

My Internship experience in the International Secretariat of Pacific Economic Cooperation Council

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During my time in Singapore, I often wondered if the world was going to end. The summer of 2016 was bloody, messy and confusing. Terror struck Nice, Medina and Dhaka. And the growing skepticism on globalization has caused political changes in the UK and around the world. International cooperation is met with much cynicism and doubt. It was indeed an interesting time to be in Singapore, the city-state that prides itself in being a hub of international and regional cooperation. And among the many institutions in the city, Pacific Economic Cooperation Council ("PECC") is the perfect illustration of the ongoing effort to draw different economies in the Asia Pacific Region closer together.

As an intern in the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council, I worked under Mr Eduardo Pedrosa, the Secretary General of PECC. Working closely with my fellow intern, we conducted a research project on the level of corporate cash holdings in the Asia Pacific region. We collected and organized data of 100 influential corporations from various PECC member economies. The objective of our research is to determine if the corporations in the region is hoarding excess amount of cash. While we enjoyed a great degree of flexibility during our research, Ed was always there to guide us when we were stuck. It was satisfying to conduct a research project from scratch. Nothing beats the feeling of slowly seeing the big picture as all the data you collected are coming together. I was also responsible for inputting data for PECC's survey in their "State of the Region" report. Being able to read the responses from opinion leaders across the region enables me to understand their own perspectives. The survey collected responds from opinion leaders from different fields and economics. While their opinions are diverse, there are some common themes in their responds. Many are alarmed by the rise of the anti-globalization sentiment and consider it a threat for future economic development.

My internship here in Singapore has provided me with the valuable opportunity to learn from the very best. A perk of being an intern at PECC is that I had the chance to attend a wide range of seminars and workshops organized by different Universities, think tanks and government subsidiaries. After attending these events, I drafted reports to my supervisor in PECC. From the dispute in South China Sea to the latest development in Blockchain, scholars and experts alike are very willing to share their insights. Out of the many excellent sessions, the most memorable one was organized by ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute on the Trans-Pacific Partnership's ("TPP") dispute resolution mechanism. As a law student, it is fascinating to learn how multilateral trade agreement interact with domestic laws from various legal traditions. While the Investor-State Dispute Settlement ("ISDS") mechanism is nothing new to ASEAN countries, its importance cannot be understated as large corporations are playing an increasingly curial role in world trade. Although Hong Kong does not participate in the TPP, the experience of implementing ISDS will still have a considerable impact on Hong Kong, the city which prides itself as an international arbitration center. I am also impressed by the Singapore's robust discussion on these important issues across all corners of the civil society. The seminars and workshops are attended by people from all walks of life. From students to professionals, they are very willing express their insights and contribute to the discussion.

Although many in Hong Kong consider Singapore a competitor, the Singaporeans I met are more interested in the cuisines and culture of Hong Kong. The latest food sensation in Singapore is a Michelin-starred hawker stall in Chinatown serving Hong Kong style roast pork. In a shopping mall near Orchard road, I saw enthusiastic Singaporean fans waiting to meet Hong Kong TV celebrities that I have never heard of before. The rapid cultural exchange between the two cities enables them to learn from each other. The benefit of an international internship is the exposure to new perspectives. The staffs of PECC come from diverse background. Not only did they give me all sorts of advice on how to make the best of my stay in Singapore, we also had fruitful exchange frequently. We talked about all sorts of important issues from the effectiveness of Singaporean education policy to whether or not Durian is safe for human consumption.

Of course, my time in Singapore was not just about work. Singapore is a fascinating city to visit. Its charm goes beyond the many shopping malls. I indulged myself to the vibrant rock music scene of the city. There are always some bands playing in the outdoor theater of the Esplanade during the weekends. I was also stunned by the energy and enthusiasm displayed by musicians and audiences alike during the Ignite! Music Festival. Ignite! Is an annual rock festival organized by the students at Republic Polytechnic. It showcases local music talents and support charitable causes. It feels great to rock out with so many passionate fans while enjoying some good old fashion rock n' roll tunes. Singaporean rock music, with its diverse styles, is a good reflection of the city's multicultural heritage.

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The world may still be confusing after I completed the internship. But my time at the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council has shown me that perhaps there is a way for the world to become a more united place. Although the process may be messy and lots of mistakes will be made, there are some devoted individuals who are realizing the ideal, one step at a time.