

***ASEAN Student's Reflection: The Role of Japan's Higher Education in Fostering Global Human Resources through the Twin College Envoys Program***

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**Abstract**

Under the ASEAN Vision 2020, cross border education amongst ASEAN countries has emerged as a growing area of concern and opportunity. Capturing this momentum, Japan as a strategic partner of ASEAN promotes inter-university exchanges program with its “Re-inventing Japan Project” to invite more ASEAN students to study in Japan, as it is expected that the increased number of international students will contribute to strengthening Japanese international goodwill. In response to this situation, Chiba University adopted “Re-inventing Japan Project” and has started the Twin College Envoys (Dispatch) Program or TWINCLE Program since 2012, which strongly encourage ASEAN students to participate globally by building strong collaborative partnership, mutual academic and cultural exchange with Japanese students. By employing qualitative thematic analysis, this study explored the ASEAN student's reflection regarding their subjective experience while participating in this program. In total, there are twenty students, comprised of undergraduate, graduate and doctorate students from Indonesia and Thailand. The qualitative thematic analysis found three main themes present in the students' final report, students' insights regarding the collaborative science lesson; students' impressions of the ASEAN and Japan relationship; and students' future plans. The evidence from both students' final report and their semi-structured online interview suggests that Japan's higher education, as represented by Chiba University, gave the students invaluable experience and enhanced their global perspective.

Keywords: ASEAN students, Reflection, Twin College Envoys Program

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## **1. Introduction**

For over 40 years, Japan and ASEAN countries have been establishing a sustainable and prosperous cooperation. This long relationship began in 1973, when ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), a regional organization of Southeast Asian nations, joined with Japan to establish informal dialogue which was later formalized with the convening of the ASEAN-Japan forum in March 1977 (ASEAN, 2015). Since then, significant progress has been made in ASEAN-Japan relations. Cooperation in numerous pivotal areas such as political security, economic development and socio-cultural development has led to a mutual understanding and warm relationship between ASEAN and Japan that continues today. The enormous effort towards the establishment of Japan and ASEAN countries' deep relationship has forged close cooperation towards stability and development in Asia (Mofa, 2014).

Particularly in the context of ASEAN-Japan social cultural cooperation, in order to foster a sense of togetherness and mutual respect, people-to-people contact and cultural exchanges among the ASEAN-Japanese youth and intellectuals has been strongly emphasized (ASEAN, 2015). In fact, to strengthen collaboration and networking among universities in ASEAN countries, Japan is promoting inter-university exchanges through the "Re-inventing Japan Project", which specifically aims to valorise number of student exchanges (ASEAN, 2015).

The number of international students from ASEAN countries who visited Japan and vice versa increased over the past decade. Japan itself has invited ASEAN youth to visit Japan through various exchange study abroad programmes. For example, the Japan East-Asia Network of Exchange for Students and Youths (JENESYS) brought 13,500 youths from ASEAN and about 700 Japanese youths to visit ASEAN countries from 2007 to 2012 (ASEAN, 2015). This cooperation undeniably brings mutual benefits for both Japan and ASEAN; investing in youth study abroad programmes is considered as the key driver to opening various opportunities for both parties in facing global challenges.

The aim of this paper is to capture the subjective experience of exchange ASEAN students through their reflection journal after they have finished their exchange programme in Japan. Through thematic analysis, the paper highlights ASEAN students' insights and attitudes toward the importance of global human resources, including their impressions of Japan's higher education and culture, and their future plans following the programme.

### **1.1 Cross Border Higher Education in ASEAN**

Under 2020 ASEAN vision, cross border education in the ASEAN region has emerged as a growing area of concern and opportunity in recent years (ASEAN, 2012). By definition, cross border education can be regarded as the movement of people and research across national boundaries for academic purposes. Cross border education can take various forms, such as pursuit of a degree, internship, fieldwork or participation in a collaborative academic project (Lek, 2014). There is increasing demand for collaborative initiatives amongst ASEAN countries through either bilateral or multilateral programmes which aim to enhance cross border education. The notion of ASEAN cross border education is even slowly but surely strengthening

and developing through the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration, which was enacted by the Head of State and Government of ASEAN in 2011. Since the signing of the Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration, some jointly agreed initiatives have witnessed more accelerated progress than others (Lek, 2014).

The Cha-am Hua Hin Declaration emphasizes that regional cooperation in cross border education should be aimed at elevating the ‘well being and livelihood’ of ASEAN citizens, improving ASEAN human resources and building an ‘ASEAN identity based on friendship and cooperation’ (ASEAN, 2009). In particular, the declaration underscores the role of education in meeting the goals for the ASEAN community set for 2015, including the accomplishment of fundamental pillars like the political and security, economic, and socio-cultural pillars. The Roadmap for the ASEAN Community (2009-2015) lists several joint initiatives that aim to promote ASEAN regional cooperation in cross border education. The following list, compiled by Lek (2014), shows joint initiatives which all envisage the ASEAN cross border education.

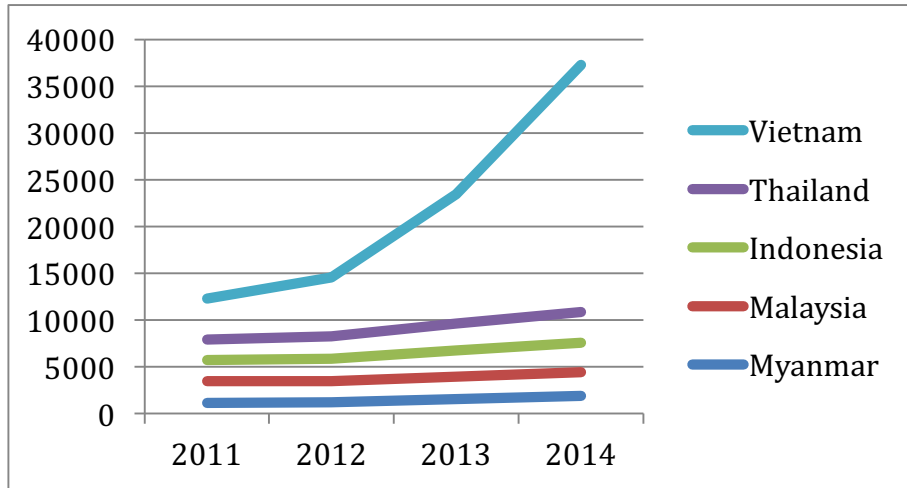
The ASEAN states have agreed to

- Develop a university curriculum on the legal systems of member states (A.1.3),
- Review ASEAN scholarship programmes (A.1),
- Enhance cooperation within the ASEAN University Network (AUN) (A.5)
- Promote staff and student exchange among institutions of higher learning (A.1)
- Promote proficiency in the English language (A.1), and
- Create regional research clusters (A.1)

## **1.2 Japan’s Higher Education and ASEAN**

From Japan’s perspective, promoting internationalization of Japan to invite international students is one of the top priorities of the Japanese government at the moment. Facing challenging domestic issues such as the falling birth rate and aging population, Japan has no other course than to enhance their capability through internationalization of higher education; this will be crucial for strengthening Japan’s international competitiveness (Shimomura, 2013). It is expected that the increased number of international students will contribute to strengthening Japanese international goodwill and globally contribute to human resource development. More importantly, accepting international students can also contribute to Japan’s economic development (Ministry of Justice, 2010). Accordingly, Japan’s current Prime Minister has established the Shinzo Abe initiative, which states the long-term goal of accepting 300,000 international university students by 2020 (MEXT, 2008).

This target is a reasonable one if the Japanese government knows their target market. As figure 1 and table 1 show, there has been a significant increase in the number of ASEAN students in Japan since 2012.



**Figure. 1 ASEAN students' mobility graphic 2011-2014**

	Myanmar	Malaysia	Indonesia	Thailand	Vietnam
2011	1151	2319	2276	2167	4373
2012	1193	2293	2410	2383	6290
2013	1598	2378	2787	2876	13799
2014	1935	2475	3188	3250	26439

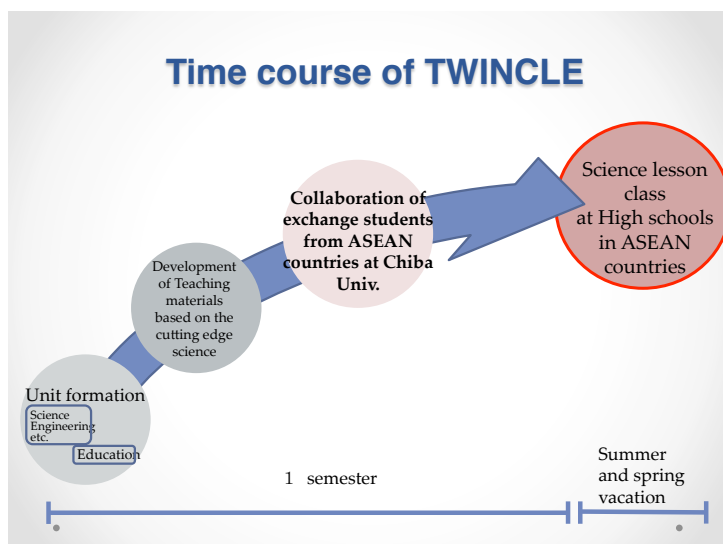
**Table. 1 Number of ASEAN students in Japan 2011-2014**

According to the data above, overall the number of international students coming from ASEAN countries to study in Japan is steadily increasing year after year. In particular, the number of international students from Vietnam increased six fold from 2011 to 2014. Although currently the majority of international students in Japan are coming from China, Japan is currently bound to increase international students from the ASEAN region. In order to achieve 300,000 international students by 2020, Japan promotes inter-university exchanges with its “Re-inventing Japan Project” funded by Ministry of Education. This project mainly supports the formation of collaborative programmes with ASEAN universities (MEXT, 2012).

### 1.3 The Emergence of the TWINCLE Program

In response to Japan’s higher education global vision, Chiba University is promoting its “Global Campus, Chiba University” program. In 2012, Chiba University adopted two new projects: MEXT’s “Project for Promotion of Global Human Resource Development” (a university-wide project) and the “Re-inventing Japan Project”. Particularly for the “Re-inventing Japan Project”, the university has started the Twin College Envoys (Dispatch) Program or TWINCLE Program, which focuses on primary and secondary education in ASEAN countries (Daphne et al., 2014). Spearheaded by the Faculty of Education and funded by the Ministry of Education, the TWINCLE program mainly aims to develop mutual academic and cultural understanding in the ASEAN region by conducting science and Japanese culture lessons.

The strong point of the TWINCLE Program is in its multilateral inter-university cooperation with universities across the ASEAN region. Through this programme, groups of graduate and undergraduate students majoring in science and education work collaboratively to develop and improve scientific teaching materials based on cutting-edge science with ASEAN partner universities' students. The TWINCLE Program is an international exchange programme offering ASEAN students the opportunity to visit Japan in Chiba University and experience collaborative science education with Chiba University students; at a later time, Chiba University students also have the opportunity to visit ASEAN countries to deliver their science lessons, which they prepared with support from visiting ASEAN students, to high school students. The TWINCLE Program is set apart from other exchange programmes in Japan due to its supervised interaction with ASEAN undergraduate and graduate students, implementation of teaching practices for Japanese culture, cutting-edge technology classes and opportunity for independent travel which supports cultural exchange (Daphne et al., 2014). Figure 2 below summarize the flow of TWINCLE program.



**Figure 2. Time course of TWINCLE Program**

There are twelve partner universities in five ASEAN countries that participate in this programme. Five partner universities are in Indonesia: University of Indonesia, Institute Technology Bandung, Gadjah Mada University, Udayana University and Bogor Agricultural University. Four partner universities are in Thailand: Mahidol University, Kasetsart University, King Mongkut's University of Technology Thonburi and Chulalongkorn University. The remaining four universities are Nanyang Technological University, University of Education, Vietnam National University, and Royal University Phnom Pehn, which are in Singapore, Vietnam and Cambodia respectively.

The TWINCLE Program offers varying course durations; Table 2 below summarizes these course offerings.

Course Title	Duration	Activities
Trial	2 weeks	Internship
Short	1 month	Internship and research work
Long	6 months	Internship, research work and fieldwork

**Table. 2 Courses of TWINCLE Program**

By fiscal year 2014, more than 150 ASEAN students had been accepted to Chiba University and completed the programme. Most of these ASEAN students had undertaken the TWINCLE Program through a trial course; a small number of students had participated in the short and long course programmes. Table 3 below summarizes the number of ASEAN student visitors as labelled in inbound column, while outbound represents the number of Chiba students from the TWINCLE Program who have visited ASEAN countries.

	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Outbound	39	76	84	96*	96*
Inbound	0	84	67	47	28*

Source: TWINCLE Report FY 2014-2015

**Table. 3 Students mobility in TWINCLE Program**

\*Expected minimum number of students

## 2. The Present Study

### 2.1 Methodology

This research employed qualitative data analysis through thematic analysis using secondary data and a small number of semi-structured online interviews. The secondary data in this paper was gathered from the final reports of ASEAN students who participated in the TWINCLE Program Trial Course in June 2015. After finishing the TWINCLE Program in Chiba University, each student was required to write a final report in the form of a reflection on his or her academic and cultural experiences as an exchange student in Japan. By writing this reflection, the students can share their insights, details about their complex learning and even enhance the meaning of their own experiences (Costa & Kallick, 2008).

Data were further supported by semi-structured online interviews with five ASEAN students. During the interviews, participants described their experience while staying in Japan for 2 weeks. Open questions were posed to participants, and interviews were recorded using a computer recording application and later transcribed. Both students' final report and interview transcript were analysed using thematic analysis, a qualitative method used for 'identifying, analysing, and report patterns (themes) within data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis is essentially a method for

identifying and analysing patterns in qualitative research (Merton, 1975). Through this method, it allows researcher to obtain a depth of information in order to understand ASEAN student's reflection after following TWINCLE program. This paper is structured in regards to the main themes which emerged from the data.

### **3. Result: ASEAN Students' Reflections**

The following section presents the reflections of ASEAN students who participated in Trial Course TWINCLE Program. In total, there are twenty students, comprised of undergraduate, graduate and doctorate students from Indonesia and Thailand. The reflections outlined in this section capture the essential points of students' experiences while staying in Japan during the trial course programme (2 weeks in duration). The qualitative thematic analysis found three main themes present in the students' final report. In this section, students' reflections are divided under those main themes. Firstly, students' insights regarding the collaborative science lesson are explored, as this is the main activity of the programme. Then, students' impressions of the ASEAN and Japan relationship are discussed; this theme includes descriptions of how ASEAN students view their country's relationship and the relationship of ASEAN countries in general with Japan at the present time. In the last part, this section highlights students' future plans now that they have completed the TWINCLE Program in Japan. The following sections outline the main themes and subthemes emerging from analysis of the final report and interview transcript.

#### **3.1 Insights Regarding the Collaborative Science Lesson**

The first main theme is the insight regarding the collaborative science lesson, which is captured from two different collaborative science lessons that students experienced during following the program, namely laboratory coursework and collaborative group-work. In the first collaborative science lesson namely laboratory coursework, each ASEAN student is deployed to a different laboratory and receives a science lesson; the lesson received depends on students' major and specific research interest. The second collaborative science lesson is facilitated through collaborative group-work between ASEAN students with Japanese students from Chiba University. This collaborative group-works is the strong point of the TWINCLE Program that differentiates the programme from any other similar exchange programmes in Japan. During the collaborative group-work, students develop a science lesson plan that later will be delivered to high school students in ASEAN countries by the Chiba students. Exchange of ideas to develop cultural understanding and cutting-edge science are the two main themes that were explored and emphasized on these two collaborative science lessons program.

- **Laboratory and Class Facilities**

Often participants from ASEAN mentioned that they were amazed by the facilities of the research laboratory that they visited in Chiba University. This amazement was mentioned not only in the final report but also during the interview, particularly expressed among participants majoring in sciences such as Engineering, Bioscience or Geography. The participants mentioned that the laboratory facility in Japan (Chiba University) is more advanced than the laboratory in their own university. During an interview, one of the participants from Indonesia mentioned the following:

*“In my laboratory, professors already have Unmanned Aerial Vehicle, already have satellite and antenna. It’s really shocking to see the gap differences with Japan. In Indonesia, I only did image processing. It’s very basic, while in Japan they already make items for making products, their facilities are really advanced.”*

- Research Paradigm

In addition to the laboratory and class facilities, which were mentioned by the majority of the ASEAN students, the students also emphasized the valuable cultural lessons they had learned during the collaborative science lesson, in particular the Japanese research paradigm. The Japanese research paradigm in this context includes the attitudes, values and mind-set that Japanese researchers apply when conducting their research; this paradigm is obviously different compared with those of the ASEAN students’ home countries. One of the students from Indonesia mentioned the following:

*“In this activity I learnt not only Japanese technology but also ways of thinking of the researcher.”*

As several of the ASEAN students in the TWINCLE Program were majoring in Education, insights were also offered into this field. For example, one of students expressed thoughts about the value of the teaching that the student experienced:

*“This programme, the most memorable thing for me, it was not only about culture and education, but also teaching strategy and teaching style. It made me realize that in teaching it is not only what knowledge we have to share but also whether we share it in the right way.”*

In addition, through their experiences in the laboratory coursework, the students were able to gain new relevant knowledge that they needed for conveying a lesson, such as techniques for asking questions and other class management skills. Another participant observed the following:

*“Sensei let students ask first, and then he added and suggested about the thing or the information that everyone should know. . . . if they (students) did not know, students will have more information about the content.”*

- Knowledge Sharing and Collaboration

Another sub-theme that emerged in ASEAN students’ reflections on their collaborative group-work with Chiba students was the importance of knowledge sharing and collaboration. As mentioned earlier, visiting students from ASEAN countries and Chiba students have the opportunity to work together to develop a science lesson, which is later delivered to high school students in ASEAN countries. Cutting-edge science based on Chiba students’ research is the core of this lesson development activity. Not only ASEAN students, who could gain a research perspective in Japan, but also Chiba students learn from their counter-parts about culture and education in the respective countries. This activity emphasizes on an interdisciplinary approach to science, education and culture, as students have to consider not only the content of the science lesson, but also, and more importantly,



the audience's needs and an appropriate cross-cultural method to deliver the content. As a result, through this activity students discovered the importance of knowledge sharing in order to produce better results. One of participants from Thailand majoring in Education reported the following during the online interview:

*“This program strengthened my understanding that research collaboration and sharing knowledge were the most important keys to producing a great result. To become internationalized, educational institutions should consider and include international research collaboration in their internationalization process.”*

Another student also mentioned about the importance of building academic network, which mentioned as follow

*“I strongly agree that it is essential for a researcher to build academic networks and collaborate with other researchers in both local and international settings”*

### **3.2 Japan-ASEAN Relationship**

Japan and ASEAN have developed a strong and stable cooperation over the past decades, ever since the first formal ASEAN-Japan forum was created in 1977. In fact, from an economic standpoint, among the countries in the world, Japan has contributed significantly to become the largest investor in several ASEAN countries, including Indonesia, Thailand and Vietnam. Owing to this situation, ASEAN students tend to have a positive view of Japan overall. Most of the ASEAN students shared through their final report that their experiences in Japan had inspired them to reflect on and connect with their country's situation. Nineteen out of the twenty students even stated that they had strong desire to visit Japan again in the future, whether as a student, a visiting researcher or a tourist.

- Insights into Developing Home Countries

After finishing the TWINCLE Program, the ASEAN students had apparently gained a different view towards their future educational plan and the way in which the programme experience connects with their country's situation. On the final report, one of the participants explained the significance of the programme experience to his new personal goals as this program allow him to gain new experience and allow him to use the experience as the source of inspiration to improve his own country.

In a more specific explanation during one of the online interview sessions, a female participant from Indonesia explained that her experiences in Japan had given her a new insight regarding earthquake emergency evacuation plans. Particularly, as she came from 'Aceh', a region in the west side of Indonesia which was one of the areas that was heavily damaged by the tsunami disaster in 2004, she was interested in Japan's emergency evacuation plan and post disaster management.

*“There are a lot of things that we can adopt from Japan to Indonesia. As I come from Aceh, Japan's disaster preparedness plan has inspired me to think about how it can be adopted in my hometown, especially because the issue of tsunamis in Japan, including coastline and cycles, is the same as in Aceh.”*

Although the participants of this programme stayed in Chiba, Japan for only 12 days, overall all of them were satisfied with their programme, and several participants from both Thailand and Indonesia even declared that their trip to Japan exceeded expectation. According to the students' post-questionnaire, of over 20 participants, only one participant did not want to stay in Japan in the near future. The rest indicated that they would like to visit Japan again, whether for educational purposes, business or leisure.

- Cultural Awareness

Another sub theme that emerged under this second main theme is cultural awareness. Almost all students, either in their final report or online interview, mentioned this sub theme, noting how they had gained a better understanding and cultural awareness of Japanese culture. The following is one of the student's testimonies taken from the final report:

*"Its very inspiring to share each other's knowledge through the workshop. For only 2 hours I can understand how most people in Japan see their culture."*

Despite the ASEAN students mostly reporting exposure to Japanese culture, as they also had the opportunity to interact with each other, the students additionally felt that they had gained a better understanding about cultures from Indonesia and Thailand as well. Although the interaction spanned only for a short period, several ASEAN students mentioned they also learnt about the differences among ASEAN countries.

*"In my opinion, I got many – many new things from this program, such as learning about new cultures... Japanese culture, Indonesia, and even Thai culture from different universities."*

Eventually this experience brought better knowledge for ASEAN students about cultural awareness in general.

*"If I can meet more people from different backgrounds, I can also learn their culture straight from themselves."*

### **3.3 Implications of TWINCLE Program for Future Plans**

The last main theme is students' understanding of the implications this programme had for their future plans in either the educational context or the context of their career plans.

- Research Goals

In terms of ASEAN students' future research plans, several students felt this programme had inspired them to explore their own research interests more deeply, and some students even said that by completing the TWINCLE Program they had found new topics of interest for their future research.

*“Opportunities to investigate different educational systems inspired me to carry out research on internationalization in different social, economic, political, cultural and educational contexts.”*

ASEAN students described how this programme had helped them to focus on a specific research topic and how they could achieve related research goals.

*“Now I have an interest in marine remote sensing. I know it is not fixed yet, but because of him [refers to student’s professor] my mind is now wide open for the research topic”*

Another student also strongly emphasized that now she has a clear plan that she wants to achieve in the future

*“In the future, I will find a scholarship to go to study in Japan in the field of chemical engineering that connects with the activated carbon laboratory in Chiba University. It [the subject] is very connected with my field in KMUTT.”*

- Global Perspective

The TWINCLE Program hopes to develop future leaders with a strong global perspective. During the online interview, when students were asked about their view toward globalization and how they feel about going abroad, the students uniformly expressed that they now had a stronger desire to go abroad, either for study or travelling. Interestingly, the students had various answers to describe their reasons and purposes if they had another opportunity to go abroad in the future. Most of students want to go abroad again because they wanted to learn new culture in order to broaden their perspective.

*“After the programme, I really want to go abroad again. Because seeing different places and cultures impacts my way of seeing the world.”*

While some students also mentioned that by travelling abroad, they would have more chance to practice their English, practically because English is not their first language.

*“I realize that a supportive environment is an important factor to improve our proficiency in English, an international language.”*

#### **4. Discussions and Recommendation**

This paper depicted a range of ASEAN students' personal experiences associated with their experience in the trial course of the TWINCLE Program. The evidence from both students' final report and their semi-structured online interview suggests that Japan's higher education, as represented by Chiba University, gave the students invaluable experience and enhanced their global perspective. According to the students' reports, none of the students had negative feedback about the programme. Students mostly emphasized that they had gained new knowledge and understanding of Japanese culture and other ASEAN countries' culture. In addition, observing the cutting-edge science from Japan's higher education had influenced ASEAN students' future plans. The majority of the students expressed a strong desire to return to Japan again in the future, and many were tempted to continue their master degree in one of the universities in Japan.

Reflecting on this paper suggests additional points for consideration of future research. Although this paper involved ASEAN students from two ASEAN countries Indonesia and Thailand, it still not represents the majority of ASEAN students who are studying in Japan. More importantly, this paper still have not covered the reflection of students come from Vietnam, Cambodia and Singapore, as ASEAN students in TWINCLE program not only come from Indonesia and Thailand, but also from Vietnam and Cambodia and Singapore. In addition, topic like push and pull factor of ASEAN students to study in Japan needs to be explored more, as this would bring greater insight for Japan's higher education in particular and ASEAN countries in general.

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