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# **The Report of the NEAT Working Group on**

## **Networking Cultural Institutions for Socio-Cultural Connectivity in East Asia**

**July 2019**

### **Rationale**

Recognizing the importance of building East Asian socio-cultural community, the Network of East Asian Think-Tanks (NEAT) has organized a number of working groups in dealing with general issues of cultural exchange and explored various ways to enhance cultural exchange in East Asia. In this context, the NEAT Working Group Meeting on 'East Asian Socio-Cultural Connectivity: Building an Institutional Network' was organized by NEAT Korea on July 20, 2018 with the presence of 17 representatives from ASEAN Plus Three (APT).

The WG in 2018 made recommendation as follows. First, it is highly necessary to build a network among the sociocultural institutes in the member countries. Upon the recommendation of NEAT coordinators, the representing institute will share information and update the state of the member states national and regional sociocultural policies and challenges.

Second, to form a regional vision for more concrete socio-cultural cooperation, a regular policy forum needs to be conducted. The regional network of the sociocultural institutes conducts collaborative research on the socio-cultural community and various sociocultural challenges the region is facing. The regular forum will identify the priorities on sociocultural cooperation. This initiative would lead to the formation of an epistemic community that consists of scholars, policy makers and other stakeholders including those who participated in the NEAT process previously.

Third, for the medium- and long-term development plan, an inter-state research and monitoring unit for the sociocultural community needs to put in place, the so-called Institute for Socio-Cultural Cooperation for ASEAN and East Asia. The

institute can offer policy recommendations for the ASSC and East Asian sociocultural community. It may handle selected socio-cultural cooperation programs mainly in the field of education and research to fulfill its main task. Importantly it would monitor the progress of the ASSC and APT plans for socio-cultural cooperation.

The proposed working for this year was committed to the recommendations of the 2018 WG by providing a room for representatives from the related cultural institutions from the NEAT member countries to discuss the process and extent of institutionalized network of cultural institutions for socio-cultural connectivity in East Asia.

The NEAT Working Group on Networking Cultural Institutions for Socio-Cultural Connectivity in East Asia was organized by NEAT Korea in Busan on July 4, 2019 with presence of representatives from 9 member states of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT). This report strives to put forward policy proposals on **Networking Cultural Institutions** while it presents major points discussed during the meeting.

### **On Discussion**

The importance of people-centered/oriented approach in networking of socio-cultural connectivity has increasing become a significant element in building a regional community in Southeast Asia and East Asia. Close cooperation between the government organizations and non-government organizations is a vital element in strengthening a cultural institutional network.

The leaders of ASEAN Member States have reaffirmed the importance of strengthening the cooperation among ASEAN countries for shared prosperity in the areas of mutual interest related to arts, culture, and creative industries (ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the ASEAN Cultural Year 2019).

There has been a number of declarations towards greater cultural cooperation including the 2000 ASEAN Declaration on Cultural Heritage, the 2011 Declaration on ASEAN Unity in Cultural Diversity: Towards Strengthening ASEAN Community, the 2014 Hue Declaration on Culture for ASEAN Community's Sustainable Development, the 2016 Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on Culture and the Arts

to Promote ASEAN's Identity towards a Dynamic and Harmonious ASEAN Community, the 2016 Vientiane Declaration on Reinforcing Cultural Heritage Cooperation, and the 2018 Yogyakarta Declaration on Embracing the Culture of Prevention to Enrich the ASEAN Identity that put high emphasis on the protection and promotion of ASEAN cultural heritage and cultural diversity as well as the role of culture for sustainable development in building the ASEAN Community.

This year was designated as the ASEAN Cultural Year by the ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts (AMCA) at the 8th AMCA Meeting in Yogyakarta, Indonesia, in order to consolidate and strengthen regional cooperation in the cultural related areas and to bring the best of ASEAN to the global stage.

The current ASEAN Chairmanship also reiterates the cultural aspect of ASEAN by with respect for diversity and a great sense of ASEAN identity to promote ASEAN culture internationally.

Engaging with ASEAN dialogue partners in the field of cultural cooperation is particularly important. It should be noted that it is important to promote greater awareness and appreciation of each other's traditions, heritage and cultures. ASEAN Plus Three (APT) also needs to enhance the awareness and understanding of each other's culture, customs and faiths, including through regular people-to-people and cultural exchange activities.

Socio-cultural connectivity within the APT framework can be enriched by further networking cultural institutions. Further developing cultural awareness programs and East Asian Studies through people-to-people exchange programs and short-course trainings need to be developed. It can be also mentioned that the cooperation among higher education institutions in East Asian countries should be encouraged to set up East Asian Studies programmes in order to contribute to socio-cultural exchange and collaboration. In other words, the process should encourage developing a humanistic regional community through increasing socio-cultural exchanges in the process of building an East Asian Community that places enhanced importance on shared ideas and identity.

In the process of Asian regional context and tolerating diversity, a new role of higher education can have in the establishment of a regional community by investing the field of higher education with development of transnational networks.

Meanwhile, there are also the concrete and more technical points to be considered. In terms, however, the Asian Higher Education Zone can raise more opportunities of students' exchange, but also faculty, provider mobilities which can project the process and extent of various institutional Network for Socio-Cultural Connectivity in East Asia. In search of mutual understanding among the APT member states, there should be more balanced interactions to avoid "one-way traffic" problem.

The ASEAN Culture House (ACH) in Busan and ASEAN Cultural Centre (ACC) in Bangkok present a possible model of realizing cultural cooperation by promoting shared awareness. For instance, the ACH seeks to enhance mutual understanding between ASEAN and Korea, and to cooperate with ASEAN diplomatic missions and cultural institutions to present the cultures and societies of ASEAN and AMS to Koreans and foreign residents living in Korea. The ACH introduces diverse aspects of the culture of ASEAN and AMS through various cooperative projects with ASEAN and domestic cultural institutions as well as their cultural experts.

The operation of the ASEAN Cultural Center in Bangkok, an interactive learning center on ASEAN culture, to promote dialogue and cooperation with similar centres and institutions in ASEAN Member States, and to further strengthen cooperation with culture centres and institutions of dialogue partners has attracted support from ASEAN member states.

ASEAN Cultural Center and ASEAN Cultural House had closely worked in preparation of the MOU on Cultural Exchanges, which it will be a part of good platform in the region. There is a huge potential for the expansion of networking for civil society and people to people initiatives such as the Asian Heritage Alliance (AHA).

Having a greater level of cultural cooperation would connote five strategic elements: 1) to ensure security, 2) to enhance competitiveness, 3) to develop human capital, 4) to promote social equity and equality and 5) to improve cultural management system.

In this context, APT countries can exchange cultural information by building a network of the existing cultural institutions and cooperative mechanisms in order to improve cultural values. The implementation of cultural activities needs to engage with the respective agency or responsible organizations of each country

through its national focal points/secretariats. Therefore, the institutional mechanism and connectivity for institutional Network should be developed.

Further engaging newer members of the ASEAN countries within the socio-cultural connectivity should not be neglected to promote knowledge sharing network among the APT countries as to best practices from cultural institutions for education, youth, and sport practices. More cross-sectorial and inter-pillar coordination on socio-cultural connectivity should be developed further.

## **Recommendations**

In order to promote greater awareness and appreciation of each other's traditions, heritage and cultures towards common and shared identity within ASEAN and in East Asia, the participants of the WG have agreed as follows.

- To recommend the governments of APT to provide institutional support for the establishment of ASEAN cultural institutions in the member countries
- To initiate the network for cultural institutions in East Asia including the ASEAN Cultural Center, the ASEAN Culture House, Singapore Heritage Society, and Myanmar Cultural Heritage Trust and other related institutions to share institutional support and collaboration policies.
- To suggest that ASEAN Cultural Center and the ASEAN Culture House to play a role of coordinator in the process of developing the network.
- To pursue the third WG on further institutionalization of the network of social-cultural institutions to be co-organized by NEAT Thailand and NEAT Korea.