

COMPLETION REPORT

Research Summary

The research project involves a comparative analysis of the relationship between domestic politics and international negotiations, taking Japan's bilateral economic partnership agreement (EPA) with Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines as cases. The particular interest of the research is to explore the reasons behind the variation in the speed (or efficiency) of the agreement processes in the three Southeast Asian countries. Malaysia, Thailand, and the Philippines started formal EPA negotiations with Japan almost at the same time in early 2004. However, time differences in the agreements' conclusion were remarkable. From the time formal negotiations started to the date of effectivity, the Malaysian process took two-and-a half years to complete; the Thai agreement took close to four years; and the Philippine agreement almost five years. The processes in Thailand and Malaysia would be longer if the period of informal consultations and joint studies were included in the comparison. Of the three countries, the EPA-making process proved to be most efficient in Malaysia and least in the Philippines. That the Philippine process became the least efficient was remarkable because the Philippine government was ahead in securing an agreement in principle with Japan.

Based on a two-level game framework, which recognizes international bargaining and domestic ratification levels in international negotiations, major obstacles to the efficiency of the EPA-making process could be located in either or both levels. The two-level game metaphor in the comparative study underscores the importance of domestic politics in making broad predictions about the speed of the bilateral agreement process. The study has further incorporated state theoretical perspectives (strong-weak states, developmental-intermediate states) to help in understanding the nature of domestic politics in the three Southeast Asian countries.

The study finds that as far as bilateral EPA-making in the three Southeast Asian countries were concerned, strong developmental states were more efficient than weak intermediate states because of fewer domestic ratification constraints, less contentious institutional processes, and less controversial leaders. In contrast to Malaysia, the high degree of contentiousness in Thai and Philippine domestic politics affected the speed of the bilateral agreement process in the two countries. Further, in contrast to the two other countries, the Philippines saw its process subjected to a combined set of institutional and political constraints to EPA ratification. As such, while the negotiating executives were efficient in coming up with a framework agreement, a virtual disregard of domestic ratification constraints resulted in the country being the last of the three to have a bilateral EPA with Japan implemented.

The paper has been presented in a professorial lecture at De La Salle University and based on comments has been revised into its current form. The manuscript shall be rewritten as an article and submitted to an academic journal for publication.

Publication of the Results of Research Project:

Verbal Presentation (Date, Venue, Name of Conference, Title of Presentation, Presenter, etc.)

April 12, 2011, Ortigas Seminar Room, De La Salle University, L.R. Aguinaldo Professorial Lecture on Philippine-Japan Trade Relations, “The Role of Domestic and Intra-Regional Politics in Japan’s Economic Partnership Agreements.”

Thesis (Name of Journal and its Date, Title and Author of Thesis, etc.)

Book (Publisher and Date of the Book, Title and Author of the Book, etc.)