

PECC International Secretariat Internship Report

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It has been the highlight of my undergraduate times to intern at the PECC International Secretariat in Singapore. In those six weeks at PECC, I have gained great insights into the Asia-Pacific economies, developed new perspectives about the region and the issues it is faced with, learned analytical skills and work ethics, and met interesting people with various backgrounds, experiences and opinions. In general the experience has been fun and rewarding. I have benefited a lot from the internship program and I am very grateful for this opportunity.

My six-week work at PECC could be roughly divided into three phases. In the first two weeks I mainly assisted Mr. Eduardo Pedrosa, Secretary General at PECC, in compiling and analyzing some Asia-Pacific socioeconomic statistics in preparation for upcoming conference presentations. I gathered data on output and income distribution in the Asia-Pacific economies when I learned how diverse the region was economically and how large the income gaps were among provinces or wealth groups within each economy. By looking at the long-term inequality statistics and indices I also confirmed the speculation about increasing inequality within the Asia-Pacific countries. And digging into some historical output data starting from the eighteenth century enable me to see how the locus of the world economy shifted away and then back to Asia. Also I compiled student flow statistics within the region and I was impressed by the increase in student movement at the tertiary level. I also surveyed previous polls on international trade to help formulate the question the State of the Region report this year. I read about how polls asked about the public opinions on the effect of trade on wage, growth, equality and specific industries and found how people from different backgrounds respond differently to these questions. Though I have had similar experiences with statistics before as research assistant, here at PECC I have been able to take one step forward to make my own interpretations of the numbers and to convey the messages behind. I have learned to think about the real-life stories encapsulated in the statistics, about the most efficient way to communicate them and what we could and should do to make things better.

In the next two weeks I was encouraged to study about some specific topic and to write something original. I therefore chose the issue of trade in services to work on: I surveyed the literatures, talked with my supervisor, Ms. Betty Ip, and read up the trade news and agreements. Before the internship I had only some vague ideas about what trade in services actually was, let alone the dynamics and issues about this topic. During the internship I started from ground zero to learn about what service trade entailed. It all came to me as so closely relevant to our daily life and therefore significant for development. I then learned the difficulties in both research and the policy-making process in this area. Data availability came as one of the biggest obstacles to study services trade but there have been

great efforts invested in data collection and compilation. And in trying to facilitate more trade in services, issues like labor, regulation, law and politics at times complicate things or even hinder the process of improvement. Before it gets too technical I also watched presentations and read publications in past PECC events to see what academics, government officials and business people have in mind when they were discussing and studying this issue. On the one hand I have seen lots of challenges ahead in greater volumes of services trade; on the other I remain hopeful since it is being made more possible by technology and passionate efforts of advocates and regional organizations like PECC.

In the last two weeks, I studied the investment in infrastructure in the Asia-Pacific region and the monetary supply in the major economies. I also assisted with the State of the Region survey by looking into the survey results and making entries into the digital system. It appeared to me as surprising that Asian countries have invested so much in building up their basic infrastructures, in becoming more developed and in creating greater positive impacts on the people. There also is great potential for further development. And in helping to enter the survey results I get to see how people from different regions and backgrounds tend to have different answers about the priorities of the regional leaders. It was a little pitiful that I could not stay long enough to see the bigger picture of the survey results. In general I really appreciate the sophisticated design of the survey and the active responses from thought leaders. They have made me feel the awareness and effort people in the region are making to get things better.

During the internship I have attend two staff meetings when my colleagues reflected about the General Meeting in Canada and discussed follow-up work. I joined the PECC International Secretariat right after the annual meeting was held in Canada. My colleagues just got back from the meeting with the fresh memories about the event including the memorable experiences there and the lessons throughout the planning and running process of the conference. By attending to their discussion I was able to learn about the highlights of the conference like the guest performance, youth delegate programs, sub-committee meetings, etc. and the invaluable tips about managing such large-scale event from booking tickets right to providing clear instructions to participants.

During the internship I have also had the chance to attend the workshop on energy security in China hosted by the Energy Studies Institute. It was in the second week of my internship when Betty invited us interns to take some time off our work and joined the talk at the Energy Studies Institute, which was located right upstairs. I was very much illuminated by the speaker and the discussants on the issues discussed. Now I at least have some idea about the country's position in certain areas, the scale of volume it is generating and absorbing, the import landscape and dynamics it is facing, and the projects it is undertaking for development and change. It helped build up my knowledge about the issues from ground zero. Not only did the speaker update me on the numbers and facts but also shared comments and insights that helped me look at the issues from new perspectives. Learning more about the lobbying and approving process behind the scene I come to see the matter of offshore oil production from the angle of the business groups and policy makers. This again

reminded me of what Betty encouraged me on the first day of my internship – to be open to different perspectives.

Beyond the office building I have learned much from my colleagues about the organization. Some of them have remained with PECC for more than two decades and therefore shared with me very interesting stories about PECC.

The prime location of the PECC office has allowed me to meet people from not only our office but also other research institutes like APEC Policy Support Unit and United States Development Program, which are just one or two floors upstairs. By the introduction of my fellow interns I got to make friends with researchers from other institutions that were doing different but equally interesting and important work over lunch. It was an eye-opening and mind-broadening experience to talk to them and to learn about their personal experiences as well as their opinions and work.

At the weekend I always went out and explored the city of Singapore. Though Hong Kong is constantly being compared with Singapore, these two cities have their own charms in very different ways from my point of view. I enjoyed walking around the city and appreciating the architectures from colonial times very much. And the buildings in the civic district still smacks of past old times when the city was the trading hub of southeast Asia and when the trade ships just came and went and were docked along the Singapore river. The wave on the river felt like still reflecting the hustle and bustle of the trade ships.

I have also caught up with friends from undergraduate study and exchange who were in Singapore. Through them I learned much of the local perspective about the development of the city, the job market for college graduate, their concerns about the economics and politics.

I highly recommend this internship to my fellow students. In preparation for the application and the internship, I suggest reading through the archives of the HKCPEC and PECC as well as reading up the latest news in the Asia-Pacific. In the interview with the HKCPEC, I was asked about my experiences abroad, my interest in and knowledge about the internship and my career goals. I was also asked about my opinions about the quota on milk powder on the Mainland-Hong Kong border. In the previous round of interview I was asked about my perspectives about the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. So I think it would be helpful if candidates can familiarize themselves with the economics and politics in the regions.

Last but not least I would like to thank Mr. Eduardo Pedrosa for his invaluable instruction for my work and advice for life; Ms. Betty Ip for sharing of her life experiences both within and outside of PECC; Ms. Zakiah Kassim for her great administrative supports; Ms. Nor Irdawaty for orienting me around the campus and the city; Ms. Jessica Yom for introducing me to the office. I would definitely bring their teachings and blessings with me at my new journey of life and hopefully contribute back to the PECC community in the future.

