

Think-Tank Delegates Discuss Cultural Exchange Through Education



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The Network of East Asian Think-tanks (NEAT)¹ held its fourth working group meeting on enhancing cultural exchange in Seoul, Korea on 18 to 20 June, 2010. This year the focus of the 20 participants from ASEAN Plus Three countries (ASEAN, China, Japan, South Korea) was on the importance of education as a means of cultural exchange. Previous meetings discussed cultural exchange and the role of the media, and cultural exchange and the role of popular culture and cultural festivities².

The meeting was hosted by the Korean Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (KISEAS). Delegates discussed urgent issues in cultural education, the experiences of each country on cultural exchange through education, case studies on cultural exchange through education, and measures and programs that could be taken to enhance cultural exchange through education in East Asia.

During the meeting, representatives from each country gave accounts of cultural education within their countries and cultural exchanges with other countries through education. Singapore's delegate spoke about how Singapore's multicultural society and immigrant past and present made cultural exchange and understanding important not just for diplomacy, but also for its internal harmony. Schools and universities in Singapore are diverse institutions where students interact with others from a wide variety of backgrounds, he said. He also cited some of the many programmes and schemes in place, encouraging students' participation in cultural exchange opportunities overseas.

¹ NEAT is a mechanism for research and academic exchange, and a platform for second-track diplomacy in the regional cooperation among 10+3 countries in East Asia (that is the 10 ASEAN countries, and China, Japan and Korea).

² The reports of the first three meetings can be found at http://www.ceac.jp/e/pdf/neat_05wg04.pdf, http://www.ceac.jp/e/pdf/neat_06wg04.pdf, and http://www.ceac.jp/e/pdf/neat_07wg05.pdf Future meetings will be on people-to-people exchange (2011) and performing arts and cultural exhibitions (2012).

During the general discussion, the following were brought up:

- 1) Cultural exchange applies not just between countries, but within countries, especially in multicultural societies. Cultural exchange does not necessarily result in cultural understanding, so there is a need to devise programmes which are effective in fostering intercultural understanding.
- 2) The need for ministries of education to commit to multicultural education as a principle.
- 3) Networks – both national and international – could be set up between education institutions for cultural exchange. These networks would foster more exchanges and facilitate the sharing of information.
- 4) The need to establish a database of best practices for cultural exchange so as to learn from each other's experiences. The international network could be responsible for the database. Many countries and institutions have some form of cultural exchange programmes which other institutions may not know about. The database will be a one-stop information portal for institutions wishing to start a cultural exchange programme or to find partners.
- 5) The need to leverage on the Internet as a medium for promoting cultural exchange. For instance, the database suggested above could be put online for easy updating and access.
- 6) The possibility of setting up a student hosting network to connect students and families in other countries willing to host them.
- 7) The need for more research to be done on cultural exchange. Little is known about the best way of conducting cultural exchange, or the effects of cultural exchange on their participants.
- 8) The possibility of setting up a cyber-university.
- 9) The idea of an ASEAN languages centre that could be based in multicultural societies such as Singapore or Malaysia, or nations could take turns to host.

The report of the working group will be submitted to the General Meeting of NEAT to be held on 23-24 August in Manila.

Senior Research Fellow Tan Tarn How attended the meeting and wrote this report.

