**ChinaComment**

**Sailing in the same boat**

**JAPAN AND CHINA SHOULD TAKE A LESSON FROM HISTORY TO WEATHER STORMY RELATIONSHIP TOGETHER**

Kanji — the characters derived from Chinese and adapted into written Japanese — are so visible in Japan that visitors from China may have an occasional illusion that they are still in their own country. The use of kanji for place names is particularly helpful. Chinese people can make educated guesses about the meanings and navigate successfully, even though they don’t know how to pronounce the words.

But be careful: While a lot of kanji words look Chinese, they can differ in meaning. In China, “牺牲” means to lay down one’s life for a heroic purpose, while in Japan it can refer to the death of 56 people when Mount Ontake, the volcano in Otaki, Nagano prefecture, suddenly burst to life in September.

Japan is an anxious time. Some of its world-class athletes are sharing their experiences with students at the University of Sydney. She specializes in labor market issues in Australia. The issues are relevant.

There are also intractable problems with the education system. The qualifications of workers in Indonesia are much lower than in any other Southeast Asian country, including Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam.

There are several reasons for this mismatch. Partly it’s about the informal sector. Indonesia has a long way to go if it is to provide enough skilled labor. Workers have a primary school education less than 10 percent of employers consider the qualifications of workers in Indonesia are much lower than in any other

A World Bank Employer Skill Survey suggests that fewer than 30 percent of employers consider the skills of school leavers to be very good. Five times as many rate them as ‘poor’ or ‘very poor.’

The Indonesian government is trying to address these problems, working to keep students in school longer and to improve their skills levels, especially in the vocational education sector. There have also been efforts to improve the international competitiveness of Indonesia’s tertiary education sector, though the system has a long way to go if it is to produce large numbers of truly job-ready graduates.

These issues need to be addressed, both for the well-being of Indonesia’s young people and for the nation’s economic and social future.

Professor Michele Ford is director of the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre at the University of Sydney, Australia. She specializes in labor relations and labor migration in Southeast Asia.

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**Youth unemployment haunts Indonesia**

Graduation from university should be a joyful and exciting occasion. But for many young Indonesians it is an anxious time. Some 27 percent of university graduates join the ranks of the unemployed, a higher percentage than in any other group under the age of 24. When they do get work, many end up in positions unrelated to their field of study.

Those with university degrees are of course by no means the worst off. While high school graduates are less likely than university graduates to be unemployed, they are twice as likely as the working-age population of around 180 million people, just over 118 million of whom are in paid work. Of those, a third are employed in agriculture and 40 percent in trade, restaurants and hotels or in community, social and personal services. These sectors are dominated by informal employment.

Partly, too, it’s about the unevenness of the economy. There is a big difference between the levels of industrialization in Java compared to that on other islands. Eastern Indonesia is particularly underdeveloped and poor.

Things are not great in the urban centers either. Good jobs are generally found in the cities, but the labor market has failed to keep up with rapid urbanization, and youth unemployment rates are actually higher in urban areas. Particularly in industrial and commercial heartlands around Jakarta.

There are also intractable problems with the education system. The qualifications of workers in Indonesia are much lower than in Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines. Around 70 percent of workers have a primary school education or less.

The quality of education is also an issue. There are some good government schools in Indonesia, but on the whole, educational outcomes are poor. There are still schools without electricity or running water even on the fringes of provincial capital cities. Things are considerably harder in isolated regions.

In recognition of this, Indonesia now spends 20 percent of its total annual budget on education. There have been attempts at curriculum reform. Efforts have also been made to improve wages and working conditions for teachers, and to encourage them to engage in professional development. However, serious issues remain.

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