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*Corporate Social Responsibility in  
Vietnam State-owned Enterprises: A Comparative  
Analysis of PVEP and VTC*

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A Comparative Analysis of PVEP and VTC*

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Ms. Nguyen Thi Hue

## Abstract

Due to the limited research on Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) in State-owned enterprises (SOEs), this paper investigates and makes a comparative analysis of CSR practices of two large Vietnamese SOEs: PetroVietnam Exploration Production Corporation (PVEP) and Vietnam Multimedia Corporation (or Vietnam Television Corporation – VTC). The input data is based on descriptive information collected from existing literature, corporations' official websites, published reports, and primary data from interviews with managers of the two companies. The analysis indicates that PVEP and VTC share similar views on the concept of CSR and in line with definition of standard ISO 26000. It identifies the focal points of these corporations on CSR themes which are Environment, Labor and Community Involvement for PVEP and Labor, Fair Operating Practices, Consumer Issues and Community Involvement for VTC. Institutional Theory has been adopted to examine the main drivers of CSR. This study has determined that the external and internal institutional drivers effect on responsible behaviors of the two corporations at different extent.

**Key words:** CSR, sustainable development, SOEs, drivers, ISO 26000, Vietnam

## **1. Introduction**

Since the Doi Moi reforms of 1986, Vietnam has experienced rapid economic growth in the range of 6% to 8% GDP annually. This economic opening has deepened the nation's exposure to the positive (and negative) impacts of globalization. On the one hand, the country has seen many social and environmental consequences as a result of prioritizing GDP growth. These issues demand that economic stakeholders, including enterprises, have a responsibility to contribute to solving the problems which are caused partly by them. On the other hand, on the road to economic integration, the requirements for implementation of good Corporate Social Responsibility towards Sustainable Development have become one of the non-tariff barriers challenging developing countries like Vietnam (Hamn, 2012). From the perspective of the enterprises, Vietnamese companies started to be more aware of the importance of respecting social and environmental standards in enhancing their reputation and increasing competitiveness. (Pham, 2011). Due to the increased interest, there are more and more studies conducted on CSR practices covering various perspective and objects. Among many components of Vietnam's economy, State-owned Enterprise have been playing unique and critical roles (Collins, Sitalaksmi, & Lansbury, 2013).

As the result of renovation, the number of SOEs has been decreasing, as have been the shares in those kinds of companies held by the government. However, SOEs have continued to be leaders of Vietnam's economic growth, as they still contributes for 32% of GDP (Nhipcaudautu, 2014) In the list of V1000<sup>1</sup> published in 2016, SOEs contributed nearly 60% of the total Corporate Income Tax detailed in the whole list (Vietnam Report, 2016). At the current moment, Vietnam's economy still displays the presence of SOEs in main economic sectors, from agriculture to industry and services. SOEs even still hold monopoly in some sectors. State-owned enterprise is an effective instrument of government not only to improve efficiency economically, but also to lend active support to the government for ensuring the social security. CSR activities practiced by SOEs have been widely recognized by

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<sup>1</sup> V1000 is the List of Top 1000 Corporations that pay the highest income tax in Vietnam. The list is published based on the results collected, investigated, processed and verification of independent data of the V1000 organizer, in combination with the feedback data of enterprise from the survey of Vietnam Report as well as credible analysis and evaluation in the media; including a review of compliance with policies and legislation on corporate tax.

the investors, governments and community. In the context of present-day Vietnam, it is interesting to explore how SOEs understand and implement CSR as well as the motivation behind their responsible behaviors. It is significant for the expansion of Vietnam's economy, and its development as a whole if these enterprises perform well in their Corporate Social Responsibility activities. This study, as a comparative analysis of two large SOEs which are PetroVietnam Exploration Production Corporation (PVEP) and Vietnam Multimedia Corporation or Vietnam Television Corporation (VTC), would be an initial step which aims to create a wider view on CSR in SOEs than the single case studies conducted before.

This study aims at examining the current situation concerning CSR practices in Vietnam SOEs by comparing PVEP and VTC, as two large state-owned enterprises, and to some extent their motivations to engage in CSR-related activities. It fills the gaps in the literature, namely that Vietnam State-owned Enterprises have never been addressed as independent category, and in conjunction with other components of Vietnam economy.

## **2. Methodology**

The data for this study were collected from both primary and secondary sources. Secondary data were collected from articles and information available on the Internet and the university library. This information was used to construct and develop a theoretical framework for analysis. Besides primary data, , secondary data was collected for the empirical investigation mostly from official website of PVEP and VTC where they published about their practices via reports and news. Also important for this empirical part, data were extracted from previous articles which studied some aspects of PVEP and VTC was. The primary data were collected through semi-structured, in-depth interviews with middle managers employed with PVEP and VTC. The interviewees were selected based on their position in the companies which is expected to have comprehensive understanding of the companies' operations, as well as for their availability and willingness to take part in interview process.

## **3. Company Profiles**

PetroVietnam Exploration Production Corporation (PVEP) is a one member limited liability corporation, 100% held by a state-owned enterprise, PetroVietnam Groups. PVEP was

established in order to be a core unit of PetroVietnam Groups, a leading enterprise in the field of oil and gas exploration and production<sup>2</sup>. In terms of working on CSR, PVEP noted that an enterprise cannot just focus on seeking profit objectives but also must perform their responsibilities and obligations to the community. These responsibilities require enterprises to build a model where it develops in harmony with the environment, society and the population (PVEP Vision and Mission Statements)<sup>3</sup>. For PVEP, environmental aspects, and responsibilities to the community and employees are emphasized. While PVEP has not published any separate reports for CSR, on the official website of the corporation, there is a separate item named “social responsibility” which includes two sub-sections: Health, Safety and Environment, and Social and Community Activities. The content of Human Resources and labor are presented as other, separate items. From the distribution of items in PVEP’s official website can help us to see that in PVEP’s perspective, labor practice is not integrated into CSR.

As PVEP is a giant in the manufacturing sector, in the service field, Vietnam Multimedia Corporation (VTC) is a pioneer enterprise which is leading in research and applying the Digital Television technology successfully in Vietnam. It is the first company that provided digital media solutions, transferring technologies to all TV stations in Vietnam, including both post production, transmission and broadcast. VTC is a 100% SOE performing independent accounting under the Ministry of Information and Communications of Vietnam. From the

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<sup>2</sup> By the end of 2015, total assets of PVEP have increased 5 times, estimated at nearly 155 trillion VND, with the annual average financial index as follows: turnover of about 45 trillion VND, pre tax profit of about 22 trillion VND, submit the state budget at 15 trillion VND. It has been in top 10 of V1000 for 7 consecutive years.

(PVEP. (2016). *About PVEP*. Retrieved from Official Website of PVEP: <http://www.pvep.com.vn/vi/gioi-thieu-76/tong-quan-83>)

<sup>3</sup> Vision and strategy of PVEP is presented specifically as follows:

Vision

*“To build PetroVietnam Exploration Production Corporation into a strong entity capable of managing and participating in various local and overseas petroleum projects with regional and global competitiveness, reputable in international cooperation, so as to increasingly develop its capital and profit, maximize income for the Government and the Viet Nam Oil and Gas Group, and contribute to ensuring energy security for the national development.”*

Mission Statements

*“PVEP will produce oil and gas in an efficient and environmentally safe manner, substantially benefiting the community and all employees”*

vision, mission statements and core values of the VTC<sup>4</sup>, it can be seen that among the themes related to the concept of CSR, the Corporation puts more focus on labor practices, customer relations, and community involvement. So far, VTC has not published a CSR report. The amount of information related to CSR on the official website of the Corporation is sparse. This reveals that the Corporation hasn't considered CSR as an important strategy which potentially bring the profit and other benefits for the Corporation.

#### 4. Theoretical Framework

This study has adopted the CSR definition of the Standard ISO 26000 for the analysis and evaluation of CSR practices and institutional theory for analysis of CSR drivers in PVEP and VTC. According to ISO 26000, the concept of CSR is defined as:

*"[...]responsibility of an organization for the impacts of its decisions and activities on society and the environment, through transparent and ethical behavior that contributes to sustainable development, including health and the welfare of society; takes into account the expectations of stakeholders; is in compliance with applicable law and consistent with international norms of behavior; and is integrated throughout the organization and practiced in its relationships (ISO, 2010, pp. 3-4)".*

The standards identify seven core subjects of CSR practices which includes: Organizational Governance, Human Rights, Labor Practices, Environment, Fair Operating Practices, Consumer Issues and Community Involvement and Development.

By reviewing the literature regarding motivations for corporations to engage CSR-related activities, the author proposed an integrative framework for analyzing the motivation for Vietnam SOEs to engage in CSR.

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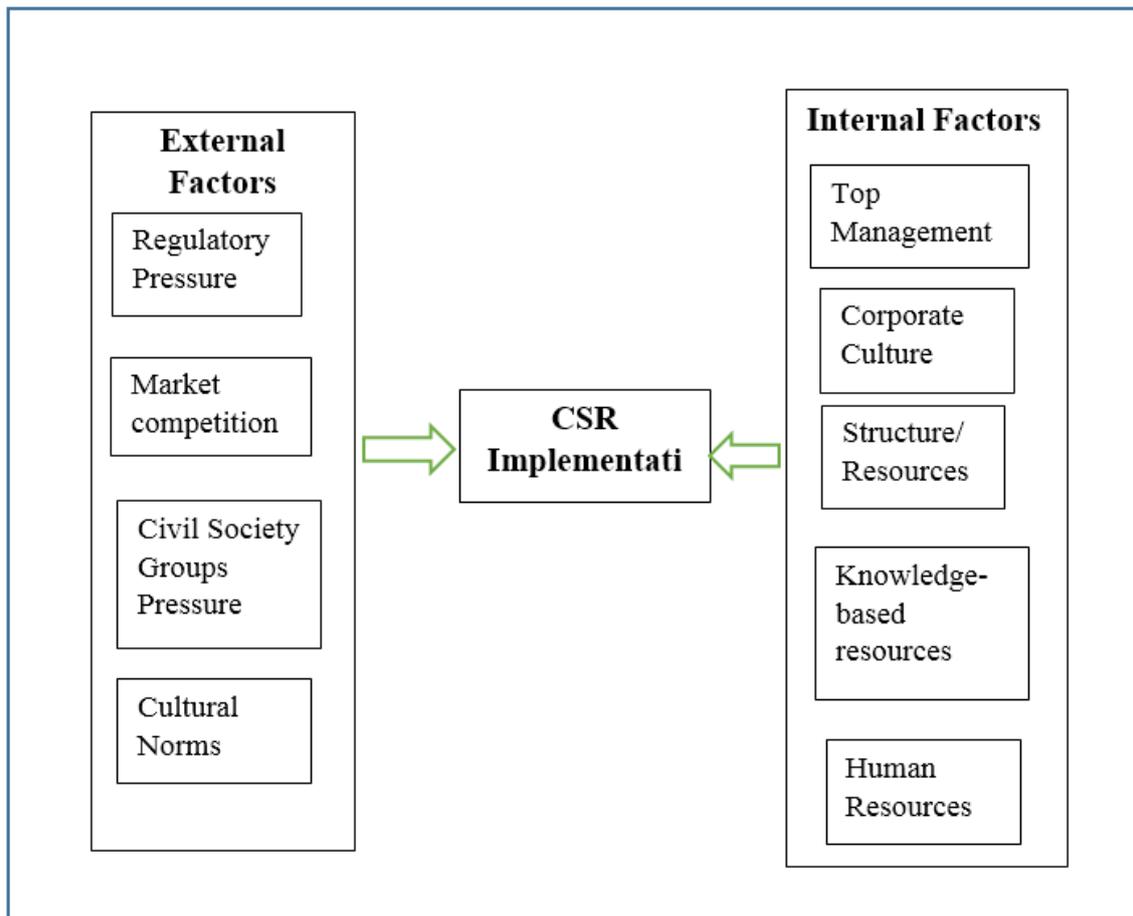
<sup>4</sup> Visions and Mission statement of VTC

Visions: *"To be the leading provider in multimedia services with information and entertainment focused. TO expand business both domestically and internationally."*

Mission statements:

- *To satisfy VTC's customers with high-end quality, premium technology, competitive price.*
- *To be profoundly engaged in early making Vietnam a country strong in information and communication technologies*
- *To develop highly skilled, wealthy and socially responsible human resources.*

Figure 1. An Internal – External Institutional Factors Framework for Analyzing CSR



Source: Based on the author's analysis

## 5. Findings and Discussion

### 5.1 CSR understanding

The findings indicate that the way PVEP and VTC understand the concept of CSR shares similarities with the definition offered by ISO 26000: 2010. These two corporations agree that CSR has close ties to sustainable development. The corporations see themselves as parts of society, and are aware of responsibility to contribute and share their benefits with the community and society, and to together develop the environment within which the corporations exist. It is noticeable that CSR definition of ISO 26000 does not mention profit-making aspects of CSR explicitly. The ISO 26000 standard, however, recognizes the

interdependence of financial success, sustainable environment and social development, stating that:

*[...]an organization's performance in relation to the society in which it operates and to its impact on the environment has become a critical part of measuring its overall performance and its ability to continue operating effectively (ISO 26000, 2010: vi).*

Similarly, both PVEP and VTC also set aside the profit-making goal in their CSR activities, and gaining profit is only considered to be the unintended results of CSR-related activities. However, the core subjects which are under CSR spectrum understood by PVEP are more diversified and more competent with the definition. PVEP instead shows special attention to environment and local area where it is embedded. Therefore, the corporation takes serious consideration on how its operations impact on the environment and locality, and deals with them proactively. The “stakeholders” whose expectations are taken into account are broader as compared to VTC. With VTC, on the other hand, there is a limitation in the consideration of stakeholders regarding CSR concepts. They believe that their CSR is all about how benefits are distributed among the whole society, and then about how to support and assist society whenever the situation permits. Accordingly, among the six themes specified, VTC believed that the CSR concept only embraces community involvement, and how their activities incline to charity, donation and philanthropy activities. VTC's understanding of the concept actually is similar to the greater number of enterprises in Vietnam (Hamm, 2012). Perhaps it is that the translation of the term "corporate social responsibility" into Vietnamese creates misunderstandings when it refers to “society” and “responsibility” alone, without understanding the complexity of the CSR concept that covers many aspects and themes. A reason that may explain this difference is that PVEP is working with foreign partners and expanding its business into overseas markets. Therefore, they exposed to more developed approaches to CSR. Meanwhile VTC's operation is limited within the border of domestic market.

## 5.2 CSR implementation

Regardless of limited understanding of both corporations, regarding the core subjects which CSR concept covers (specified in ISO 26000), the practical behaviors of PVEP and VTC are

beyond that. As a large, branded enterprise whose partners and customers are mainly foreigners, PVEP has fully and seriously implemented national and international standards on environment (PVEP, 2015). PVEP also builds its long-term strategy to implement more fully social responsibilities on environmental protection, human resources development and support, and community development. Meanwhile, from the position of a state-owned enterprise, VTC always believes that being an ethical enterprise is their mission.

For PVEP, the impact of CSR activities towards the environment is obviously more comprehensive than those of VTC. PVEP not only adhere to the basic regulations of domestic law, as well as to international standards, but also pays serious attention to investing in continued research and development in order to better improve the impact of their business activities on the environment (Le, 2015). PVEP is not only looking outward. It is also focusing on the issues of savings and the efficient use of energy. PVEP considers these to be more than a means to sustain the environment, but also as solutions for crisis management (PVEP- Thương hiệu xanh, 2016). Meanwhile, the VTC environmental activities primarily embrace the workplace (Ha, 2013) and then a limited number of fragmented activities related to environmental issues in the theme of Community Involvement as well.

Regarding consumer issues, VTC notes that the corporation takes them very seriously. We easily traced this from their vision, mission statements, and their public announcements. Their communications with consumers also reveal this. On the other hand, during the interview with PVEP, the interviewee did not stress on that and, in fact, there is no source we can find on the internet about who their clients are and how PVEP treats them.

PVEP and VTC share a common perception that, once they are profitable, they should fulfil their responsibility to their local communities by making charitable donations (eg, to earthquake and flood victims), supporting and contributing to local and community projects, and to common causes such as supporting the education of children. Both companies discussed social responsibility as being embedded in their corporate activities (eg, an implicit form of CSR as argued by Matten and Moon, 2008, p. 418) and alluded heavily to how they looked after their employees and their welfare (eg, raising wages, employees' welfare and determining the investment in energy conservation projects); and that they maintained doing so by communicating with them on a regular basis (through employee congress, reports,

surveys etc.). Both corporations put special focus on the role of the laborers to the survival and development of enterprises. Thus the activities related to guaranteed-labor practices are well implemented, comprehensive and uniform. For PVEP as well as VTC, concerns related to human rights are mainly limited to the work place; ensuring issues such as workers' rights and gender equality. On the other hand, other issues are rarely discussed, especially political rights, since the state-owned enterprises are controlled by the Party and Socio-political organizations such as trade unions. Because trade unions within SOEs are closely tied to Vietnam Communist Party, there are shortcomings in the protection of power of labors, especially political rights. As an example, companies hardly referred to any external channels of communication (eg, NGOs) when discussing with their employees.

Corporate Governance concerning both PVEP and VTC is noticeable given that they are both 100% State-owned enterprises.. The state has a great deal of control over their operations and decision-making processes. Therefore, there is not much difference between PVEP and VTC in this regard. ISO 26000 standard states that a corporation would maintain good corporate governance if it incorporates CSR principles. One of the common problems of SOEs in general, and of PVEP and VTC specifically, is the principle of transparency. Their performance in this principle is relatively weak. It is almost impossible for the public to track how and what the decisions related to CSR are being made. Of all decision that were made, only a few of them are published publicly. This top down approach causes Vietnamese firms to conceptualize CSR as a compliance issue, without regarding how CSR can strategically drive better performance (Twose & Rao 2003). Thus, while VTC is depicted as a passive CSR performer, PVEP appears as a more proactive one who integrates CSR activities better into operation and strategy.

### **5.3 CSR Drivers**

This study has conducted an empirical study to test the influence of both internal and external institutional factors on CSR practices. Looking at external institutional drivers, the effects of regulatory pressures and cultural norms are confirmed. The findings showed that the way regulatory pressures affect CSR implementation of PVEP and VTC appears to be consistent with much previous research (Ramon V. del Rosario, 2011). The regulation shapes behaviors of the corporations in most aspects from organizational governance,

environmental practices, human rights and consumer issues. For the SOEs specifically, they are owned by the state, thereby it is obligatory to follow the government's and the Vietnam Communist Party's guidelines and directions in corporate development (Lan, 2016). Besides the regulatory pressure, the findings indicate strong support for cultural norms in explaining firms' responsible behaviors. Despite the mix of unique cultures, Vietnamese culture can be referred to as high power distance, high collectivism, moderate uncertainty avoidance, and high context. Vietnamese people prefer group activity. They usually consider themselves as a part of a group and make decisions that benefit the group instead of personal goals (Truong, 2016). Moreover, Many of Buddhism's teachings have become core values of Vietnamese tradition. Therefore, although the religious belief is crossed out from the drivers by interviewee, it should be understood from the perspective of cultural norms. This is relevant to the research findings of Herrera et.al. (2011) and Visser (2008) which stated that philanthropy (charity) and doing no harm to society are primary teachings of Buddhism and, therefore, could provide a solid foundation for supporting CSR values among Southeast Asian countries.

In contrast, the pressure for civil society groups is proved to be the least effective factor on CSR implementation for both corporations. This result is in line with previous findings related to the civil society groups in Vietnamese society in general and to CSR practices that are weak in particular (Dang & Pham, 2013). The low level of civil society development in Vietnam limits its work on human rights issues, including labor and environmental rights, because the state does not fully recognize the role of CSOs as servants of the public interest. Instead it limits their roles to community work and philanthropic activities. Partnerships between business and civil society are yet to be fully established. There are fears of conflicts and thus negative impacts on business. Moreover, a legal framework has not been created to protect human rights even within the public and private spheres. Vietnamese civil society remains dominated by organizations that maintain close ties to the state. The most influential civil society group in enterprises is trade unions, however, which have close ties with the Vietnam Communist Party. Therefore, it is explainable why both these SOEs representatives assessed that the pressure from civil society groups on forcing companies to practice CSR is not large.

Regarding the internal institutional drivers, the commitment of top management and ethical corporate culture proves to have strong influence on the responsible behavior of the corporations. This finding was supported by Campbell (2007), Hieu (2011). Under a planned economic system (before Doi Moi), state-owned enterprises (SOEs) were considered the only legitimate economic form (Nguyen, 2011). Under such a system, being ethical was presumably equivalent to being in compliance and obeying instructions from hierarchically higher authorities. These characteristics have remained in the current PVEP and VTC, which are both 100% SOEs. The senior managers of these two corporations are all party members and their positions in the companies depend heavily on their loyalty to the State and Party. Accordingly, being loyal and following the State policies and Party's guidelines are instinctive. The corporate culture is also found to have positive effects on the CSR decision-making of PVEP and VTC. The corporate culture of PVEP as well as VTC is constructed first on traditional Vietnamese values. Then the nature of enterprise as state ownership is taken into account. The SOEs are categorized as a socialist public owned sector, which according to the socialism's principles is owned and shared by all people. Therefore, serving the people with qualified products, supporting the people from poor areas, and helping people recover from disasters become critical components of their corporate culture. PVEP and VTC are not exceptional.

## **6 Conclusion**

This paper has achieved its objectives and answered the two research questions. It has concluded that the understanding of CSR concepts by PVEP and VTC is consistent with the definition given by ISO 26000. Both of them agreed on the close relationship between CSR-related activities and sustainable development and that the existence of the corporation is attached to the development of surrounding environment and society. However, PVEP has a more comprehensive view of subjects that CSR covers. This partly explained why PVEP has practiced CSR more effectively than VTC. Regarding the second question, it was found that the factors which have influence on responsible behavior of PVEP and VTC--top management and corporate culture as internal institutional factors as well as regulatory pressure, market competition and cultural norms--are key drivers. The role of civil society groups have not been strengthened to appropriate level.

This study still faces several limitations. Due to limited study time and ability to access the interviewees, the interview questions are not comprehensive enough, and the sample size is still small. When evaluating the performance of the company's CSR, only the internal aspect is considered (yielding almost one-sided information from the persons interviewed and the documents provided from the official announcement of the business). The paper has not considered the views of other stakeholders such as customers, suppliers, partners, social organizations and has not estimated the impact of the implementation of CSR on the company performance. Therefore, it leaves the gap for future research to design more detailed questions, survey clients and stakeholders and estimating the impact of CSR on corporate performance by methods other methodology.

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## Author's Profile

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### Educational Attainment

- *August 2015 – Present:* Master of Arts, Master of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies, College of Interdisciplinary Studies, Thammasat University, Bangkok, Thailand. Sponsored by Thammasat University
- *2010-2014:* Bachelor of Arts, Oriental Studies, University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University, Hanoi, Vietnam, GPA: 3.61/4
- *January 2014 – May 2014:* TF LEaRN Programme @ NUS National University of Singapore, Singapore. Sponsored by Temasek Foundation



### Work Experience

- *15 December 2016:* Interpreter at Workshop on Training for High-Ranking Public Officials in Thailand at Thammasat University, Thailand
- *August 2014 – August 2015:* Secretary at South Glory Investment Consultant Company Limited
- *October 2014 – July 2015:* English teacher at Thang Long English Club

## About

### **Thammasat Institute of Area Studies (TIARA)**

Thammasat Institute of Area Studies as one of the most active institute in Thammasat University has a long history of academic excellence. Starting out as an institute named Thai APEC Study Centre, the institute focus basically on conducting research and to advise the government in the matter of policy making. One of such example is research and training collaborations with the Office of National Broadcasting and Telecommunication Commission (NBTC). Later on, the institute grown to accommodate another Institute namely Australian Study Centre (ASC) and renamed to Thammasat Institute for Study of International Cooperation (TISIC). With this new structure, the Institute expands its research base to include that of Australia and New Zealand. Master of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies (MAPS) coming up as a result of years of experience in conducting research and academic exchanges through the above mention institutes. The Master program was officially launched in 2015 with its first batch already producing some of the best works for the institute.

In line with the University wide restructuring, in 2015, the Institute underwent a major revamp to include 3 more area studies institutes namely Indian Studies Centre, Russian and CIS Studies Centre and ASEAN Studies Centre. With the consolidation of these 3 new area study centres, the institute therefore renames Thammasat Institute of Area Study (TIARA). The institute will continue what it do best, to continue producing high quality academic excellence and hope with the new restructuring, the institute will be able to achieve more in the coming years.

For more information on TIARA, you can visit our website at <http://www.apecthai.org/>

## About

### **Master of Arts in Asia-Pacific Studies Program (MAPS)**

Master of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies (MAPS) program is an up and coming area study based master degree in Thailand. Focusing on Asia Pacific Studies, MAPS is a multidisciplinary graduate program that helps interested students to have an in depth understanding of this dynamic region. With a strong foundation of academic curriculum and high quality facilitators across all academic backgrounds, Master of Arts in Asia Pacific Studies will guide students through the disciplines of Politics, Economics, International Law and International relations to give a well-rounded understanding of Asia Pacific. These advanced courses offer a more in depth examination of questions and problems specific to the Asia Pacific region. Our graduates go on to pursue careers in academia, business organisations, government and wide array of organisations, both local and international.

Our students will also have the chance to familiarise with the academic settings in a sense that through their thesis course, student will be exposed to all kinds of academic scrutiny such as thesis defend and comprehensive thesis writing course. Nearing to the end of the program, student will be given a chance to showcase their hard labour at an International Conference held specially to facilitate the students learning curve. In the end, the works that they put their heart and soul into will become the pride of the program as each one of them, despite their different backgrounds; can come up with a thorough and deep analysis of particular research program concentrated on Asia Pacific and finally contribute to the literature on Asia Pacific Studies.

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