting to both 'market-distorting state capitalism in China and a dysfunctional WTO'. "No trade policy decision since the end of WWII proved more devastating to working people than the extension of permanent normal trade relations to China in 2000. Despite President Clinton's predictions... , the opposite occurred" – he concludes. (FAM, 99/04/20)

ideological battle and politics of cultural reaction. Such a reactive status quo has no intellectual appeal to attract and inspire beyond its borders.

So, if for China the XIX was a “century of humiliation”, XX “century of emancipation”, should it be that the XXI gets labeled as a “century of imitation”?

(The BRI is what the most attribute as an instrument of the Chinese planetary posture. Chinese leaders promised massive infrastructure projects all around by burning trillions of dollars. Still, numbers are more moderate. As the 2019 *The II BRI Summit* has shown (and the forthcoming BRI Summit of November 2020 may confirm), so far, Chinese companies had invested USD 90 billion worldwide. Seems, neither People’s Republic is as rich as many (wish to) think nor it will be able to finance its promised projects without seeking for a global private capital. Such a capital –if ever – will not flow without conditionalities. The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and the BRICS or ‘New Development’ – Bank have some \$150 billion at hand, and the Silk Road Infrastructure Fund (SRIF) has up to \$40 billion. Chinese state and semi-private companies can access – according to the OECD estimates – just another \$600 billion (much of it tight) from the home, state-controlled financial sector. That means that China runs short on the BRI deliveries worldwide. Ergo, either bad news to the (BRI) world or the conditionalities’ constrained China.)

How to behave in the world in which economy is made to service trade (as it is defined by the Sino-American high priests of globalization), while (preservation of domestic jobs and) trade increasingly constitutes a significant part of the big power’s national security strategy? And, how to define (and measure) the existential threat: by inferiority of ideological narrative – like during the Cold War; or by a size of a lagging gap in total manufacturing output – like in the Cold War aftermath. Or something third? Perhaps a return to an inclusive growth.

If our civilizational course is still the same – the self-realization of mankind; than the deglobalization would be a final price to pay for re-humanization of labor and overall planetary greening. Are we there yet?

Promise of the Schumann Resonance

Earlier in this text, we already elaborated on imperial fictions and frictions: Empires and superpowers create their own realities, as they are not bound to ‘situation on ground’. For them, the main question is never what they can but what they want in international conduct.

For sure, there is no intellectual appeal in a growth without well-being, education that does not translate into fair opportunity, lives without dignity, liberalization without personal freedom. Greening international relations along with a greening of social fabrics and its economy (including the shift to blue and white, sea and wind, energy) – geopolitical and environmental understanding, de-acidification and relaxation is that missing, third, way for tomorrow.

This necessitates both at once: less confrontation over the art-of-day technology and their demopolized redistribution as well as the resolute work on the so-called Tesla-ian implosive/fusion-holistic systems. That would include the free-transfer non-Hertzian energy technologies (able to avoid life in electromagnetic technologically generated soup of unbearable radiation toxicity, actually able to de-toxicate our troposphere from dangerous fields, waves and frequencies emittance - drawing us closer to Schumann resonance); carbon-sequestration; antigravity and self-navigational solutions; bioinformatics and nanorobotics.

Surely, with the bioinformatics and nanorobotics being free from any usage for eugenics' ends (including the vaccination for microchipping purpose).⁶

In short, more of initiative than of obedience (including more public control over data hoovering). More effort to excellence (creation) than a struggle for preeminence (partition). Leader of the world needs to offer more than just money and intimidation.

'Do like your neighbor' is a Biblical-sounding economic prophecy that the circles close to the IMF love to tirelessly repeat. Indeed, it is hard to imagine a formidable national economic prosperity, if the good neighborly relations are not built and maintained.⁷ Clearly, no global leader has ever in history emerged from a shaky and distrustful neighborhood, or by offering a little bit more of the same in lieu of an innovative technological advancement.

(Eg. many see Chinese 5G – besides the hazardous electrosmog of IoT that this technology emits on Earth's biota – as an illiberal innovation, which may end up servicing authoritarianism, anywhere.⁸ And indeed, the AI deep learning inspired by biological neurons (neural science) including its three methods: supervised, unsupervised and reinforced learning can end up by being used for the diffusion of digital authoritarianism, predictive policing and manufactured social governance based on the bonus-malus behavioral social credits.⁹)

Ergo, it all starts from within, from at home; socio-economically and environmentally. Without support from a home base (including that of Hong Kong, Xinjiang and Tibet), there is no game

⁶ Confronting the long-term interests of stakeholders with the short-term interests of shareholders, the multinational and national private sector from both sides of Atlantic exercises disproportionate power in the technological share (infrastructure and data), but also by largely benefiting from massive public research funds while in return paying dismal, negotiable tax if any at all. Far too often it comes with the nondisclosure agreements and other unilaterally beneficial legal instruments as well as with the close ties between the private sector, intelligence agencies and media. The same applies to a big Pharma which increasingly dictates a non-preventive monofocal approach to medicine and research, and controls reporting about it – not always in the name of the public health. Therefore, the above represents the largest underreported threat to our democracy and future societal conduct.

Conclusively, Bioinformatics is a dual-use technology. It has huge weaponization potential for at home and abroad. Consequently, this necessitates a comprehensive legislation which builds up on the Universal Charter and Nuremberg Code and its effective enforcement, nationally and internationally.

⁷ Fully aware of it, China and Russia (in their historical and yet still ongoing rapprochement) are pushing on a new Asian continental/regional security organisation. Building on the best legacy of comprehensive pan-European security mechanism – that of the Vienna-based OSCE (Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe), these two are committing themselves to and inviting their neighbours to join with the CICBMA (Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia), architecting the CSTO (Collective Security Treaty Organisation) and the QCCM (Quadrilateral Cooperation and Coordination Mechanism). It is on a top of already elaborate SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation) and well-functioning economic FORAs – China-run AIIB (Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank) and Russia-backed EAEU (Eurasian Economic Union). Hence, in a matter of just two decades the central section of Eurasian continent became the most multilateralised – and therefore stabile, region of the world. The collective one is far better than the bilateral or selective/Ad Hoc security arrangement preferred by the US in the Asia-Pacific. Alliances are built on shared interested, solidified by formulated principles and maintained on reliability and predictability – hence, are structural stabilisers.

⁸ Seems that China leads but is not alone with its much-criticised bonus-malus social credit system powered by facial recognition technology. Human Rights monitoring agencies (including the US Carnegie Endowment's AI Global Surveillance Index) report that practically each and every of the G-20 countries extensively uses the AI-enabled surveillance appliances, including variety of facial recognition programs, aimed at social 'predictability'. Not to mention that such new technologies are particularly dangerous for weak democracies since many of their digital tools are dual use technology.

⁹ Technology, its innovation and to it related norm-setting institutions are not a fancy item for round-tables' discussions – it is a central element of contemporary global and regional geopolitical competition.

changer. China's home is Asia. Its size and its centrality along with its impressive output is constraining it enough.

Conclusively, it is not only a new, non-imitative, turn of socioeconomics and technology what is needed. Without truly and sincerely embracing mechanisms such as the NAM, ASEAN and SAARC (eventually even the OSCE) and the main champions of multilateralism in Asia, those being India Indonesia and Japan first of all, China has no future of what is planetary awaited – the third force, a game-changer, *discursive power*, lasting visionary and trusted global leader.¹⁰

If there was ever in history a lasting triumph, this is over by now. In the multipolar world of XXI century dominated by multifaceted challenges and multidimensional rivalries, there is no conventional victory. Revolution or restauration?

Post Scriptum:

To varying degrees, but all throughout a premodern and modern history, nearly every world's major foreign policy originator was dependent (and still depends) on what happens in, and to, Russia. So, neither a structure, nor content or overall direction of world affairs for the past 300 years has been done without Russia. It is not only a size, but also a centrality of Russia that matters. That is important as much (if not even more), as it is an omnipresence of the US or a hyperproduction of the PR China. Ergo, that is an uninterrupted flow of manufactured goods to the whole world, it is a balancing of the oversized and centrally positioned one, and it is the ability to controllably corrode the way in and insert itself of the peripheral one. The oscillatory interplay of these three is what characterizes our days.

Therefore, reducing the world affairs to the constellation of only two super-players – China and the US is inadequate – to say least. It is usually done while superficially measuring Russia's overall standing by merely checking its current GDP, and comparing its volume and PPP, and finding it e.g. equal to one of Italy. Through such 'quick-fix', Russia is automatically downgraded to a second-rank power status. This practice is as dangerous as it is highly misleading. Still, that ill-conceived argument is one of the most favored narratives which authors in the West are tirelessly peddling. What many analysts miss to understand, is in fact plain to see; throughout the entire history of Russia: For such a big country the only way to survive – irrespectively from its relative weaknesses by many 'economic' parameters – is to always make an extra effort and remain great power.

To this end, let us quickly contrast the above narrative with some key facts: Russia holds the key positions in the UN and its Agencies as one of its founding members (including the Security Council veto right as one of the P5); it has a highly skilled and mobilized population; its society

¹⁰ Over the past few months, People's Republic has upped the ante in nearly all of its many territorial disputes and even provoked new ones, in another departure from past practice. Beijing has also reversed course when it comes to its national periphery. "Past Chinese leaders, notably Deng Xiaoping and Jiang Zemin, believed in the institutionalized processes of collective leadership. Xi has disabled or neutralized many of these channels. The world may now be getting a sense of what China's decision-making looks like when a singularly strong leader acts more or less on his own" - noted professor Rapp-Hooper recently in her book. That of course triggers constant shockwaves all over Asia. While Indonesia is contemplating the NAM's reload as well as the ASEAN block strengthening, others are reactive. India and Japan, two other Asian heavyweights (and champions of multilateralism), are lately pushed to sign up on the so-called Indo-Pacific maritime strategy with the United States (balancing the recent Pacific trade deal of RCEP). However, none of these three has any coherent plan on what to do on the Asian mainland. They all three differ on passions, drives and priorities. This is so since the truly pan-continental organization is nonexistent in Asia.

has deeply rooted sense of a special historic mission (that notion is there for already several centuries – among its intellectuals and enhanced elites, probably well before the US has even appeared as a political entity in the first place). Additionally and tellingly, Moscow possesses the world's largest gold reserves (on surface and underground; in mines and its treasury bars); for decades, it masters its own GPS system and the most credible outer space delivery systems (including the only remaining working connection with the ISS), and has an elaborate turn-key-ready alternative internet, too.

Finally, as the US Council of Foreign Relations' Thomas Graham fairly admits: “with the exception of China, no country affects more issues of strategic and economic importance to the US than Russia. And no other country, it must be said, is capable of destroying the US in 30 minutes.”

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COVID-19 PANDEMIC'S IMPACT ON THE LABOUR MARKET IN ASEAN COUNTRIES

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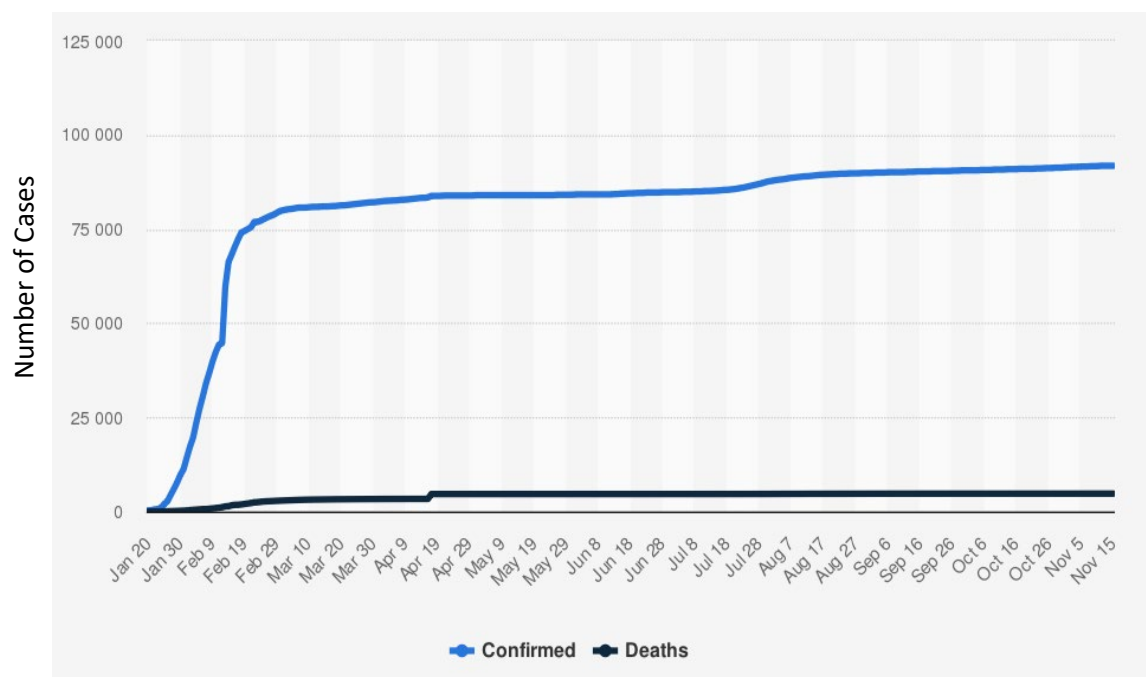
Abstract

This paper aims to examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on the labour market in ten ASEAN countries, namely Brunei, Lao PDR Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Myanmar, Singapore, Vietnam and Thailand. A flu virus first detected in China later affected neighbouring Southeast Asian countries. Although the pandemic has varying implications and at varying levels, it has a negative impact on the ASEAN economies. The labour market is affected as economic activities came to a halt when ASEAN governments-imposed lockdowns or restricted movement. Job losses continue to escalate amid the pandemic, vulnerable workers such as those working in informal sectors, self-employed workers, gig workers, migrant workers, and micro, small and medium enterprises are facing a tough labour market and also at risk of losing livelihood due to lockdown. Post-COVID-19, ASEAN region sees the need for collective action to build the economy, leveraging on technology and digital trade. The pandemic may reshape ASEAN's digital landscape in the labour market especially on the way work is done in the future.

Keywords: COVID-19, labour market, pandemic, ASEAN

Introduction

On 31 December 2019, a novel coronavirus in Wuhan City, Hubei Province, was reported to the World Health Organization (WHO) China Country Office (WHO, 2020). The virus has quickly become a far greater global health crisis than the Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (SARS-CoV) of 2003 and the Middle East Respiratory Syndrome Coronavirus (MERS-CoV) of 2012(Li, Liu, Yu, Tang, & Tang, 2020). On 30 January 2020, the WHO stated the new virus as a public health emergency (Zhang & Shaw, 2020). The International Committee for the Taxonomy of Virus (ICTV) on 11 February 2020 described the new virus as a serious acute coronaviral syndrome (SARS-CoV-2) currently referred to as "COVID-19" by the WHO (Sharma, Tiwari, Deb, & Marty, 2020). Coronavirus disease has been declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organization (WHO) on 11 March 2020. (Li et al., 2020).



Source: Statista (2020)

Figure 1: Number of novel coronavirus COVID-19 cumulative confirmed and death cases in China (January 20 - November 15, 2020)

Figure 1 shows that the COVID-19 cumulative number of confirmed cases and deaths in China from 20 January to 15 November 2020. The COVID-19 has infected 91,800 people. 4742 people have died from COVID-19 until 15 November of 2020 in China (Statista, 2020).

On 7 June 2020, a white paper titled "*Fighting COVID-19: China in Action*" was released by the China's State Council Information Office to present its prevention, control, treatment efforts in battling COVID-19 and China's cooperation with the international community (Chinadaily, 2020). Not only does the document contain the efforts and experiences of China in the fight against the pandemic, but it also provides recommendations for other countries on how to win over the coronavirus (Kobierski, 2020).

According to the white paper, there are five stages that China's fight against the COVID-19. The first stage is "*swift response to the public health emergency from 27 December 2019 to 19 January 2020*": China immediately took action to carry out etiological and epidemiological investigations after unknown pneumonia cases were identified (SCIO, 2020). The second stage is "*initial progress in containing the virus from 20 January to 20 February 2020*": due to the rapidly increasing confirmed cases, the Chinese government conducted a crucial step that closed Wuhan's outbound traffic to stem the virus's spread (SCIO, 2020). The third stage is "*newly confirmed domestic cases on the Chinese mainland drop to single digits from 21 February to 17 March 2020*": the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China made a significant decision to coordinate COVID-19 prevention and control with economic and social development, and orderly resumed work and daily life to minimize the losses caused by COVID-19 (SCIO, 2020). The fourth stage is "*Wuhan and Hubei – an initial victory in a critical battle from 18 March to 28 April 2020*": the spread of the national pandemic with Wuhan as

the main battleground was halted (SCIO, 2020). The restrictions for Wuhan City and Hubei Province were lifted, and all Wuhan's hospitalized patients with COVID-19 were discharged. The fifth stage is "*ongoing prevention and control since 29 April 2020*": domestic virus and inbound cases are generally under control (SCIO, 2020). China has made arduous efforts to resume work and reopen schools, and achieved a major strategic success in the nationwide control efforts (SCIO, 2020).

As the end of the April, industrial enterprises (99%), small and medium-sized enterprises (88.4%), and construction projects (95%) nationwide had resumed; while the resumption rate of enterprises and the return to work rate had reached 98.2% and 92.1% respectively in Hubei Province (SCIO, 2020). Thus, China's economic operation is gradually returning to normal (Chinadaily, 2020)..

COVID-19 Pandemic in ASEAN

Southeast Asia was one of the first regions affected due to its close geographical proximity and business travel, tourism and supply chain links to China. The first COVID-19 case was reported in Malaysia on 25 January 2020, prior to the upward swing of cases at the end of February 2020. (Tang 2020). The number of cases remained low and were confined to imported cases until localised cluster began in March 2020.

Table 1: COVID-19 Cases in ASEAN as at 30 September 2020

	Cases	Deaths	Tests	Recovered	Cases per millions
World	33,417,386	1,002,676	-	23,193,238	4,284
China	90,509	4,739	-	85,415	63
USA	7,150,824	205,091	102,342,416	2,794,608	21,604
Indonesia	282,724	10,601	1,962,754	210,437	1,055
Philippines	309,303	5,448	3,680,659	252,930	2,949
Vietnam	1,094	35	261,004	1,007	11
Thailand	3,559	59	849,874	3,370	51
Myanmar	11,631	256	253,704	3,073	218
Malaysia	11,135	134	1,510,390	9,939	357
Cambodia	277	0	10,438	275	17
Lao PDR	23	0	51,882	22	3
Singapore	57,742	27	2,692,047	57,393	10,289
Brunei	146	3	29,841	142	341

Source: CSIS Southeast Asia Program, <https://www.csis.org/programs/southeast-asia-program/southeast-asia-covid-19-tracker-0>, accessed on 30 September 2020.

The active cases in Malaysia declined from a peak of 2,596 in early April to less than 250 cases by late June. The highest number of cases was recorded in the Philippines by the end of September, followed by Indonesia, Singapore and Myanmar. The pandemic is less serious in Thailand, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Vietnam and Brunei. (Table 1).

The Malaysian Government imposed a nationwide Movement Control Order (MCO) intended to flatten the infection curve and to reduce burden on the health care system. Between 18 and 31 March, the public was encouraged to stay at home. All schools from kindergarten to higher education institutions, as well as government and private premises were temporarily closed for two weeks. Essential services, such as water, power, electricity, telecommunications, oil, gas fuel, broadcasting, finance, banks, health, pharmacy, defence, food and retail services, remain available. The MCO was extended by two weeks until 14 April as there were still large numbers of new cases. The MCO has been extended further to 28 April 2020 and to 12 May 2020. During these periods, employees were encouraged to work from home. However, workers in the service sector and other sectors that require workers to be physically present at work to complete their jobs were severely affected. Several stimulus packages have been launched in Malaysia, including electricity discounts, employee monetary assistance schemes, direct cash payments to 4 million low-income households, wage subsidies, SME grants and loans and tax deductions. (The discussion in this paragraph and the following is drawn heavily from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) 2020).

A widespread testing, detailed contact tracking and a mandatory well-implemented quarantine were used to avoid the virus in the neighbouring country, Singapore. However, in April, the city-state experienced a surge of cases involving dormitories of foreign employees. New community infections continue at a lower rate. A 'circuit breaker', similar to the MCO in Malaysia, was implemented on 7 April 2020 to ensure the public to stay at home. The 'circuit breaker' was later extended to 1 June 2020. Singapore reopened schools and 75% of its economy gradually, allowing one-third of employees to return to their work in offices and factories from 2 June 2020. Students from elementary school, secondary school and junior high school returned daily from 29 June 2020.

The Singapore government announced multiple stimulus packages, namely the one-off payments to citizens, wage subsidies, and relief funds to self-employed workers. As part of a workfare income supplement scheme aimed at assisting the bottom 20 percent of the workforce, about 400,000 low-income employees were eligible for cash pay-outs starting on 28 July 2020. A 33-million-dollar campaign was launched by the Singapore Tourism Board to support domestic tourism and redirect foreign spending. The government has spent about 70.4 billion dollars (approximately 20% of GDP) before April in response to the COVID-19. The expenditure was Asia's most extensive and most combative stimulus package. Eventually, in August 2020, Singapore and Malaysia began to reopen their country borders permitting limited business travel among their citizens.

In Indonesia, the government declared an "Emergency of Public Health" on 31 March 2020 enabling regional governments to impose social restrictions such as closing schools and offices and restricting the holding of religious and public meetings. The implementation of quarantines and lockdowns varied considerably, depending on the location. Jokowi unveiled a five-point plan on 4 May 2020 to foresee the second wave of the pandemic: (1) The Large-Scale Social Restriction Evaluation; (2) testing, contact tracking and isolation goals for provinces under the

Large-scale Social Restriction; (3) regulation of migrant workers more rigorously ; (4) Stronger social security net for families with low incomes ; and (5) a feedback hotline about pandemic management by the government. The WHO has put pressure on Jakarta due to its low testing rates compared to other countries worldwide.

With the increased numbers of casualties and deaths, local leaders began to reimpose lockdowns, particularly in Jakarta. The "New Normal" policy of President Jokowi states that touristic destinations are witnessed by thousands of local visitors, with social and religious activities unchecked. The country seems to abandon flattening its curve in favour of economic reopening. Still, official governments and international sources have confirmed that the economy continues to contract, irrespective of whether it is. In addition to strengthening the social safety nets, the government launched some incentive packages to support low-income families, micro-enterprises, and state-owned businesses.

The Philippines recorded the highest number of cases in ASEAN by the end of September 2020. Most restrictions were lifted on 1 June 2020, after 76 days, causing a massive rise of COVID-19 cases. Threatening the public health system, the economic situation of the country continues to worsen. While social mobility constraints and testing have steadily increased across the country, the government is still controlling the virus. The Philippines government has announced a social protection programme for low-income families and health workers, similar to other ASEAN countries. Approximately 3.4 million micro-businesses benefited from a Wage Subsidy Package. President Duterte also adopted a pandemic relief measure of \$3.4 billion to expand healthcare and support to small businesses on 11 September 2020. However, the country continues to be hit by protests against the lack of food and job loss.

The battle against COVID-19 was relatively well-conducted in Thailand with fast lockdown, effective test & tracking and with the already strong health systems. However, Thailand reported a new case on 3 September 2020, after over 100 days without local transmission. Prime Minister Prayuth declared the first state of emergency on 26 March 2020 until the end of August, although lockout action was relaxed on 29 June 2020 for most businesses. Thailand is also expected to be hit hardest economically because of its intense dependence on tourism and exports sector. Thailand declared in September 2020 that it will spend up to 1 billion to help its agricultural sector and build rural employment. The government also announced plans for a new \$ 58 billion stimulus package in funding for workers, infrastructure and job investments, soft loans to SMEs and the Stabilization Fund for Corporate Bond Bonds.

Vietnam was initially able to successfully control the pandemic, despite scarce resources and a busy frontier with China. The first local quarantine orders in Vietnam were declared on 15 February 2020 while the national lockdown commenced on 1st April 2020. On 25 April 2020, the government issued guidelines authorising localities to remove COVID-19 restrictions when the virus had been contained. Prime Minister Nguyen Xuan Phuc declared in March 2020 that he would provide the government with a fiscal stimulus package of \$1.16 billion. The package included tax breaks, deferred tax payments and government infrastructure investment. Furthermore on 24 March 2020 Vietnam also halted stopped rice export to ensure national food safety. Though Vietnam was hit by a second wave spread from Danang City, the COVID-19 was under control at the beginning of September.

The ASEAN region's lowest case counts were held by Myanmar until August 2020. But the number of cases soared sharply thereafter, primarily due to the pandemic in Rakhine State which has spread across the largest cities of Myanmar. In the event of an escalating wave of infections, the under-developed health care system in Myanmar may not be able to cope with the pandemic. In addition, the on-going targeting of the internet ban may lead to some conflicting regions of Myanmar not being aware of the pandemic. Other measures to contain the spread include extending the stay-at-home order and closing schools while businesses are permitted to remain open.

Despite poor healthcare infrastructures and an initially slow response, Cambodia reported few cases and zero casualties. This has contributed to a widespread speculation of inadequate counting of infections. The government declared the closing of schools throughout the country in March 2020. The Ministry of Education approved the reopening of kindergartens and elementary schools by August 2020. The government has already reopened places of worship, educational institutions and several industries with plans to revive the whole economy. Flights to several Chinese cities and some countries in Southeastern Asia have resumed in Cambodia.

Lao People's Democratic Republic, which is the Southeast Asia's most rural nation, was the last to announce its first COVID-19 infection. While the healthcare infrastructure is nearly non-existent, the pandemic has been avoided. This can be explained in terms of geography and demography factors. The Lao People's Democratic Republic is sparsely populated and enclosed by residence who managed to relatively well contain this virus. Like its neighbouring countries, the Lao PDR economy has also been affected despite minimal cases reported. However, Lao's PDR has already resumed travel to many Southeast Asian countries and fostered domestic tourism to improve its economy.

The economies of ASEAN were further affected by China's supply and trade disruptions and by the dramatic drop in foreign tourism, where many countries have taken lockout and social containment action (OECD 2020). Among the most affected are SMEs, services and the tourism industry. Governments of ASEAN have adopted incentives to minimise the economic impact (OECD 2020).

At a regional level, the 26th ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) retreat released a statement calling for concerted action to mitigate the effects of the virus, focusing on technology leveraging and digital commerce, as well as commercial facilitation mechanisms to promote connectivity in the supply chain and sustainability. It is hoped that a post-pandemic recovery plan and a proposed development of the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund will counteract social and economic effects in ASEAN (OECD 2020). Therefore, closer regional cooperation among ASEAN countries is particularly important in the post-COVID 19 period.

General characteristics of the labour market in ASEAN countries

It is interesting to note that there are huge discrepancies in term of geographic size, population and national income among ASEAN countries. Table 2 reports the land area, total population, Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and per capita GDP in these countries. Firstly, the total land area in ASEAN countries amounted to 4.6 million square km. The largest country in term of the area in Indonesia (1.9 million square km) while the smallest country is Singapore (0.7

thousand square km). In term of land area, Indonesia is 2,720 times as large as Singapore. Secondly, the total population in ASEAN countries amounted to 656.3 million. Indonesia is the largest country in term of the population (267.6 million) while Brunei is the smallest country (0.4 million). Indonesia is 669 times as large as Brunei in term of population. Thirdly, the total GDP in ASEAN countries amounted to 3.2 trillion US dollars. Once again, Indonesia has the biggest national income (US\$1.2 trillion) while Brunei has the smallest national income (US\$13.3 million). In term of GDP, Indonesia is 90 time as large as Brunei. Finally, there are three ASEAN countries whose income per person are greater than US\$10,000, namely Singapore (US\$68,487), Brunei (US\$30,204) and Malaysia (US\$11,484). By contrast, there are four countries whose income per person is less than US\$3,000, namely Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Vietnam. These countries are known as CLMV countries. The main objective of ASEAN economic policy is to stimulate economic growth in these CLMV countries to catch with richer ASEAN countries, such as Singapore, Brunei and Malaysia.

Table 2: Geographic size, population and income (2020)

	Land Area (1000 square km)	Total Population (million)	GDP (billion US dollars)	GDP per capita (US dollars)
Brunei	5.7	0.4	13.3	30,240
Cambodia	181.0	15.2	21.8	1,614
Indonesia	1,904.5	267.6	1,200.0	4,460
Lao PDR	237.9	7.1	20.1	2,670
Malaysia	330.8	32.7	381.5	11,484
Myanmar	676.5	52.5	66.1	1,245
Philippines	300.0	109.0	383.3	3,484
Singapore	0.7	5.7	391.3	68,487
Thailand	513.1	69.9	516.0	7,607
Vietnam	331.2	96.2	261.6	2,740
Total	4,681.4	656.3	3,255.0	-----

Source: World Bank (2020)

Table 3 reports four types of labour force participation rate (LFPR), namely the total LFPR, the male LFPR, the female LFPR and the LFPR gap or the difference between male and female LFPR. The findings from the table also indicate that there is a considerable difference in the LFPR among ASEAN countries. Firstly, the average level of total LFPR in ASEAN countries is 64.5. There are two countries whose total LFPR are greater than 70, namely Cambodia (81.7) and Vietnam (76.2). By contrast, there are two countries whose total LFPR is less than 60, namely Lao (40.7) and the Philippines (58.9). Cambodia has the highest level of total LFPR while Lao has the lowest level of the total LFPR. In other words, Cambodia's total LFPR is

almost 2 time as high as Lao’s total LFPR. Secondly, the average level of male LFPR in ASEAN countries is 74.7. There are three countries whose male LFPR are greater than 80, namely Cambodia (88.0), Indonesia (82.2) and Vietnam (81.5). On the other hand, there are two countries whose male LFPR is less than 70, namely Lao (45.2) and Brunei (68.8). Cambodia has the highest level of the male LFPR while Lao PDR has the lowest level of the male LFPR. In other words, the difference in male LFPR between Cambodia and Lao PDR is 42.8. Thirdly, the average level of female LFPR in ASEAN countries is 61.1. There are two countries whose female LFPR are greater than 70, namely Cambodia (75.9) and Vietnam (71.2). Also, there are three countries whose female LFPR is less than 50, namely Lao (36.5), the Philippines (45.3) and Myanmar (48.4). Cambodia has the highest level of the female LFPR while Lao PDR has the lowest level of the female LFPR. In other words, difference in female LFPR between Cambodia and Lao PDR is 39.4. Finally, it should be noted that there are huge discrepancies in the LFPR gap among ASEAN countries. The LFPR gap is difference between male the LFPR and female LFPR. There are four countries whose LFPR gap is greater than 25, namely Indonesia (28.9), Myanmar (28.6), the Philippines (27.1) and Malaysia (25.3). Also, there are four countries whose LFPR gap is less than 15, namely Lao PDR (8.7). Vietnam (10.3), Cambodia (12.1) and Brunei (12.4). It means that Indonesia’s LFPR gap is more than three times as high as Lao PDR’s LFPR.

Table 3: Labour force participation rate (total, male, female and gap) (2020)

	Labour force participation rate (total)	Labour force participation rate (male)	Labour force participation rate (female)	Labour force participation rate (gap)
Brunei	62.7	68.8	56.4	12.4
Cambodia	81.7	88.0	75.9	12.1
Indonesia	67.7	82.2	53.3	28.9
Lao PDR	40.7	45.2	36.5	8.7
Malaysia	67.9	80.0	54.7	25.3
Myanmar	61.4	77.0	48.4	28.6
Philippines	51.9	72.4	45.3	27.1
Singapore	67.7	75.6	60.2	15.4
Thailand	67.7	76.5	59.6	16.9
Vietnam	76.2	81.5	71.2	10.3
Average	64.5	74.7	56.1	18.5

Source: World Bank (2020)

Figure 2 depicts the relationship between income per person and four types of the LFPR, namely total LFPR, male LFPR and female LFPR and LFPR gap. Firstly, there is a weak positive relationship between GDP per capita and total LFPR in ASEAN countries. In other words, countries with higher income level would tend to have a higher total LFPR. For example, Singapore’s total LFPR (67.7) is relatively higher than total LFPR in the Philippines

(51.9) and Myanmar (61.4). There are two main outliers in this positive relationship, namely Cambodia (81.7) and Vietnam (76.2). This positive relationship could be explained by the level of technology. There are few high tech industries in Cambodia and Vietnam and these countries depend on the labour-intensive industries. As a sequence, there could be higher LEPR in these relatively poorer ASEAN countries. Among ASEAN countries, these countries are relatively poor. However, these countries have relatively higher total LFPR. Secondly, there is no clear linkage between income level and male LFPR. Despite huge discrepancies in income level, there is a minor difference in the male LFPR, except Lao PDR. The male LFPR in the richest ASEAN country, Singapore, is 75.6 while the male LFPR in the poorest ASEAN country, Myanmar, is 77.0. Lao PDR is the outlier in this relationship and its male LFPR is only 45.2. Thirdly, there also is a weak positive relationship between income level and female LFPR in the region. It would mean that countries with higher per capita income would tend to have a higher female LFPR. For instance, Singapore's female LFPR (60.2) are relatively higher than other ASEAN countries, except Cambodia (75.9) and Vietnam (71.2). In other words, Cambodia and Vietnam are outliers in this relationship. Finally, most importantly, there is a moderate negative relationship between income per capita and the LFPR gap in the region. It would mean that countries with relatively higher income level would tend to have a lower difference between male and female LFPR. In other words, relatively wealthy ASEAN countries offer more equal job opportunities for male and female workers. Three CLMV countries, namely Lao PDR, Cambodia and Vietnam are outliers in this relationship. These countries are relatively poor among ASEAN countries; however, these countries have a smaller gender gap in the LFPR.

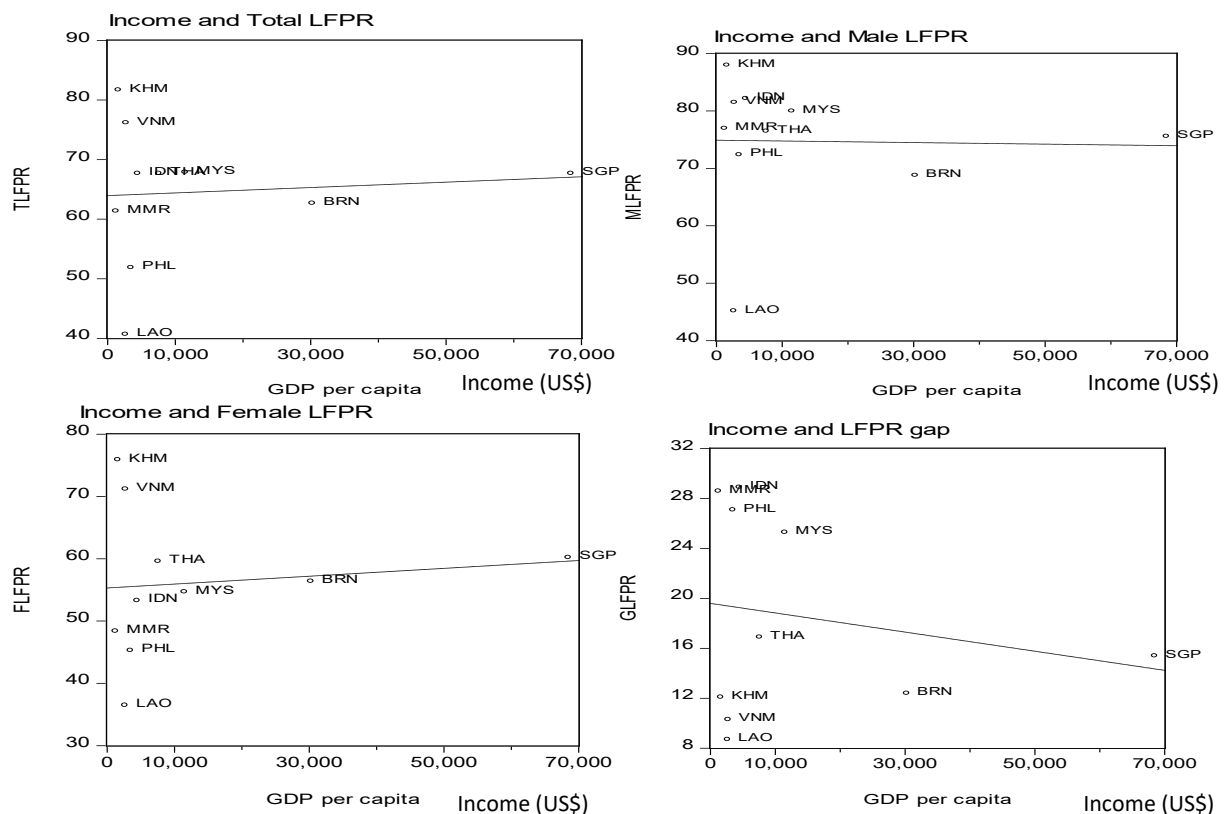


Figure 2: Labour force participation rate and income level

Table 4 reports three types of labour force participation rate (LFPR) separated by different education level, namely the LRPR (Basic education), the LFPR (Intermediate education), the LFPR (Advanced education). The basic education level means primary and lower secondary education and advanced education level means degree. The intermediate is in-between of two categories. There are no statistical data on the topic in Singapore which is excluded from this analysis. There are four countries in which there is a positive relationship between the LFPR and education level, namely Brunei, Indonesia, Lao and Thailand. In these countries, workers with higher education would have a higher likelihood to join the labour force. There are two countries whose workers with intermediate education level would have the highest level of the LFPR, namely Cambodia and the Philippines. In these countries, the workers with intermediate education level would have the highest likelihood to enter the labour market. By contrast, these are three more countries whose workers with intermediate education level would have the lowest level of the LFPR, namely, Malaysia, Myanmar and Vietnam. In these three countries, the workers with intermediate education level would have the lowest likelihood to enter the labour market.

Table 4: Labour force participation (basic, intermediate and advanced education) (2020)

	Labour force participation rate (total)	Labour force participation rate (male)	Labour force participation rate (female)
Brunei	52.8	66.0	81.9
Cambodia	81.6	86.1	79.6
Indonesia	62.8	72.2	82.0
Lao PDR	42.2	48.0	75.2
Malaysia	69.0	66.9	69.2
Myanmar	66.1	45.8	66.8
Philippines	63.1	74.3	63.3
Thailand	69.8	72.7	83.8
Vietnam	78.3	76.6	88.3
Average	65.0	67.6	76.6

Notes: Basic education is primary and lower secondary education, Intermediate education is upper secondary and diploma and advanced education is degree

Source: World Bank (2020)

Figure 3 depicts the relationship between income per person and three types of the LFPR by education level, namely LFPR at the basic education level, LFPR at the intermediate education level and LFPR at the advanced education level. Firstly, there is a negative relationship between GDP per capita and LFPR at the basic education level in ASEAN countries. In other words, countries with lower income level would tend to have a higher LFPR at the basic education level. For example, Indonesia’s LFPR at the basic education level (62.8) is relatively

higher than LFPR at the basic education level in Brunei (52.8). There is an outlier in this negative relationship, namely Lao PDR (42.3). This country has a relatively lower income level with a lower level of LFPR at the basic education level. Secondly, there is no clear linkage between income level and LFPR at the intermediate education level. For example, some relatively poor countries tend to have higher LFPR at the intermediate education level, such as Cambodia (86.1) and Vietnam (76.6). At the same time, other relatively poor countries have lower LFPR at the intermediate education level, Myanmar (45.8) and Lao (48.0). Finally, most interestingly, there is a positive relationship between income per capita and LFPR at the advanced education level. It would imply that countries with relatively higher income level would tend to have a higher LFPR at the advanced education level. For example, LFPR at advanced education level in Brunei (81.9) is higher than LFPR at advanced education level at Lao PDR (75.2) and Cambodia (79.6).

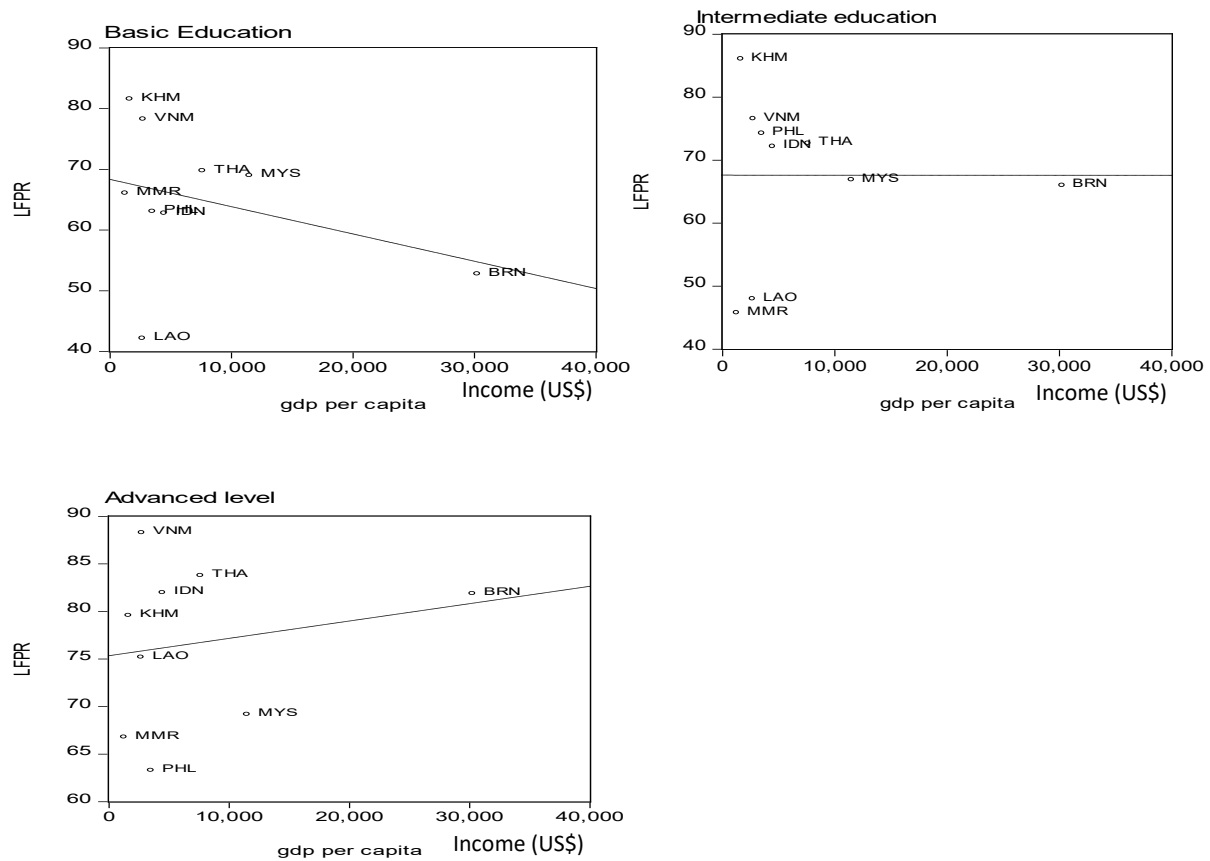


Figure 3: Labour force participation rate by education levels and income level

Table 5 reports four types of the unemployment rate, namely the total unemployment rate, the male unemployment rate, the female unemployment rate and the unemployment gap. The unemployment gap is the difference between male and female unemployment rate. Firstly, the average unemployment rate in ASEAN countries is 3.6. By contrast, there are three countries with the relatively higher total unemployment rate which are higher than 9.0, namely Brunei (9.3) and Laos (9.4). By contrast, there are three countries with the relatively lower male unemployment rate which are less than 1.0, namely Cambodia (0.7), Thailand (0.4) and

Myanmar (0.8). Interestingly, these countries also have relatively lower inflation rates, namely Cambodia (2.4), Thailand (0.7) and Myanmar (2.8). Secondly, the average level of male unemployment rate is also 3.6. There are two countries with the relatively higher male unemployment rate which are greater than 8.0, namely Lao (10.7) and Brunei (8.7). On the other hand, there are three countries with the relatively lower male unemployment rate which are less than 1.0, namely Cambodia (0.5), Thailand (0.5) and Myanmar (0.7). Thirdly, the average level of female unemployment rate in ASEAN countries is 3.7. There are two countries with relatively higher female unemployment rate which are greater than 7.0, namely Brunei (9.9) and Lao PDR (7.8). Also, there are two countries with relatively lower female unemployment rate which is less than 1.0, namely Thailand (0.4) and Cambodia (0.8). Finally, the average level of unemployment rate gap in ASEAN countries is -0.1. There are seven countries with negative unemployment gap, namely Brunei (-1.2), Vietnam (-1.1), Malaysia (-0.8), the Philippines (-0.5), Singapore (-0.4), Cambodia (-0.3) and Myanmar (-0.3). Also, there are three countries with positive unemployment gap, namely Thailand (0.1), Lao PDR (2.9) and Indonesia (0.4).

Table 5: Unemployment rate (total, male, female and gap) (2020)

	Unemployment rate (total)	Unemployment rate (male)	Unemployment rate (female)	Unemployment rate (gap)
Brunei	9.3	8.7	9.9	-1.2
Cambodia	0.7	0.5	0.8	-0.3
Indonesia	4.5	4.6	4.2	0.4
Lao PDR	9.4	10.7	7.8	2.9
Malaysia	3.4	3.1	3.9	-0.8
Myanmar	0.8	0.7	1.0	-0.3
Philippines	2.3	2.1	2.6	-0.5
Singapore	4.2	4.0	4.4	-0.4
Thailand	0.4	0.5	0.4	0.1
Vietnam	1.9	1.8	2.9	-1.1
Average	3.6	3.6	3.7	-0.1

Source: World Bank (2020)

Figure 4 depicts the trend of unemployment rates for the period of 2009-2017 in six ASEAN countries, namely Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Vietnam. Due to lack of sufficient data, four countries, namely Brunei, Lao PDR, Myanmar and Thailand, are excluded from this analysis. Firstly, there are two countries with relatively higher average unemployment during this period, namely Indonesia and Singapore. It is interesting to note that there is a downward movement of unemployment rates in Indonesia. The country's unemployment rate was 6.1 percent in 2009 and decreased to 5.6 percent in 2010, further to

5.1 percent in 2011. Its unemployment rate decreased from 4.4 percent in 2012 to 4.3 percent in 2016, further to 4.1 percent in 2017. By contrast, Singapore's unemployment rate was 4.1 percent in 2010 and decreased to 3.8 percent in 2011, further to 3.7 percent in 2012. However, the country's unemployment rate increased from 3.7 percent in 2015 to 4.0 percent in 2016, further to 4.2 percent in 2017. Secondly, there are two countries with moderate level of unemployment, namely Malaysia and the Philippines. There is an interesting downward movement of unemployment rates in the Philippines. The country's unemployment rate was 3.8 percent in 2009 and decreased to 3.6 percent in 2010, further to 3.5 percent in 2011. Also, unemployment rate in the country decreased from 3.0 percent in 2015 to 2.7 percent in 2016, further to 2.5 percent in 2017. On the other hand, Malaysia's unemployment rate was 3.6 percent in 2009 and decreased to 3.3 percent in 2010, further to 3.0 percent in 2011. However, the country's unemployment rate increased from 3.7 percent in 2015 to 4.0 percent in 2016, further to 4.2 percent in 2017. Finally, there are two more countries with relatively lower unemployment rate, namely Cambodia and Vietnam. In the case of Vietnam, the country's unemployment rate increased slightly from 1.7 percent in 2009 to 1.8 percent in 2011, further to 1.9 percent in 2011. However, the unemployment rate in Vietnam decreases from 2.1 percent in 2015 to 2.0 percent in 2017. On the other hand, Cambodia's unemployment rate decreased from 0.7 percent in 2010 to 0.5 percent in 2011, further to 0.4 percent in 2013. However, the country's unemployment rate increased from 0.1 percent in 2015 to 0.7 percent in 2016, further to 0.8 percent in 2017.

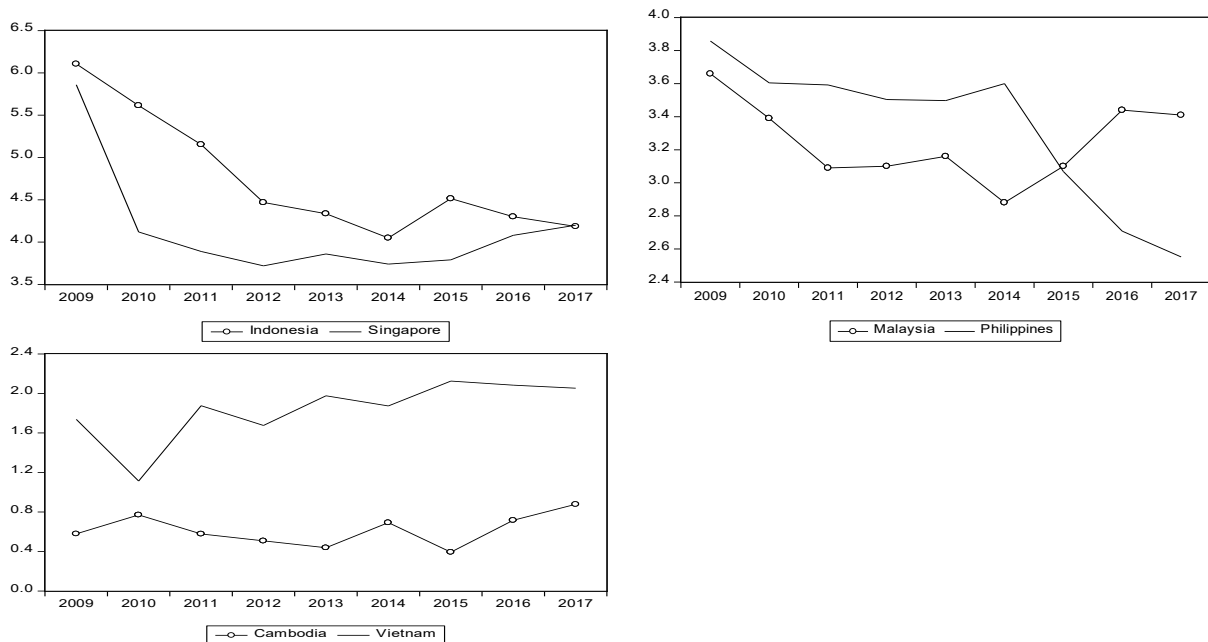


Figure 4: Unemployment rate (2009-2017) (percent)

It should be noted that difference in the relationship between income, the LFPR and the LFPR with different educational levels could be caused by discrepancies in economic structure, labour market and education policies, relatively poorer countries with low technological level, such as Cambodia and Laos, may need to use more labour, rather than physical capital, for their

production. So, they have relatively higher level of the LFPR with basic education. By contrast, these poorer countries may lack of appropriate education policy for higher learning and labour policy for the promotion of employment among workers with the higher level of educations. These countries have relatively lower level of the LFPR with advanced level of education.

The impact of COVID-19 pandemic on ASEAN's labour market

Disruptions in the regional and global supply chain, travel bans and lockdowns due to the pandemic have had extensive repercussions on the labour market causing widespread limits on business and workplace operations. As work and business is the source of income to many, the lockdown and other containment measures have decelerated most of the economic activities in ASEAN (United Nations, 2020) affecting workers in the labour market. This includes temporary business closures as the community were forced to stay at home following quarantine orders. The most affected industry in ASEAN is travel and tourism as ASEAN relies heavily on this sector. In 2018, travel and tourism contributed 12.6 percent to the economy of ASEAN (ASEAN, 2020). However, the travel restriction and border control have restricted entry of foreigners, leading to a large drop in the number of tourists into ASEAN countries. The pandemic has not only halted the aviation industry but also impacted the tourism and hospitality related sector (ASEAN, 2020) such as hotels and restaurants due to the cancellations of tickets and room reservations (Foo, Chin, Tan, & Phuah, 2020). As Cambodia, Thailand and Vietnam are the ASEAN countries with the largest share of employment in tourism reaching 6.7, 9.0 and 6.9% respectively (ILO, 2020a), workers in tourism-related industries in these ASEAN countries suffer most.

The repercussion of the pandemic on the labour market is reflected in the various forecasts of the impact on the regional GDP. Vietnam's GDP growth projections for 2020 is 2.7 percent from 7.0 percent in 2019 (International Monetary Fund, 2020). Similarly, GDP growth is projected to decline to 0 percent in 2020 in the ASEAN+3 (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam), plus China, Japan, and South Korea, from 4.8 percent in 2019. The GDP declines are more likely for Cambodia and Thailand, as these countries have very close ties with tourism and development in terms of trade services (Kimura, Thangavelu, Narjoko, & Findlay, 2020).

In Southeast Asia, the unemployment rate has soared to almost unimaginable levels as a result of the pandemic that has ravaged economies to varying degrees. Thailand is expected to experience the worst economic downturn of any state in Southeast Asia, mainly due to its heavy reliance on global tourism. The unemployment rate in Thailand increased to 1.9 percent in August 2020 from 1% in the same month of the previous year. It was reported that job losses in Malaysia increased by 42 percent year-on-year for the first quarter of 2020.

The lockdown efforts to mitigate the spread of the pandemic have resulted in the reduction of business operations, temporary reduction of working hours or workdays, and reduction of employees, affecting workers of all ages in the region. Such a situation may explain the reason to why certain self-employed jobs tend to increase during a crisis, as self-employment becomes a default option to many job losers for their economic survival and income (International Labour Organization, 2020). As a result, underemployment would increase on a wide scale

although this form of coping mechanism can be limited by the restrictions on the movement of individuals.

The shock to the labour demand is also reflected in the rise of retrenchment of workers, salary reduction, revoked job offers and unpaid leave. The Malaysian Association of Hotel reported that from a total of 54,299 workers in the hotel industry in Malaysia, nearly 4 percent (2,041 workers) were laid off, 9 percent (5,054 workers) faced pay cut and nearly 18 percent were given unpaid leave during the MCO (Foo et al., 2020). In Vietnam, approximately 31 million employees were adversely affected by the COVID-19 pandemic, with 900,000 out of jobs and up to 18 million receiving lower income. The International Labour Organisation has predicted working hour losses where the overall reduction of working hours for the second quarter of 2020 in Southeast Asia is forecast at 12.7 percent, which is equivalent to 35 million full-time workers (ILO, 2020).

Furthermore, as job losses continue to escalate amid the pandemic, vulnerable workers such as those working in informal sectors, self-employed workers, gig workers, migrant workers, and micro, small and medium enterprises are facing a tough labour market and also at risk of losing livelihood due to lockdown. These working classes have a greater problem as they are less protected by social security schemes and other forms of income smoothing, leading to their susceptibility to the pandemic. These groups of workers and their families would have no way to live without other sources of income. Income losses and lack of income assistance in some ASEAN countries have contributed to more hardship for many informal sector workers pushing them further into working poverty as the number of hours worked falls along with decreasing economic activity (ILO, 2020c). Furthermore, households and families are in danger of being evicted, particularly when the disposal moratoriums expired, and households are struggling to pay back due rent.

The COVID-19 has also affected vulnerable and disadvantaged groups such as youth, women, and elderly depending on their condition in the labour market. Youth belongs to the age category of most vulnerable to retrenchment (ILO, 2020d; Lee, 2020). Fresh graduates will face the challenge of seeking their first job in the labour market with extremely limited demand (ILO, 2020d). The effect of the pandemic would be greater for young job-seekers as they would have a reduced "wage reservation," which is the lowest salary at which a worker will be able to accept a certain form of work – relative to experienced workers (Lee, 2020). A high proportion of women were found in the informal sector, particularly in ASEAN's low and middle-income countries. Unregistered jobs make up an estimated 78 percent of Southeast Asia's total workforce, while women make up the bulk of the informal sector in Myanmar, Lao PDR, Cambodia, Philippines, and Indonesia. Part of the gender gap is explained by the existence of the shock and the disproportionate effect on employment and industries in which more women are working (Alon, Doepke, Olmstead-Rumsey, & Tertilt, 2020). Therefore, women are less likely to withstand economic shocks than men (WTO, 2020).

Nevertheless, COVID-19 is reshaping ASEAN's digital landscape in the labour market by bringing about significant change in the way of how work is done during the time of crisis as the pandemic has forced company and organisations to adopt remote work or work from home (WFH). As workers could abide by the social distancing while working, teleworking will

become a new norm in ASEAN, with most corporations resorting to flexible work arrangements for its employees and at the same time promoting a positive family and work life balance. As the Southeast Asians are considered the world's most active internet users (OECD, 2019), the advancement of the digital economy has led to the rise in the usage of telemedicine, digital learning in the education system and e-commerce during the pandemic. For instance, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Singapore saw traffic increase by more than 10 percent on e-commerce platforms during the COVID-19 crisis (Dezan Shira & Associates, 2020) when more people engaged in online shopping compared to the conventional shopping as people are instructed to stay at home and avoid crowds throughout the MCO.

Conclusion

COVID-19 which has been discovered in Wuhan, China has led to a global economic downturn. This paper examines the impact of COVID-19 pandemic on the economy focusing on the ASEAN labour market. A glance into the general characteristics of the labour market in ASEAN countries showed that there is a positive relationship between income per capita and LFPR at the advanced education level. It would imply that countries with relatively higher income level would tend to have a higher LFPR at advanced education level. The pandemic has caused an unprecedented reduction in economic activity and working time. Income support for workers and businesses operating in the informal economy is crucial in order to prevent them from falling far deeper into poverty. Business and job protection should concentrate on the most vulnerable in order to reduce the economic and social effects of the confinement process. Given the growing dependency on work from home connectivity during the pandemic and the need for ASEAN countries to further develop their e-commerce, this sector would require significant foreign investment to ensure that digital technologies can be properly leveraged in the fight to preserve business continuity. Labour experts believe that the economic and labour market situations will deteriorate even more over the next few months. Though as the situation persists, ASEAN countries have been quick to prepare their COVID-19 stimulus and relief programmes. However, the feasibility of interventions to target disadvantaged groups and the government's ability to sustain fiscal expansion would also remain a concern. ASEAN and governments all over the world find it difficult to strike the right balance between caution in protecting national health and the reopening of economic activities as the spread of COVID-19 is unlikely to subside completely in the near future (ILO, 2020b).

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Case Study

COLLABORATIVE TRAINING IN RESEARCH METHODOLOGY: A CASE OF MALAYSIA AND LAOS

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Abstract

One important aspect of the ASEAN vision is that ASEAN countries strive for equitable economic development and therefore concerted efforts must be made to narrow the development gap between ASEAN countries. This is prioritised in the Initiative for ASEAN Integration which outlines several activities that are designed to assist CLMV countries achieve deeper regional integration while supporting national development priorities and inclusive development. While there has been improvement, there is still significant variance in development achievements. The gaps are wide not only in achievements in income but also in education and health outcomes. This case study provides a description of a Malaysian and Lao collaboration in English language and research methodology training and the challenges faced in doing social science research among Lao academics. The collaboration addresses the developmental divide through knowledge exchange, engagement and collaboration, and capacity building in development between the parties involved.

Keywords: research, Laos, Malaysia, capacity building, training

Introduction

This case study is based on a collaborative project in 2015-2017 between the Asia-Europe Institute, Universiti Malaya and two universities in Laos, the National University of Laos, and Souphanouvong University. The project aimed to strengthen collaboration between Malaysia and Lao academics as well as meet the goals of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) and the ASEAN University Network (AUN) for academics in Laos to be highly educated and skilled people for social and economic development of their country. The objective was to develop a Training of Trainers (ToT) programme for English Language Education and Research which can be used effectively by Lao academics. A training programme that met these needs was developed and used in their institutions to test the effectiveness of this programme in order to improve it further.

Laos is one of the last few members to join the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) in the late 1990s and is among those who are ‘chasing their neighbours’ and have

much to accomplish in higher education. This struggle is further accelerated by the realization of the AEC and the Initiative of the ASEAN Integration (IAI) Strategic Framework through IAI Workplan Phase II (2009-2015, 2016-2020) that aim to address the development divide and integration of the CLMV countries (namely Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam).

The project aimed to explore the issues and challenges that the Lao academics faced and how both parties collaborated to try to overcome them. The focus of the training was on English academic writing and research methodology concerning English language education. This is seen to be important given the regional efforts in harmonising higher education and the role that English has. In ASEAN countries, “English is being introduced as a compulsory subject into the primary curriculum in all the 10 countries with the exception of Indonesia” (Kirkpatrick, 2010). In many CLMV countries (Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam), the number of schools that use English as medium of instruction is fast growing and might well lead to a situation where the function of English in the curriculum is no longer that of a foreign language, but of a “near universal basic skill” (Graddol, 1997).

The project involved capacity building activities, knowledge transfer and skills development training, as well as a Training of Trainers (ToT) programme to foster a sustainable pool of highly educated and trained academic leaders who will contribute to socio-economic competitiveness for the benefit of their nation. This project also forged strong intercultural ties between Malaysia and Lao PDR, thus further strengthening the network and regional cooperation and integration objectives of the AEC and contributes towards narrowing the development gap between other ASEAN countries in line with the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI).

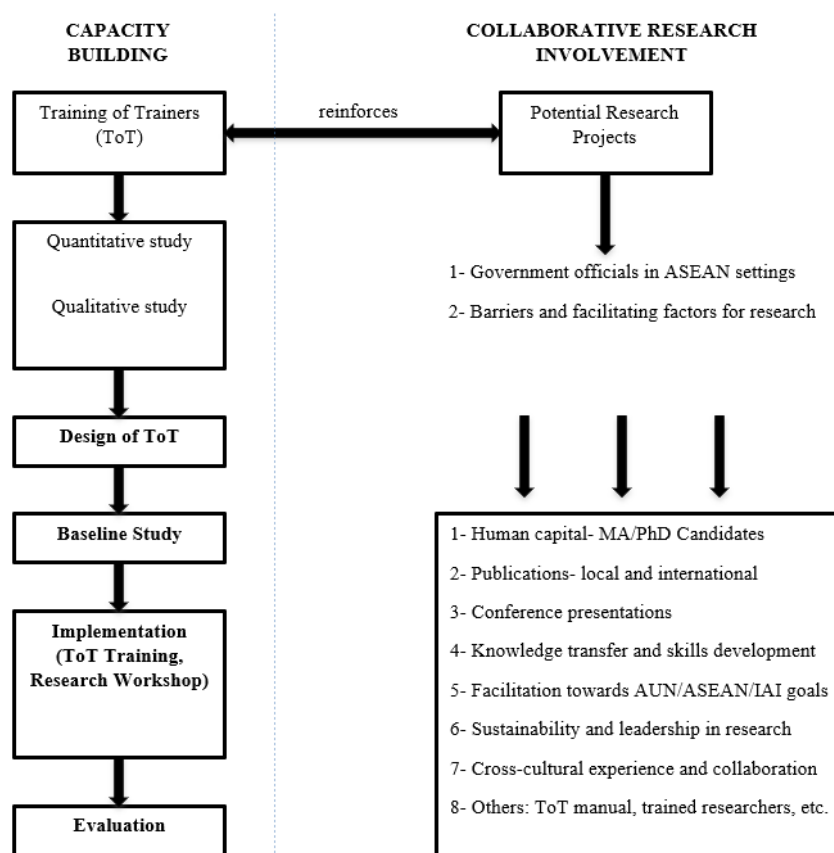


Figure 1: Framework for UM-NUOL ToT Research Programme

Figure 1 shows the framework for the UM-NUOL ToT Programme. The key to sustainability of any innovation is long term acceptance of the change process through the appropriation of skills, competence and values. This is shown in the Training of Trainers (ToT) methodology as it involved all key partners and several academics and students. Local Lao trainers were engaged as they provided familiarity towards the cultural context as well as the institutional background. Implementation of the ToT was facilitated through academic exchange visits between Universiti Malaya (UM) and the National University of Laos (NUOL). These visits were accompanied by delivery of courses, workshops or seminars for a pool of trained researchers enabling them to be facilitators of learning, not just presenters. The ToT was a jointly developed model/framework between the two partners (UM and NUOL) to facilitate the plan for action.

Dimensions of the ToT consisted of the expert trainers, adult learning theories, sharing of best practices, training processes and the set of tools/techniques for managing participants. The subject content or topics that were covered included knowledge and skills for conducting research, writing for publication, presenting or finding results, ethics in research and publication. The ToT also highlighted the socio-cultural context of ASEAN (ASCC) with emphasis on intercultural learning and understanding of norms, diversity and context-dependent parameters of research for ASEAN community building which narrow the development gap.

Prior to the design of the ToT, a needs analysis survey and focus group interviews were conducted by the research team at NUOL to identify the research needs of the academics in Lao PDR. The survey findings revealed that the academics in Lao PDR are disadvantaged by the following:

- Lack of research experience
- Lack of research knowledge and skills
- Little opportunity to attend research training programmes
- Perception that research is difficult
- Burden of teaching hours and subjects taught
- Insufficient communication in relation to research (unable to access information for research)

The design and implementation of the ToT aimed to meet these needs by producing experienced researchers, organizing research training, and providing effective cooperation between both internal and external organisation and research facilities. At the end of the ToT training, the trained Laos researchers were evaluated based on their training delivery to local participants at another university in Lao PDR.

The Training kit

The ToT training kit consisted of:

Evaluation form – Participant's feedback

This is for learners to evaluate the quality of the training workshops/seminars presented by the expert trainers from the University of Malaya. These feedback forms provided input that helped to improve and reframe future development of the workshops/seminars.

Evaluation feedback/input for ToT improvements

The feedback gathering sessions were important for the co-development of the ToT module between UM and NUOL. The guiding documents containing the table of contents and the list of topics for every module were provided in advance to the NUOL ToT Committee prior to the UM ToT team's visit to Lao PDR in April 2016. The ToT Committee from NUOL provided feedback for the eleven modules in the following areas - problem areas/difficulties, local situation/examples in Lao PDR, practical implications (application) and other remarks/requests. During one of the visits to Lao PDR in April 2016, the UM and NUOL team had another feedback gathering session to facilitate and elicit more input/contents relevant to ASEAN and the Laotian context for the ToT handbook.

Co-authorship in the ToT Manual

Regarding authorship, maintaining all slides' main author/contributor' names, including in the templates and a full page that acknowledged the contribution/input from the Laos committee (their names, and affiliations) at the beginning of the handbook was done. This is to highlight that the main contribution comes from the authors of the slides themselves.

Baseline study/Assessment materials

This is used for pre- and post-training cohorts. The baseline study provided data for further research and as a support facility for ToT review/post-ToT proposals success stories. Within this project, UM also collaborated with the Faculty of Letters, NUOL on joint research publications by putting the process of TOT into practice.

Micro Teaching Evaluation/Reflective journals

The Micro Teaching (MT) evaluation form was given to all the trainees/facilitators/mentees at the end of the ToT Training Workshop (September 2016) at UM. The ToT Training Workshop was attended by members of the NUOL ToT Committee to participate in the research training for academics from the National University of Laos (NUOL) by expert trainers and to encourage knowledge transfer and exchange between academics from NUOL-UM through the development of the TOT programme. The trainers were divided into two groups with each MT session focusing on a specific module. Each trainee had to choose 3 slides (of specific module) and present for 7 minutes. Performance of the presenters was evaluated by a panel of trainers from the UM team and feedback was given at the end of each MT session. All MT presentations were evaluated according to the following criteria - Familiarity with the content, Clarity of presentation, Communication (voice, eye contact, body language), Interactions with the audience: verbal or non-verbal and Traits of an experienced trainer/researcher, etc. The data from the MT evaluation form was used as a monitoring effort for the effectiveness of the trainers' delivery. Reflective journals were prepared by each member of the UM team to document their personal experiences of conducting/attending training workshops/seminars/meetings in Lao PDR.

Setting up of an official ToT Committee in this collaboration

A formal letter of request was sent to the President of the National University of Laos (NUOL) to propose the setup of a project committee at the Faculty of Letters to be involved in the University of Malaya (UM)-NUOL collaborative project for research development through the ToT programme. Details of the project were explained in the letter as well as the functions of

the ToT committee (to conduct regular meetings (monthly) to discuss planning/issues of TOT for close communication with UM team, to contribute additional content for the TOT modules (UM will be the primary contributor), to participate in a 1-week trainer's training at UM, to plan the implementation of TOT in NUOL i.e. learners, time, resources, etc., to implement research training for faculty members/colleagues (by trained staff/committee) and to evaluate/review implementation results). The proposal of this project committee was in response to the strategic purpose of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) for regional cooperation on academic and higher education collaboration. In addition, it further continues the good relationship and cooperation between both universities, for research leadership and higher education development.

Method in Action

At the beginning of this project, interviews and surveys were carried out with experienced ToT trainers to devise strategies for the development of an effective ToT training programme for the Laotian participants. Discussions and needs analysis were organised with ToT experts/experienced academics (including the project team members) and the collaborators in Lao PDR. Subsequently, the development of a training programme commenced and the curriculum was constructed by the researcher team based on the feedback/input received from the research instruments. The later part of the project involved the delivery of the ToT programme to selected/identified Laotian academics from the pool of our collaborators. This exchange provided the confidence for the participants/individuals to continue and sustain the training programme at their institutions through knowledge transfer, training and development based on a system of mentors and mentees facilitated by the researcher team and expert trainers. A minor part of this project is the (comparative) analysis of the Laotian academic discourse in research and academic writing. Data was collected from a questionnaire that was distributed to the local respondents who taught/learned English and had some interest in research writing. Further discussions/communication with the respondents were carried out to clarify findings and results. Focus Group Discussion were conducted to find out the ToT experiences and approaches for capacity building and global engagements in the Lao context. The focus group discussion covered two aspects; (a) Impact of this ToT initiative in order to assess the sustainability factor of TOT for future planning and recommendations and (b) ASEAN Contents. The ASEAN Contents sought to seek suggestions or recommendations on what kind of local Laos content and how they can be included in the TOT presentations and whether the insertion of Laos content was helpful in making the concepts and terms clear.

Challenges faced in implementing the UM-NUOL ToT Programme

- *Challenge 1- Lack of research experience*

Research is new and challenging in Lao PDR even though many of the academics have had experience in conducting research projects and wrote their own theses during their university days. Some of them thought of their research projects during their university course as assignments to complete their degree. Not much emphasis was placed on the purposes of doing research and how they were supposed to conduct it.

Counter Measure 1-Mentor-mentee system: The academics or staff in Lao PDR needed training on how to do research in order to become full-fledged academics because they recognize that teaching and research are deemed important for academics. This was made

possible through the mentor-mentee system implemented via the ToT programme. Selected academics from NUOL were trained by a group of trainers from UM in the field of social science research. The goal was to prepare them to have a certain body of knowledge, present this effectively, respond to questions and lead activities to reinforce learning. The trained researchers from NUOL were taught to build their confidence, engage the audience, be able to develop learning objectives, assess and evaluate the impact of training initiatives and manage participants with effective techniques- engage different learning styles, create positive learning, manage classroom challenges and others.

- *Challenge 2- Lack of research knowledge and skills*

Only a handful of academics and staff in Laos had some knowledge and skills in doing research. Most of them have not been exposed to research and therefore lack the necessary required skills.

Counter Measure 2- Our research knowledge and skills training focused on less familiar research approaches/ techniques. The UM team opted to focus on qualitative research, use of focus group interviews and analysis of qualitative research. Awareness of ethical considerations were also highlighted. The ToT Training manual served as the complete guide on how to conduct research in the social sciences within the ASEAN context, with specific examples from Malaysia and Lao PDR.

- *Challenge 3- Little opportunity to attend research training programmes*

Academics or staff in NUOL did not have equal opportunity access to the training. Priority is given to seasoned or senior academics to attend research training programmes whilst the junior academics or staff continue with their daily task. It was also highlighted that places to attend research training programmes are limited (as mentioned in the interview excerpt below):

... ເພິ່ນເລືອກເອົາ ຮູ້ສຶກວ່າເພິ່ນໃຫ້ບ່ອນມາໜຶ່ງບ່ອນບໍ່

... They asked us to nominate one of our staff as they gave us one seat for the workshop.

(FLE06)

*Counter Measure 3-*Time-space considerations for ToT implementation must be given ample thought. Research training programmes could be conducted after the examination period and during the university semester break (which means the academics and teaching staff in Laos have less teaching and grading commitments). Postgraduate students should also be invited to attend future capacity building seminars and talks that are scheduled at appropriate hours (eg: not during lecture hours).

- *Challenge 4- Perception that research is difficult*

The general view that research is seen as difficult by Lao academics arises because they do not have any or enough experts or individuals who are knowledgeable to supervise them. They also thought that the faculty/university management did not place much emphasis on doing research.

Counter Measure 4- The UM team leveraged on mentoring/ scaffolding involving NUOL lecturers with MA/PhDs by instilling positive attitudes towards research, and their implications on the understanding of adult learning theories/learning styles in the trainer's guidelines in the ToT curriculum. By getting them involved directly with the UM expert trainers in various aspects of research, it helped to build and shape their confidence and increase their motivation in doing research.

- *Challenge 5- Burden of teaching hours and subjects taught*

Several academics in NUOL thought that they had more teaching than they were supposed to do. The teaching hours can stretch up to between 11 to 20 hours per week. Some of the academics have to teach from 20 to 40 hours in a week. It would be very difficult for them to spare time to do other tasks such as doing research. These academics also have to teach more than two subjects. There are some academics who have to teach five subjects.

Counter Measure 5- The introduction of action research to the NUOL academics was to introduce the concept of getting started with research in the classroom. By doing this, they could conduct their lessons and do research at the same time. Providing incentives such as research scholarship to bright individuals could also cultivate the research interest among NUOL academics.

- *Challenge 6- Insufficient communication in relation to research (unable to access)*

More than half of the staff at the Faculty of Letters, NUOL had hardly accessed the necessary information about research. For example, notices on training, budget, and other related information. Many wished that they had prior information about research funding to be more prepared in developing research proposals and so on.

Counter Measure 6 – The promotion of ToT or other research opportunities to relevant networks in the university could be communicated as a long-term research plan for staff with incentives/rewards to those who succeed in securing the research grants. It would be good to keep a database of potential learners by maintaining contact and communication through a broadcasted announcement or e-mail.

Strengths to improve research

Although the academics faced some limitations, they have certain strengths that would help improve the research capacity at the Faculty of Letters, in NUOL for example, (1) academics recognized the importance of doing research, (2) they were willing to do research, (3) they had a positive attitude towards doing research, and (4) the availability of some research equipment.

Practical Lessons Learned

Support of the top management is crucial to ease facilitation when conducting training/workshops/seminars in Lao PDR. Recognizing the importance of research will provide more motivation to encourage staff to do research. Good access to Internet is crucial to develop a platform for training. Inclusion of important references which are available online for further reading is necessary. It would be useful to consider a multimodal delivery which includes videos, online-courses, quizzes (some e-learning can be incorporated as activities to reinforce learning/sharing of resources). Availability of a core of people who are familiar with research will aid in the mentoring and coaching initiatives. We need to recognize that capacity building needs long term commitment. Senior academics who have more experiences in doing research could mentor the juniors in research in related areas. Sharing one's expertise with others collegially is one way of passing knowledge from one generation to another generation. Perhaps some kind of a research network within departments and between faculties could be established. A change in the mindset of sharing ideas needs to be encouraged. Collegial performance contributes to the work of the whole team or center or department and ensures a

future for new generations of researchers. Additionally, it has the benefit of feeding back into improving the activity and performance level of an individual as they learn, reciprocally, from those around them. Providing research seminars that could enhance the research knowledge and capacity is another avenue.

Conclusions

The purpose of this ToT programme was to empower Laotian academics with the necessary research knowledge and skills in conducting English language teaching (ELT) and education-based research. Trained academics may become potential leaders/trainers at their respective institutions and can continue similar capacity building activities in a sustainable approach at the local context through knowledge sharing, training and skill development programmes. By engaging these participants in research discussions, we can develop a better understanding about the challenges and issues faced by the academic community in Laos in particular on ELT and their research needs in higher education. Thus, this exchange will facilitate the exploration for strategic sites/areas of cooperation between the nations for academic and higher education development in the ASEAN region. Another UM-led regional and inter-regional endeavour in education that runs from 2017 to 2020 is an Erasmus+ Capacity Building in Higher Education project 'Building Social Research Capacity in Higher Institutions in Lao PDR and Malaysia' (BRECIL). This project aims to build research capacities in Laos universities, enhance research governance in Malaysia and Lao PDR and innovate new research developments through ICT technologies. At the end of the BRECIL project, Lao PDR research capacity is expected to be enhanced as it builds on the Lao National education goals as stated in their National Education law. As for Malaysia, there will be intra ASEAN mobility for researchers and it is clear that the project has goals and aims to fulfil specific actions stated in the "Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education".

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Retrieved from <http://www.aaa>, [accessed on data of access].

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