

# 2021 LSE SU EAST ASIA FORUM

## CONFERENCE PROPOSAL FOR:

### “Youth in East Asia: Pioneers of change”



## **I. FORUM INFORMATION**

DATE/TIME: 12:00 – 16:00, 27 & 28 March 2020

PLATFORM: Zoom

ORGANISED BY: LSE Institute of Global Affairs, LSE Students' Union Korea Future Association, LSE Students' Union China Development Society, LSE Students' Union Japan Society

## **II. FORUM DESCRIPTION**

Youth has historically been at the centre of change in East Asian societies, such as in the Gwangju Uprising in South Korea, in the May Fourth Movement in China and the Anpo protestations in Japan. Generation Z is the current and future driving force of these countries, and are faced with conflict and peace, stability and instability at the same moment. How is this youth doing today in South Korea, China and Japan? What challenges do they currently face? LSE SU Korea Future Association, China Development Society and Japan Society have co-organised the 2021 LSE SU East Asia Forum and question the status quo of East Asian youth.

The forum comprises 4 panel discussions, with question and answer sessions for each. The Cultural Shift panel will explore the generational gap in the region, as the youth drifts apart from Confucian values towards individualism and materialism, while contributing to demographic change, and demanding for more gender equality including LGBTQ's rights. The Politics panel will discuss how youth political participation varies in each country, how media - a platform that massively impacts youth - and politics mutually influence each other, before examining how Generation Z will lead international relations in the region. The Education panel will consider the problems of East Asian education systems, by first examining their negative impact on mental health, then the tendency of increasing inequalities among the population, along with the differences between East Asian and Western styles of education. Moreover, the panel speakers will attempt to detail potential solutions to these issues. Finally, the Economy panel will focus on the East Asian labour market, more specifically on the issues of unemployment and the growing number of irregular jobs which are mitigated by digitalisation as well as youth entrepreneurship, contributing to the market transition.

### III. SCHEDULE TIMETABLE

<b>TIME (GMT)</b>	<b>DAY 1 (27 MARCH 2021)</b>
12:00 - 12:10	Registration of Attendance
12:10 - 12:30	Opening
12:30 - 1:40	Panel 1: Cultural Shift
1:40 - 2:40	Break
2:40 - 3:50	Panel 2: Politics
3:50 - 4:00	Debrief

<b>TIME (GMT)</b>	<b>DAY 2 (28 MARCH 2021)</b>
12:00 - 12:10	Registration of Attendance
12:10 - 12:30	Opening
12:30 - 1:40	Panel 3: Education
1:40 - 2:40	Break
2:40 - 3:50	Panel 4: Economy
3:50-4:00	Closing

## IV. ORGANISER INTRODUCTION

### 1. The Institute of Global Affairs (IGA)



The IGA was established in 2015 with a mandate to maximise the impact of LSE's world leading expertise across social sciences by shaping locally-rooted responses to the most important and pressing global challenges. Supported by its constituent centres, the IGA has global reach and a multi-disciplinary approach, encouraging fertilisation across regions and disciplines. The IGA works closely with the LSE's recently established School of Public Policy (SPP).

With a focus on research-based policy making, IGA aspires to promote deeper understanding and peer-to-peer transfer of knowledge across emerging and developing economies. The IGA also offers a 'safe space' that is open, fair and transparent and where students, government, private sector and civil society from all around the world can meet to address the challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

IGA launched its Global Policy Lab (G-POL) in May 2017, with the aim of maximising the broader impact of LSE research on the important global challenges. G-POL currently pursues five core initiatives: *Rethinking Global Finance*, *Avoiding the Middle Income Trap*, *Global Governance*, *Global Migration*, *Blue Finance*.

### 2. LSE SU KOREA FUTURE ASSOCIATION



London School of Economics Students' Union Korea Future Association is the student society at LSE which has been organising the world's largest student-led conference regarding the study of the Korean Peninsula every year. Its main aim is to promote a holistic and in-depth understanding of both domestic and international issues affecting Korea, spanning from economic and socio-political to cultural and historical. LSE SU

Korea Future Association consists of a group of LSE students who want to bring a wide variety of issues within and beyond the Korean Peninsula to a larger platform where students from not only London, but throughout Europe can convene to learn from our renowned speakers and exchange ideas and knowledge.

### **3. LSE SU CHINA DEVELOPMENT SOCIETY**



Founded in 2002, the LSE SU China Development Society (CDS) steadfastly embraces its core mission of promoting a global understanding of China; not only economically, but also politically and socially, among its members and the wider public. It is the sole society on the LSE campus that organises regular China-related events and offers comprehensive, in-depth analyses of the current affairs surrounding China's multi-faceted, ongoing transformation. Despite its short history, it has already established ourselves as one of the most well respected societies on campus with a membership base of over 3,000 students, alumni and professionals. Meanwhile, it has forged strong collaborative ties with many premium organisations including LSE Institute of Global Affairs (IGA), Confucius Institute for Business London, LSE Department of Economics, 48 Group Club and China Britain Business Council (CBBC).

### **4. LSE SU JAPAN SOCIETY**



LSE SU Japan Society is one of the largest cultural societies in the school, with the goal to share various aspects of Japanese culture and create a space for dialogue on topics related to Japan. Collaborating with other societies and organisations like this forum is important for Japan Society, which hopes to open up discussions on current issues related to Japan. It would like to take this opportunity to discuss the issues surrounding Japan and affecting the international community not only for the stability of the East Asian region but also for the contribution it can make for the peace around the region.

Also, it hopes to see this event as a cause of seeing Japan's history and culture from the perspectives of other countries by communicating with the KFA and CDS.

## **V. AGENDA PROPOSAL**

### **PANEL 1. CULTURAL SHIFT: "Cultural Shift toward Individualism"**

*Confucianism provided and still continues to provide a cultural basis to East Asian societies. Its principles led South Korea, China, and Japan toward economic progress: Its group centric and family-centric values not only shaped its society but also greatly impacted the economic boom in East Asia during the late 1900s. However, more recently, East Asian countries have shifted toward a more individualistic culture, many more are increasingly focusing on their own needs and values diverging away from the group-centric principles of Confucianism. Yet, there also remain some national-cultural specific traits, possibly deriving from the selective absorption of both western ideologies and Confucianism in fragmented form, which forms a culturally unique concept of East Asian individualism. The wide acceptance of such swift among the youth plays a profound role in influencing the present and future of these nations.*

*This panel will delve into the specifics within the cultural shifts, exploring the particular links behind the big concept of 'individualism'. It will explore how East Asian culture shifted toward materialism/consumerism and how individualism led to a demographic change, such as the fading fertility rate along with the diminishing marriage rate. Based on the shifts in such cultural values, South Korea, China, and Japan are striving toward gender equality - including the general increase in acceptance of LGBTQ+ ideas - as a result of the adoption of a more individualistic culture.*

### **Proposed Topics & Questions**

#### **1. Individualism and Materialism**

- How diverse are forms of individualism in East Asian countries, which are the results of the combination of Confucianism and western values?
- How did individualism impact the rise of materialism in East Asia? What have other factors caused some post-90s youth to put more value on their material interests?
- According to the Atlantic, China and South Korea are found to measure success based on the amount of property. However, Japan was found to be an exception to this case. Why?
- How much does materialism influence the youth and their culture in East Asia? To what extent is it different from the previous generation?

## 2. Individualism and Demographic Change

- To what extent are the changes in fertility rate and marriage rate, as well as the ageing society, results brought about by the rise of individualism?
- Did the cultural shift to individualism prompt a demographic change, or did the demographic change prompt the cultural shift?
- To what extent are the consequences of change in population structure a concern for East Asian countries?

## 3. Individualism and Gender Equality

- People's conception of LGBTQ+ as well as gender roles are changing, e.g.) a tendency for gender-ambiguity in the K-Pop culture. Is the growing acceptance of LGBTQ+ and feminist ideas in the youth a consequence of this cultural shift toward individualism? Is the proliferation of gender identities a part of youth's pursuit of "picking and mixing" individualistic western cultural features into already-existing Confucian values?
- What kind of challenges are young women facing in balancing their role in familial and public spheres, when calling for more gender equality? Does this reflect the rise of individualism in East Asia?
- Is the enhancing acceptance of LGBTQ+ ideas in the youth a consequence of the cultural shifts toward individualism?
- To what extent does gender inequality during the mid-1900s relate to the decline in population and the recent demographic traits in East Asia amongst the youth?

## **PANEL 2. POLITICS: “What is influencing the youth view on politics and how will they shape the future?”**

*The relations between China, South Korea and Japan has been an ongoing issue. After the two global wars in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, the western world has seemed to put history behind them and moved towards cooperation (e.g. the European Union). Looking eastward, the three countries may still be ‘holding grudges’ of old territorial disputes, and the wartime hostility appears to be a significant factor that influences East Asian relations and national identity.*

*The rapid evolution of media, technology and global network enables the youth to be involved in politics, in ways that may not always be explicit. This panel will first focus on exploring the different patterns of youth participation in domestic politics in East Asian countries, before discussing the mutual influence media and politics have on one another. Finally, the panel will analyse how Generation Z will shape the new East Asian diplomatic relations.*

### **Proposed topics & Questions**

#### **1. How does youth participation change the political landscape in East Asia?**

- In recent years, youth in Hong Kong, South Korea, and Taiwan are leading political movements and asserting their interests onto the national political agenda. What are the reasons behind high youth participation in politics in East Asia?
- Political enthusiasm among youth is noticed in South Korea, Hong Kong and Taiwan, while Japanese and mainland Chinese youth do not show interest in politics. Why are there different patterns of youth political participation in East Asia?
- In what ways should youth prepare for greater political participation in order to actively lead their respective societies?
- How should governments create an environment where youth can effectively participate in politics?

#### **2. What is the impact of the mutual influence media and politics have on youth? In East Asian countries, is youth merely receiving information that the governments want us to see? Specifically, how is this done through censorship of media and propaganda?**

- When the Sino-Korean relationship showed a worsening trend in 2017 following the THAAD incident, the significant consequence that appealed to the public was the disappearance of K-pop in China. Is censorship in the entertainment industry being used as a new weapon of politics?
- Is it ethical for politicians / government to select the information that we can have access to, by censoring certain things in the media?
- Protests in Hong Kong and mainland China’s response to it were first revealed through

social media. Given that youths are the primary users of these platforms, to what extent does social media have an influence on Generation Z's view on politics?

### 3. How will Generation Z reshape East Asian relations?

- To what extent does youth participation influence the diplomatic landscape between East Asian countries?
- To what extent do history, societal perception and education influence the youth's attitude towards the current diplomatic relations in East Asia? What are the possibilities of East Asian cooperation in the future, and what will the youth's role be in this process?
- In possible cases of conflicts/cooperation in the future, how should youth step up to better the given situations?

### **PANEL 3. EDUCATION: “Challenges and Opportunities for Youth Empowerment in East Asia”**

*East Asian countries are famous for their highly competitive and extremely rigorous education systems. Such pursuit for academic excellence has significantly contributed to the economic growth in Japan, China and South Korea and has made East Asian students continuously outstanding in many international rankings (e.g. PISA and TIMSS). Nevertheless, in recent years, there are rising criticisms toward some prominent features of such education patterns, such as the exam-oriented teaching approach and the high pressure learning environment. Regarding the topic of youth, it is crucial to assess the controversial opinions about the East Asian education system which plays a vital role in shaping the future for the youth and will continuously have a profound impact on following generations.*

*This panel starts from a discussion about the worrying trend of teenage mental health conditions and the youth suicide rate in East Asian countries, largely attributed to high exam pressure and increasing school violence. The relationship between income inequality and inequality in accessing education will be analysed with a particular focus on the rapid growth of the private education market. Further exploration of this topic will be made by assessing the feasibility of e-learning in helping to reduce the unequal distribution of educational resources. Furthermore, the panel will take a broader perspective by making a comparison between Western and Eastern education systems to find the needs for educational reforms in East Asia under changing economic, social and political contexts. This will also lead to a discussion about the potential initiatives that could be undertaken by governments and educational institutions to create an improved educational environment for the youth in East Asian countries.*

#### **Proposed Topics & Questions**

##### **1. Education System and Mental Health Issues**

- What are the fundamental causes of physical violence and other forms of school bullying in general terms? Are there any East Asian education characteristics that have made students prone to violence?
- What could be the potential solutions to school violence and who plays the most critical role in this process (the government, schools, teachers, parents or students themselves)?
- Given that school stress has been the leading cause of teenage mental health issues for most students, what should be the future orientation for the development of the education system in terms of improving the psychological wellbeing of East Asian students?

## 2. Income Inequality and Education Inequality

- How should we assess the costs and benefits of private education in the context of East Asian countries?
- It is suggested that education inequality and income inequality can be mutually reinforcing factors that perpetuate their own vicious cycle. What should be the key solution to break that cycle? What are the roles of the different agents in this process?
- The Korean government, for example, has announced a decision to abolish all elite high schools across the country by 2025 as part of efforts to fix education disparity. The education ministry in many countries has introduced student loans to promote more equal opportunities. To what extent might these methods be effective in reducing education and social inequality?
- How could the emerging new technology of remote learning or online courses help mitigate the issue of education inequality, especially following the COVID-19 pandemic? What are the advantages and disadvantages of such learning methods in comparison with traditional learning?

## 3. Comparisons between Western and Eastern Education Systems

- To what extent have the history and social context in East Asia made Japan, China and South Korea adopt a relatively similar education system? What are the differences between the three countries? What are the economic or cultural roots that have caused such differences?
- There has been a growing influx of Asian students into Western universities in recent years; how do such trends reflect limitations of the Asian education system?
- In a globalised world, are there some social and economic constraints (e.g. the vast population base in China) that force us to use the “Eastern” way of schooling? Or should our education system also adapt to Western standards and norms (namely, focusing more student participation in class, fostering innate human curiosity and encouraging critical thinking)?
- Conversely, is there any aspect the West could take away from the East Asian standards and norms to implement into its own system?
- Given the distinctive cultural values each state stands for, to what extent can there be meaningful comparisons between Western and Eastern education methods?

## 4. Potential Reforms

- What are the key elements in East Asian education systems that require fundamental changes and reform? How would the focus of reforms be different in Korea, China and Japan, given their systems are distinctive, in order to enable East Asian youth taking charge for their future?

## **PANEL 4. ECONOMY: “Youth Labour Market in East Asia”**

*Despite the region’s economic power in the world and young people’s eagerness to gain jobs and work experience, the younger generation, as a vital driving force in the national economy, has faced significant obstacles in adapting market transitions. Hence, this panel aims to understand the challenges the young workforce is coming across, and to evaluate how the young generation should embrace this ever-changing job market.*

*The panel will start by evaluating the problem of youth unemployment in East Asia, by taking an interest in the nature and difference of the severity of youth unemployment in South Korea, China and Japan. It will then discuss how the high current supply of labour and limited job vacancies increase the number of irregular jobs and lead to the exploitation of labour. Whilst Generation Z increasingly faces such hurdles, significant structural job market transitions are also noticeable under digitalisation, which creates jobs and business opportunities for the younger generation in East Asia. Finally, the panel will analyze how youth, as entrepreneurs, can positively contribute to the three economies.*

### **Proposed Topics & Questions**

#### **1. Youth unemployment in East Asia: Its nature, causes and consequences**

- How to define youth as a labour force? Is there a universal understanding for this concept?
- What are the market and institutional factors contributing to the rise in youth unemployment in East Asia now?
- The statistics from the World Bank shows an overall increasing tendency of youth unemployment rate in China and South Korea over the past decade, but a continuously falling trend for Japan, what are the reasons behind such a trend?
- What are the governments’ policies to mitigate this situation?
- What are the short-run and long-run impacts of youth unemployment on the national economy?
- How has the COVID-19 pandemic affected youth unemployment? Will any of these effects still remain after the pandemic?

#### **2. Irregular Jobs**

- An increasing number of youths are being employed as an irregular worker in East Asia. For instance, over 35% of the youth workforce in Korea is an irregular worker, while over 610,000 youths in Japan aged between 15 and 24 are so-called ‘freeters’. Linking to unemployment, what are the factors that lead to irregular jobs?
- These irregular workers are often mistreated to the extent that could reasonably be described as labour exploitation. What are the reasons for youth labour exploitation in

East Asia?

- Some irregular jobs, such as social media influencers, earn more than some regular jobs and have better work-and-life balance. Considering this, are irregular jobs inherently worse than regular ones?
- Increasing youth unemployment and irregular jobs in East Asia have reduced the average income of the youth. However, the price of houses in major cities in East Asia has unceasingly grown, and the youth with lower income cannot afford it. What are the consequences of such a tendency? What policies should governments introduce to address this issue?

### 3. Digitalisation: Rise of the Internet industry and labour market transition

- What is the impact of the development of the social media industry on the job market? What are the potential challenges and opportunities for youth in traditional industries? How will traditional sectors seize opportunities and adapt to changes in this era of digitalisation? How successful was the integration of digitalisation with the creative market?
- What is the role of the youth in shaping and leading the development of the Internet industry?
- How should young generations adapt themselves to and embrace this ever changing job market?
- How will the increased use of remote working following the COVID-19 pandemic affect digitalisation of the job market in the longer term? How does this affect youths who are about to enter the labour force?

### 4. Youth as a driver of the economy

- In the three East Asian economies, especially China, the number of venture capital investments for youth startups has grown significantly. As a result, many youths are now actively involved in entrepreneurial roles. What is the impact of an increasing number of startups and young entrepreneurs on East Asian economies? Does this mean that the younger generation can contribute to or even lead the economy?
- Given that youth can get more easily involved in entrepreneurial roles, how can their contributions to innovation be a new driver of economic advancement?
- What policies can governments implement to effectively increase the number of young entrepreneurs and support them?