

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION IN JAPAN



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KURA URAs Frontline: Japanese URA's Experience with ASEAN

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Japanese universities face a range of challenges associated with internationalization in the world of higher education. The Japanese government has launched a number of programs to help universities promote cooperation in international research and education, and to help them pursue more globalized education systems. Additionally, universities have established and implemented individual strategies for internationalization. This has led Japanese universities to establish more than 400 overseas offices around the world, to boost Japanese universities' presence, and to develop close connections with overseas universities.

The Kyoto University Research Administration office (KURA) has been engaged in Kyoto University's internationalization activities, and has been actively involved in establishing and managing Kyoto University's representative overseas centers, including the Kyoto University ASEAN Center, which opened in Bangkok, Thailand in June 2014. Three University Research Administrators (URAs) specialize in supporting various research activities in the ASEAN region. Each URA resides in

Bangkok to work with the Center for around 3–4 months a year on a rotational basis. Although the Center is located in central Bangkok, it administrates the entire ASEAN region, and we travel to various parts of the region, from Yangon, Myanmar, to Jakarta, Indonesia (the location of the ASEAN headquarters and secretariat) in order to facilitate communication between Kyoto University and universities and research institutes in ASEAN.

This article introduces URAs' experiences in exploring potential for overseas centers.

Kyoto University in ASEAN

Historically, the ASEAN region has been pivotal in promoting cultural exchange between the East and West. Southeast Asian countries have accumulated considerable knowledge in research and education, and in promoting mutual prosperity and coexistence within diverse communities. There are currently around 600 million people living in the ASEAN region—a population greater than that of the EU—and the region has

become a major political and economic center. The rise of research and education networks in the region will undoubtedly increasingly promote regional cohesion and global competitiveness.

Kyoto University has participated in research and education in the ASEAN region since the early twentieth century. In 1963, the University established the Center for Southeast Asian Studies (CSEAS), which has become a base not only for Japanese researchers, but also for researchers from around the world who are interested in researching Southeast Asia. CSEAS established a liaison office in Bangkok in 1964, followed by a Jakarta liaison office in 1970; both became bases for on-site study, and for exchange between researchers and students from Southeast Asian countries. From its roots in area studies, Kyoto University has expanded its network and deepened its academic partnerships in the ASEAN region. Today, Kyoto University has 29 overseas offices and centers in eight ASEAN countries (Thailand, Laos, Myanmar, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Indonesia).

The 29 offices and centers' functions vary, from equatorial atmosphere radar for atmospheric observation in West Sumatra, Indonesia, to field stations as bases for field research. Environmental science, anthropology, area studies, energy science, ecological research, biological conservation, agriculture, and disaster mitigation are some of the areas our researchers are addressing in the ASEAN region. Although a researcher studying labor migration and another studying sustainable energy may be working in the same country, they may not know of each other, as they are members of different disciplines and faculties.

Establishment of Kyoto University ASEAN Center

Kyoto University formulated an international strategy known as named “2x by 2020,” which is the slogan of the new international strategy by means of which Kyoto University aims to double its international indices in research, education, and international service by 2020. The Kyoto University ASEAN Center was established as part of this strategy to provide support for the promotion of research, education, and international collaboration in the ASEAN region by integrating various existing research and educational activities and networks in the region, and by expanding collaboration with ASEAN universities and research institutions.

Although our university has considerable experience in the ASEAN region, we must admit that the university had not previously made a collective effort as a whole. In order for the Kyoto University ASEAN Center to become a real hub, we first needed to connect the Center to Kyoto University's researchers and faculties that were engaged in research and educational activities in the region. The Center and URAs' director visited the dean or representative of each faculty one by one to introduce the Center, and to learn about ongoing activities and existing challenges. Face-to-face discussion not only provided opportunities to comprehensively grasp the current



Dr. Osawa introducing Kyoto University ASEAN Center to the students and faculty members at Mahasarakham University in Thailand.

situation, but also became essential to mobilizing internal cooperation.

The next challenge was to establish a system for regularly sharing ideas and information between the Kyoto University ASEAN Center and researchers, and among researchers across faculties, and a mechanism to incorporate them into the university's international strategies. Representatives from seventeen faculties were invited to establish the Kyoto University ASEAN Network Committee, which meets regularly about every two–three months to review activities, share information, and explore opportunities for new collaboration. The Center in Bangkok and the ASEAN Network Committee have thus formed the Kyoto University ASEAN Platform.

Exploring new horizons in collaboration with ASEAN universities

After establishing our internal cooperative framework, we began exploring new horizons in our collaboration with ASEAN universities and institutions. First, in March 2015 we organized the “Kyoto-ASEAN Forum 2015 Kickoff Meeting,” in which members of the ASEAN Network Committee and representatives of academic institutions and governmental agencies in ASEAN countries met to identify current challenges and potential for collaboration in research, human capacity development, and social responsibility and contribution.

Although the diversity of the ASEAN countries must be considered, it became clear in this meeting that we all face common challenges regarding sustainable collaboration, due to the effects of factors such as lack of funding and changing policy makers. To make collaboration more effective and enduring, we concluded that we must upgrade our collaboration to an institutional level, mobilize our resources to develop a promising Kyoto-ASEAN collaboration strategy, and advocate it in academic policy dialogue.

At a glance: Activities in Myanmar

As mentioned above, it is one of our important missions to act as a hub for our researchers. This year, Kyoto University will sign a MoU (Memorandum of Understanding) with the University of Yangon, Myanmar. Several Kyoto researchers have been involved in research and education in Myanmar.

To give a few examples, Professor Ari Ide-Ektessabi, who leads the Advanced Imaging Technology Laboratory at the Kyoto Graduate School of Engineering, has been involved in human resource development projects addressing the digitalization, documentation, and conservation of cultural heritage in Myanmar. Associate Professor Yoshihiro Nakanishi (Center for Southeast Asian Studies) authored “Strong Soldiers, Failed Revolution: The State and Military in Burma, 1962–88,” whose research addresses Myanmar politics. Professor Mamoru Kanzaki, of the Kyoto Graduate School of Agriculture, has been researching biodiversity and sustainable tropical



KURA staff at the ASEAN Center welcoming the delegates from Mahidol University and King Monkut's University of Technology Thonburi from Thailand on 2 March, 2015.

forestry in central Myanmar. We cannot introduce all the Kyoto University researchers engaged with Myanmar in this article, for lack of space.

The Center and the URAs provide opportunities for these researchers to become acquainted each other, exchange information, and possibly cooperate. Though researchers' fields may differ, research interests and issues in a region or country often overlap. Signing a MoU between Yangon and Kyoto will enrich existing collaboration, and facilitate various types of exchange between researchers from both universities. These researchers were brought together and coordinated by the Center's URAs, and are exchanging opinions and ideas about possible collaboration through Yangon University and beyond. It is no exaggeration to say that the signing of the MoU mentioned above could not have been organized without the establishment of the Center and the work of the URAs.

The state of international collaborative research

The Japanese government has promoted the internationalization of Japanese universities that encourage international collaborative research. Spending time in overseas centers and supporting the activities of Kyoto University's researchers is a practical and efficient way to understand researchers' support needs. We address challenges with our researchers, learn how international research collaboration may be initiated, and consider with researchers how collaboration may be sustained. Through this on-site experience, we directly observe the process of the promotion of international collaborative research.

Working in the Center provides URAs with more opportunities to meet our researchers than are available in the Kyoto office; we believe this is essential to properly supporting researchers (see previous report by Sugihara in the March/April issue of NCURA magazine). A surprising number of our researchers travel to, and spend time in, the ASEAN region for various reasons (e.g., conducting research, establishing joint laboratories, attending meetings and symposiums, and organizing seminars and workshops). As mentioned above, we expect the new ASEAN office to become a significant regional hub, not only for Kyoto University researchers, but also for anybody with interest in the ASEAN region. Moreover, we expect interactions among people from all over the world to occur in this office. By establishing sustainable relationships with our ASEAN partners in order to work closely with our researchers, we suggest there is something important beyond measurable outcomes (e.g., publications and funding) in international collaborative research. We are fortunate as URAs to work in exciting and challenging environments where we can directly support our researchers to address global challenges to benefit international collaboration. For more information about Kyoto University ASEAN Center, please visit <http://www.oc.kyoto-u.ac.jp/overseas-centers/asean/en/> and our Facebook page. **N**



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If you have a habit of starting projects and not finishing them, ask yourself: Why that is the case? Well, you are not alone. It appears to be an ongoing problem for most of us. We tend to come up with great ideas, get started on them, and then run out of steam before they are completed. What can you do? Here are a few things to consider.

Become Aware of the Pattern

Recall the last two projects that you worked on. Take a moment to write down why you began the projects and why you stopped. See if you can find any commonalities.

Know Yourself and Try Being Realistic

Stop setting goals that are impossible for you to achieve. Don't set yourself up to fail by raising the bar too high. Instead set mini timelines that are reachable. This will add some structure to your project, and keep you motivated to continue working.

Quit Getting Stuck on the Big Picture

"Procrastinators don't miss the forest for the trees – they miss the trees for the forest". They can see the big picture, but just have trouble completing the work. Deconstructing the tasks to make them more manageable is what causes paralyzation.

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