

Internship at Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC)

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When a building is demolished, a brief calm usually prevails at first. The dynamite blasts, the concrete exhales a few wisps and sways a little, there is a stillness for one or two seconds and then, with a groan, the whole thing comes down. The world will live most of 2018 in that ethereal moment. As we have witnessed events ranging from the commencement of the Sino- US trade war, where economies have increasingly adopted protectionism over open, and free trade measures, to the U.S withdrawal from Iran nuclear deal and United Nations Human Rights Council, the wavering U.S leadership in world affairs and its commitment to defend international rule-based order could lead to severe ramifications – for both the U.S and the world.

At PECC Secretariat

During my time at PECC Secretariat, I have had the honour to work with a small, diverse group of staff, which afforded me an opportunity to experience a truly multi-cultural working environment. My duties were flexible depending on the needs of different staff. As some of the previous interns at PECC, I mainly worked for Mr Eduardo Pedrosa (Ed), the Secretary-General of PECC. Under the leadership of Ed, I have conducted various macroeconomic analyses on PECC countries' national income, debt growth rate, and on the digital economies of the PECC region. I was tasked by Ed to examine the PECC countries' GDP breakdown, where I have understood that the recent growth in China's GDP was mostly debt-driven.

Comparing to other mature economies where consumption constitutes a higher share of GDP growth, the idea is that the Chinese model of economic development could be dangerous – especially when growth is slowing down, making it harder to honour the debt payment.

One of the macroeconomic overviews for the key economic policy in the region is the development of the digital economy. I have leveraged the result of the 2017 State of the Region survey as well as international databases to track the evolution of the development of the digital economy in the Asia-Pacific region. In order to precisely measure the contribution of the national income from digital economy sector, I have identified definitions for the term “digital economy” - it has, intriguingly, varying interpretations from different countries and organizations like OECD, IMF - so that Ed could know what part of the economy he could go after when he tries to examine the contribution of GDP from digital economy. Flipping through the legal documents with incompatible definitions on the digital economy is no doubt a hard work, but nothing beats the feeling of slowly seeing a common ground as you have managed to reconcile the assorted information.

Along with other administrative tasks like summarizing and reconciling transcript for the 25th PECC General Meeting, I have also assisted Ed on his economic researches as well as presentations. My research on Global Trade Alert would be one prime example, where I have assisted Ed in identifying the anti-free trade actions taken by various economies in the PECC region from 2008 to 2018, in the face of their commitments in fighting trade protectionism. Our objective is to point out the mismatch, or perhaps hypocrisy, between policy goal and reality. PECC and I, too, firmly support the idea of free-trade, and we believe in the benefits of it. Multilateral trade is not a zero-sum game. It was frustrating to discover that nearly all economies in the PECC region have engaged in some sort of anti-free trade measures over the years.

Through my research and conversations with Ed, I have learned that as an independent and politically neutral international organization, it is of prime importance to phrase our ideas without bias, therefore, the choices of words become critical. It was the first time that I have realized the power of a word, where different interpretations could be given, and bias could be rooted and attached.

Event Attendance

During my time at PECC, I was blessed with different learning experiences and opportunities. I have had the privilege to attend the 42nd Singapore Lecture, delivered by His Excellency Moon Jae-in, President of the Republic of Korea, during his three-day state visit. His speech placed the spotlight on what the Moon administration's "New Southern Policy" means for South Korea's development of its relations with Southeast Asian and ASEAN. Moon reaffirmed South Korea's strong commitment to the U.S – South Korea alliance, and it is his earnest hope to create a permanent peace in the Korean Peninsula. He invited the international community to create opportunities for North Korea to fulfil its role as a responsible member of the international community. "In the event, North Korea carries out measures for denuclearization with sincerity, I hope that the North will be invited to the various consultative bodies run by ASEAN and that bilateral exchanges and cooperation between ASEAN and the North will be strengthened." It is fascinating to see parties working hard together to create peace for the Korean people at the peninsula, and I was particularly impressed by the political willingness undertaken by President Moon to engage the regimes in the United States and North Korea in a peaceful and meaningful collaboration. I am of the view that the U.S – North Korea summit held in Singapore earlier wouldn't be manifested into reality had his input and hard work were absent.

In addition to the 42nd Singapore Lecture, I was also accorded the opportunity to attend a Fullerton Lecture, delivered by Her Honorable Chrystia Freeland, Canadian Foreign Minister, where I have learned the importance of an international rules-based order and how it influences the game of international politics. I was impressed by the Canadian commitment to defend the international rules-based order. I also share the view that it is of nations' interest to honour an international system with predictability, accountability and equity. In company of wall-builders, door-slamers and

drawbridge-raisers, Canada stands out as a heartening exception. Canada seems to be not tempted to shut itself off from the world in face of the rising populism in every corner of the globe, upholding the torch of openness in the west.

Just as important, I also went to several events hosted by the Institute of South Asian Studies and the HKETO office. I was amazed by the level of intellectual exchanges and collaborations in the Singapore civil community. Discussions on international social, economic policy and politics are high quality and popular. Politicians, scholars, think tanks, and universities hold different discussion panels every few weeks. I thought the Singaporeans are very lucky to have a myriad of platforms with a captivating level of civil debates and exchanges to discuss on important international issues that affect the daily life of each and every one of us. As for the HKETO event, I networked with the staff as well as other Hong Kong students interning in Singapore over a buffet dinner. It was a pleasure to make new friends and to joke about how we all have experienced difficulties when trying to get used to the lifestyle in Singapore.

Acknowledgement

The internship at PECC gave me the opportunities to understand the issues concerning the region, and the exposures on free-trade, growth model, and nations' economic development. In working closely with Ed and other staff members at PECC, I have gained on-hand research experiences and broadened my horizons in international affairs. The Internship is constantly pushing me to learn something new, and giving me the chances to go out of the office and attend formal discussion forums held by various world-wide renowned institutions.

Singapore is a country with an enthralling spirit and culture. It represents a truly international cultural hub where cultures and ethnicities come together and co-exist peacefully. It has a marvellous city vibe that carries with an array of entertainment and nightlife choices. In addition, it also offers some of the best food and beverages selections, ranging from Korean, Chinese, Japanese, Indonesian, Indian, Malaysian, Thai to Western cuisines, and the list goes on. You can never have enough in this amazing country.

I am beyond grateful for the opportunities accorded to me. I would like to thank the PECC Secretariat for the learning experiences. The Staff at the PECC has made me feel at home and included, and I am humbled to have the prerogative to be part of the team. I have to express my sincere gratitude to Ed for his insightful advice on my research projects and career future; Betty, my supervisor, for her warm guidance and support throughout my internship; Zakiah for taking care of my work-pass application; Nor for her guidance and assistance on different matters; and Mr Stanley Kwok for his succours and encouragements throughout my time at the office. On a final note, this experience would not have been made into a reality without the generous support from the Trade and Industry Department of HKSAR government and HKCPEC. I would like to give a special shout-out to Miss Winnie Cheung and Miss Kathy Chan for coordinating all the logistic arrangements and communication between parties. I treasured my time at PECC, and as I board the plane heading back

to Hong Kong, I look forward contributing back to the Hong Kong society with all I have gained and learned in the future.