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Honors Program

1/24/20

Thesis Proposal

Working Title

A Comparison of the Political, Economic and Cultural Development of Japan and Thailand through Human Development Indexing

Project Purpose

As someone who is interested in globalization and learning about its influential effects on international countries, I have always been interested in expanding my perception of specific countries through research and study. While visiting Japan and Thailand as a part of a study abroad program, I noticed a lot of huge differences and similarities between these two countries in terms of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental development. The purpose of my thesis is to understand the developmental differences of these two countries from two different perspectives. First, I would like to understand how these two countries are different in terms of development through the use of the Human Development Index (HDI), which was created in the first place to determine levels of development between and among countries. Second I would like to investigate how politicians and people within these two countries perceive their levels of development and compare them to their rankings in the HDI.

Project Importance

It used to be that international development indices were used to label countries as “First”, “Second”, “Third”, and “Fourth” World countries. However, this “Three Worlds” model (Caporaso, 2008) have fallen out of favor in recent years, and instead labels countries as either “advanced/developed”, “transitioning/developing” or “lesser developed” This substitution of labels, however, just continues the trend of using blanket metaphors to stereotype different countries and their patterns of development and comparing them to Western, industrialized countries that are determined by these same indices as being advanced or developed.

My thesis focuses more on how politicians and people in Japan and Thailand define development themselves. This thesis seeks to promote a view of development that relies less on metrics and their associated stereotypes and more upon the quality of life people perceive to have based on their cultural views of development and their life experiences.

For me, diving deeper into the research of finding out more about the history and culture of Japan and Thailand has opened my mind to the possibilities of the different perceptions that locals might have regarding their own levels of economic, socio-cultural, and environmental development. As such, I am interested in knowing how politicians and people in Japan and Thailand view themselves on the “development scale” as compared with how they are ranked on the HDI. As such, it would be fair to ask from this perspective if there is a need for these development indices to determine what level of development a country is presently at. While I am not an expert in Asian history or economics, I am interested in approaching this topic from a geographic perspective to understand how developed these countries really are.

Project Overview

My plans for the economic/indexing part of the project is to gather as much human development datasets as possible from online articles, United Nations publications, and academic journals from the BYU HBLL databases and archives as well as reference material available from other BYU departments to analyze these indexes to find possible trends and patterns within the data to understand how these countries are ranked in terms of different types of development. One example of a data source is a series of human development reports by the United Nations Development Programme (2019) that contains development indicator data from 2018-2019. Looking at this data will allow me to understand how “developed” these countries are from an outsider’s point of view.

To understand the political and cultural perspectives people in Japan and Thailand have of their level of development, I will be specifically looking for publications related to local accounts from within Japan and Thailand and gather information that can help an outside reader discover more the development of a country and whatever or not it’s in danger from economic collapse. For example, a Thailand journalist (Glahan, 2019) suggests that the country is doing poorly due to political corruption and not making fair elections possible at all. These kinds of events could mean, from an outsiders’ perspective on human development, that because of unstable political turmoil’s (from corrupted government officials) happening frequently all over the country, one would think that the cause of all of these uprisings may have something to do with a countries developing economy. On the flipside, in Japan, many may assume the country is already developed and in the past has joked about conquering the world economically through globalization (Drucker, 1981), due many serious of fortunate events have happened to Japan from the past deacons or so. Although some Japanese locals may believe that they are still continuing to develop and are becoming more and more advanced, it’s still pretty hard to

imagine a country like Japan being in the process of being developed at all due to continuing successes in technology and huge exporting market.

Even though I will be doing most of the research on my own, my Thesis committee will help me internally by suggesting articles/book publications within the human development discipline as well as contribute key pointers in order to make this project a success.

Thesis Committee

Faculty Advisor: Dr. Daniel Olsen (Geography) – Dr. Olsen has taught international development courses at the University of Waterloo and Brandon University in Canada. He is familiar with the Human Development Index and how this Index, along with other comparable indices, have been used by international development scholars and politicians to rank different countries in terms of different types of development. We both share a common interest regarding globalization and how this process affects country development over time. He is also familiar with the professors in both the geography department and some of the Kennedy Center professors that teach international development.

Faculty Reader- Dr. Bruce Money (Marriott School of Business) – As I am pursuing a business minor, I have asked Dr. Money to be a Faculty Reader for my Honors thesis. We share common interests regarding globalization and international marketing. Has also has connections with the Kennedy Center staff and has also directed approximately a dozen study abroad programs in Asia, including Japan and Thailand.

Honors Coordinator- Dr. Samuel Otterstrom (Geography) – Dr. Otterstrom has experience using the Human Development Index in conjunction with human population density within North and South America.

Project Timeline

Thesis Proposal Submitted to the Honors Office	January 24, 2020
Thesis Defense Information Form Submitted	July 3
Last Day for Thesis Defense	July 29
Last Day to Submit Thesis Submission Form	July 31
Thesis Final PDF	August 7
Thesis Publication (Printed & Scholars Archive)	August 7

Funding

No funding needed for this project.

Culminating Experience

I hope to share my research findings to the faculty and students in both the Geography and Business/Pre-Management departments, as these are the departments where I am completing my major and minor programs, once my thesis is completed and published.

Conclusion

I wish to thank the Honors Program for allowing me this opportunity to participate in the honors thesis process. I also wish to thank in advance my thesis committee for agreeing to help me along this along this journey towards gaining a greater understanding of Japan and Thailand in the context of measuring international development through different developmental indices.

Sources

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