

AUN Executive Director, Choltis Dhirathiti, PhD

Address (Opening Remarks) to the China-ASEAN University Think-Tank Network Forum 2017, at Guangxi University, Nanning, PRC

Sunday, 3 September 2017

Professor Liu Zhengdong, Vice-Chairman of Guangxi Committee of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference, Party Secretary of Guangxi University and Chairman of Guangxi University Council;

Dr. Fan Zuojun, Vice President of Guangxi University and Executive Deputy Dean of China-ASEAN Research Institute, Guangxi University;

Honorable guests from the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference Committee and Central Committee of the Communist Party of Guangxi University;

Honorable representatives of China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University;

Distinguished Participants;

Ladies and Gentlemen -

[Introduction]

I feel privileged to be invited by the China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University to deliver a congratulatory message at this first Annual Forum of China-ASEAN University Think Tank Network. It also gives me pleasure to have the opportunity to be here among the experts in East Asian Studies, ASEAN Studies, GMS Studies and related disciplines from China and ASEAN Member States.

[Background]

Back in November 2015 when Professor Liu Zhengdong, Chairman of Guangxi University Council led the delegation to attend the ASEAN University Summit that was held as a side event to celebrate the 20th Anniversary of the ASEAN University Network or AUN in Bangkok. At the event, Professor Liu discussed the possibility for Guangxi University and ASEAN universities to strengthen academic exchanges, particularly the exchanges of research cooperation, and proposed that the network of China-ASEAN university think tank should be initiated in this regard.

This initiative has been pushed forward through the presentation of the representative of the China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University at the 6th ASEAN+3 Head of International Relations Meeting in May 2016. According to the presentation, it mainly featured the four components:

First, 'Background of the Network' which aimed to create a pool of academic and talent resources of China and ASEAN universities;

Second, 'Introduction to the Network', which took focus on the four levels of cooperation:

To boost a common destiny of China-ASEAN community;

To improve education and training quality at school level;

To establish talent 'tunnel' for human resource development; and

To enhance mutual understanding for better enhancement of educational resources between China-ASEAN universities.

Third, 'Milestones of the Network', which emphasized on the three projects:

(1) Collaborative Innovation Center for China-ASEAN Regional Development;

(2) China-ASEAN Holographic Data Research and Consulting Center; and

(3) Academic activities both at domestic and with international partner universities in ASEAN, America and Europe.

Forth, 'Future Plan' that put forth on the four thrusts:

(1) Collaborative platform on human resources and research facilities;

(2) Annual symposium organized during China-ASEAN Expo in Guangxi;

(3) Project cooperations; and

(4) Academic exchanges.

This proposal has later received a positive response from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of Education and the International Department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China. Accordingly, at the 3rd ASEAN+3 Rectors' Conference, held in October 2016 at Guangxi University, the China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University organized the official ceremony for an establishment of the China-ASEAN University Think Tank Network and kindly extended the invitation to representatives of AUN Member Universities who participated at the 3rd ASEAN+3 Rectors' Conference, to share this auspicious moment with the host institution.

[Rational of Cooperation]

I myself, in my capacity as the AUN Executive Director, feel delighted to be here again to see the progress of the China-ASEAN University Think Tank Network and would like to take this opportunity to congratulate the China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University for a successful inauguration of the first Annual Forum that brought here the academic people from leading specialized centers on ASEAN and East Asia into academic discussion session. This is a good starting point and yet a rare opportunity for academicians from China and ASEAN to get to know each other and to discuss possible cooperation on the areas of their common interests.

I am very positive that China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University has a full potential to host the China-ASEAN University Think Tank Network and to perform its leading role in research execution, in cooperation with ASEAN universities taking into account the advantages of their geographical location, academic strength and research profiles.

China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University has been recognized by the Chinese government as one of the largest comprehensive research institute on ASEAN and Southeast Asian Studies. The research institute is also a house of the ten (10) professional research centers in which each center is being recognized for its specific areas of expertise, in partnering with universities and research institutes in ten ASEAN nations. For example, the Maritime Silk Road Research Center and Lancang-Mekong River Economic Belt Research Center are the specific area studies that have proficiently launched by making use of geographic advantages of Guangxi as a passageway to ASEAN.

Moreover, Guangxi province is strategically emerged as one of the focal points of the proposed Maritime Silk Road that help leveraging the southern city's natural connectivity linkages with Southeast Asia and growth hubs of Guangzhou, Hong Kong and Macao. Taking this opportunity, the specialized research centers of Guangxi University can play an effective role in supporting the policy-making process on ASEAN connectivity and China's One Belt and Road initiative particularly to enhance the maritime cooperation and increase cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

[AUN Role]

For the part of AUN, it is established according to the mandate of the Ministers responsible for higher education in ASEAN countries and is recognized as one of the ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Bodies with the tasks to support the ASEAN integration and community building through higher education collaboration.

Through years, AUN has been working to achieve the political mandate and performing its roles in facilitating, strengthening and expanding cooperation in higher education as well as serving as the educational platform in contribution to the building of ASEAN Community.

Regarding wider cooperation beyond ASEAN, there are also several collaborations with dialogue partner countries including China, Japan, Republic of Korea, European Union and the United States. The regional platform such as ASEAN+3 Rectors' Conference and ASEM Rectors' Conference are also among the cooperation which AUN is actively involved.

With China, I am glad to witness a long and a fruitful cooperation between AUN and the Chinese universities and government agencies that made through the AUN's meeting platforms such as the ASEAN-

China Rectors' Conference, and youth mobility through the China-AUN scholarships. To date, we have successfully organized four (4) ASEAN-China Rectors' Conferences that involved 289 university executives, plus 180 ASEAN students who received scholarship from the Chinese University Council to pursue their Master and PhD studies in China. The ASEAN-China cooperation also significantly expanded to the ASEAN Plus Three cooperation which include the ASEAN+3 Rectors' Conference, ASEAN+3 Youth Cultural Forum and ASEAN+3 Educational Forum and Young Speakers' Contest.

For all activities mentioned above, the universities from China become the first dialogue partner country to join up and have always actively participated as well as hosted the events.

Therefore, I am very glad to see the development of ASEAN-China cooperation at higher level as it is today – in other words, the cooperation that is leveraging from dialogue session to research based collaboration.

However, it may be too soon to take this first gathering for granted that the China-ASEAN University Think Tank Network will be a fast track for research integration and is able to sustain in long term, since we are in an early stage of cooperation and may take some time to mutually agree on the specifics of cooperation we really need and are capable to carry out together.

I would like to take this opportunity to confirm the AUN's roles in facilitating international and regional cooperation platforms on education and other kinds of cooperation as agreed upon by member universities, as well as supporting intellectual exchanges and research collaboration. However, such roles will surely be performed with respect to authority of each member university and all partners involved.

[Closing]

Please allow me, once again, to express my sincere gratitude to the China-ASEAN Research Institute of Guangxi University for the hard work they have put into organizing this event and for their generous support that make this event possible. I would also like to extend my appreciation to all participants from China and ASEAN and would like to kindly reiterate that it's only with your commitment and support that we can ensure a strong academic linkages and a future long standing partnership of China and ASEAN University Think-Thank.