9

Christine Ly

(18/07/19): Siam Gas; Doing Business in Vietnam

______Today's lecture was given by Mr. Chanchai, who is the general manager of Supergas Vietnam, which is a subsidiary of Siamgas. Siamgas has expanded and has a presence in other countries than Vietnam like China, Malaysia, and Singapore. There are a mix of on-land and floating storage in these countries, because of limitations of space and policy. Overall, there are many advantages of having business and investing in Vietnam. Some points that Mr. Chanchai reiterated from past lectures include a larger population (large market), lower wages, and a greater new generation of young people in comparison to Thailand. New points we learned about included how Vietnam is a newer market, has cheaper tax rates, and cheaper infrastructure costs. On the other hand, there are still definitely some aspects to consider when it comes to doing business in Vietnam. For instance, the standard of living and average education of Vietnamese is low, so the price and utility of the products or services offered should match their needs and lifestyle. In addition, government, laws, and accountability can be questionable: the judiciary can create and enforce laws to favor their agendas, sometimes the law is unclear, and the government can arbitrarily enforce taxes and fees.

While Thursday's lecture had insightful information, frankly, it was hard to follow along. I would say that he skipped over half of the slides and went off on many tangents, some of which were interesting while others were irrelevant. I like how he shared the differences in cultures and language between North, Central, and South Vietnam. They speak differently, have different tastes in food, and in general have slightly different lifestyles which is something we did not get to observe when we visited Vietnam because we only stay in the Central area.

70

Christine Ly

(19/07/19): FinTech at Bank of Thailand & Asian Development Bank

The first talk I listened to was about payment connectivity, remittance, and QR codes in Southeast Asia. This presentation emphasized something I noticed when I first arrived in Thailand: how popular QR codes are here. If it is an option, our Thai friends will use LINE Pay or QR codes to pay through their mobile apps. When going out with our Thai friends, typically only one or two of them actually have cash on them. They all use an app to send and receive money. As foreigners, the ubiquity of paying using your smartphone is much more common than in the States. While we do have the same capabilities, I think Asian countries encourage it more, especially because I have noticed how I get promotion offers and discounts if I connect and use apps like LINE pay or Grab Wallet. I think in comparison to Thailand, America uses cards much more, whereas here I always feel the need to have at least some cash on me. As the speakers mentioned, the ubiquity of smartphones in ASEAN is quite standard. 2 speakers were representatives of start-ups; they believed that upcoming trends in payment connectivity would include the popularity of QR code payments and a way to facilitate faster remittance, especially through something like blockchain. They emphasized that there is and always will be a need to grow the startup space, because people should be spoilt for choices and startups are the ones who research closest to the users in comparison to bigger tech companies. At the end of the day, if the people do not use the app and it does not fit their needs, it does not matter how innovative the app is if the cash is still with the banks and in the hands of the people.

At ADB, I learned that they have a stake in the Nam Theun 2 Hydropower Project, which is associated with my group's final project. They informed us all of how they have been gathering a lot of information over the past years and aggregating it to tell a story, similar to Atlas, International Monetary Fund, and the World Bank. They encouraged us to use their information as a source of knowledge, which I would definitely look at considering they contribute the hydroelectric power dams in Laos. In addition, as one of the speakers mentioned, ADB follows high international standards in the sense that they tried to comply to environmental and social standards before agreeing to finance projects. At the end of the day, I find their goal admirable: lending/providing equity to public and private companies with intent to do infrastructure projects or renewable energy projects like building better, safer highways or water treatment plants. In addition, they have 7 main goals, some of which include: combating climate change, gender equality, rural development and food security, regional cooperation, and strengthen governance. They based their goals after SDGs, another topic that we have recently touched on, and applied the ones they found to be most applicable to ADB.