

European Studies in Asia

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Since the end of the cold war in 1989, new business, finance, and technological interfaces have systematically emerged in most global regions. These mark a turning point in the contemporary economic and cultural history of Asia as well. Over the past 150 to 200 years, most of the Asian regions -- who in previous centuries entertained extensive multilateral trade relations organized by multinational merchant communities -- had succumbed to the bilateral trade relations imposed by colonial forces, on the one hand, and by post-colonial western dominated international trade relations, on the other hand.<sup>1</sup> While the Bretton Wood Agreement, which accorded to the United States military and economic leadership, recognized the detrimental effects of colonialism on the world economies of the twentieth century, the international institutions it fostered in the name of an international economy, among them the IMF and WTO, it is now widely recognized similarly operated to the disadvantage of developing countries.<sup>2</sup> In other words, while Europeans, first as traders, missionaries, colonizers, and then as members of western international agencies have been an intermittent presence in Asia since the fifteenth century, the new global economy, with its multilateral technological, financial, and business interfaces, has now led to a new encounter, potentially more democratic, between

Europe and Asia. The emergence of European Studies Programs and Centers at major universities in Asian countries is a testimony to that fact.

The dialectical nature of this encounter is apparent from the contributions to an international workshop hosted by the Centre for European Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok in February of 1999 under the directorship of Professor Suthiphand Chirathiva and under the auspices of the European Commission in Thailand.<sup>3</sup> The workshop, which brought together almost one hundred researchers from Asia and Europe, focused on the structure, content, and missions of a variety of European Studies Programs which have emerged, since the mid-nineties, at major universities in nine Asian countries ranging from Thailand, India, Pakistan and the Philippines to Malaysia, South Korea, China, Indonesia, and Singapore. While the Centre for European Studies at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok represents the first program of its kind to offer an M.A. in European Studies, the European Studies Program in the Philippines, also offering a Master's degree, is considered the second largest program in European area studies. At the University of Karachi, in Pakistan, students can even obtain a Ph.D. in European Studies, a program which is co-organized and managed by the University of Brescia in Italy. In Indonesia, the program has been set up by agreement between the Indonesian government and the government of France, and in the Philippines there are special arrangements between the University of Amsterdam, the University of Barcelona, and major universities of the Philippines such as Ateneo de Manila and La Salle University.

What the contributors to the workshop pointed out is that there had been no dearth of

area studies at their respective universities. For most major universities in Asia, since the end of World War II, had developed area studies on Asian regions: Thai Studies existed in Thailand for instance, Malay Studies, Chinese Studies, Indian Studies, and Islamic Studies were taught at the University of Malay, and China Studies, Japan Studies, Southeast Asian Studies, African Studies, and West Asia Studies are part of the curriculum at universities in India. European area studies, however, had received little attention in the area of research, study, and development. For one, since these Asian nations -- with the exception of Thailand -- commanded a variety of colonial experiences tied to Europe, there was no particular incentive to study contemporary Europe or its history. And indeed, these nations, most of them developing, emphasized the technological and scientific training of their elites, rather than training in interdisciplinary social science oriented area studies. And conversely, western international educational policies, intent on attracting the brain talent from developing countries, promoted the funding of research in the technological fields, rather than in the social sciences or in area studies. In this sense, European centers of higher education, research, and development had no particular interest in Asian area studies either. All this has changed with the advent of the European Union. What the EU would like to see, for instance, is greater cooperation between government, policy makers, and business leaders between Europe and Asia, a cooperation which academic connections can facilitate. What some of the Asian participants, on the other hand, would like to see is not only greater cooperation between governments and business elites, but also greater understanding between European and Asian civil societies. Again, cultural and academic exchanges can help to facilitate this. While the European Commission supports a variety of programs throughout the region -- albeit not to the extent to which a South Korean colleague, Wok Sik Moon, would like to see it

-- the Asian universities participate in these endeavors by properly accrediting programs and degrees in European Studies.<sup>4</sup>

No doubt, the European Union financially initiated these encounters between Europe and Asia. Its pragmatic goals do impact the mission, content, and structure of the emerging programs in European Studies. Indeed, from the perspective of the representative of the delegation of the European Commission in Thailand, Thierry Rommel, the key note speaker at the workshop, the nexus between academics, policy makers, business leaders, government officials, and the civil societies of the region is crystal clear.<sup>5</sup> European Union supported European Studies in Asia are to pursue basic policy research in order to link industry, finance, and government in Asia to the European Union. Are we witnessing knowledge production at Asian universities to the dictates of European business? Will European Studies in Asia primarily service European business interests or will both regions, Europe and Asia, profit? That the European Union desires to engage in more business with Asia, in particular with the rapidly evolving Chinese market, is apparent. As major competitor of Japan and the United States, the European Union has little choice but to engage in Asia, as long as it desires to remain in the game of global competition.<sup>6</sup> Yet judging from the actual funds the European Union transferred to Asian universities in order to promote Euro-Asian relations under the name of European Studies, then Asia -- as compared to the funds for European Studies that have arrived in the United States over the past decade -- actually commands little priority. All of the European Studies Programs in Asia combined receive considerably less than comparable cultural diplomacy programs in other parts of the world.<sup>7</sup>

It is obvious, though, from many of the contributions to the international workshop at

Chulalongkorn University that our colleagues in European Studies in South East Asia are not simply waiting in line for European Union second handouts. As Rajendra K. Jain from Jawaharlal Nehru University observes, the European Union is the largest economic grouping in terms of population, purchasing power, and international trade.<sup>8</sup> A dialogue with and knowledge of such a powerful global grouping can only be beneficial for leading citizens in other global regions. More importantly, the study of the structures that enabled the formation of this grouping -- European Integration -- is useful for studying trends in world economical and international relations. Indeed, this is what Dai Bingran, from Fudan University in Shanghai points to when he gives an overview of European Studies in China.<sup>9</sup> Over 400 researchers at 70 Chinese universities, for instance, are engaged in the study of the European Community laws in the area of customs, trade, competition rules, intellectual property protection, human rights, environmental protection and social security, European Community laws which have been past in order to facilitate the integration process. The nature of integration policies and the extent of their successful application are important for contemporary Chinese society bent on moving towards marketization, privatization, and the restructuring of its social security system. The unification of peoples and territories resulting from the integration process in Europe is thus historically significant for intellectual and political elites in Asia, precisely because “nothing remotely comparable has happened there,” as Shaharil Talib from the Asia-Europe Center of the University of Malaya in Malaysia states.<sup>10</sup> The integration of the various European economies, starting from the coal and steel sectors to many different sectors in industry and commerce and coupled with rational laws for greater fluidity, on the one hand, and manpower upgrading for greater mobility, on the other hand, is a phenomenon of utmost relevance for critical

intellectuals, political leaders and policy makers alike in Asia. For Asia too, as early as 1947 and 1955, had envisaged a dream of unification, a dream which "the cold war kept ... in deep freeze." (p. 45) It should come as no surprise, then, that Europeanist scholars in the Asian region should reflect on how they can find congruence between their own Asia specific interests. And what these Asia-specific interests may consist of is probably the most consistent theme that emerged from the international workshop at Chulalongkorn University entitled "New Challenges and Contributions to the Understanding between Asia and Europe."

It should be pointed out in conclusion that the significance of the integration process in Europe is on the research agenda not only of Europeanists of developing countries in Asia, but on that of researchers in developed Asian regions as well. These include researchers from New Zealand and Australia who are involved in setting up European Studies Centers in the Asia Pacific region. In other words, although European Studies in non-developing countries tend to be less policy oriented and have the leisure to engage in philosophical questions, leading Europeanists in developed Asia Pacific regions nonetheless keep a pragmatic eye on Europe. In "Regional Integration, Economic Prosperity and Strategic Security: The EU and Northeast Asia," Barry Gustavson from the emerging Centre for European Studies at the University of Auckland in New Zealand reflects on the lessons the Asia Pacific region can learn from the European Union model of integration.<sup>11</sup> If Asia, including Asia Pacific, wants to foreclose significant economic and political instability in the region, it will be in its interest to form a regional organizational body with which to engage in the development of meaningful bilateral relations with the European Union and other major formations in the world. As the privileged trade relations New Zealand and Australia entertained with Great Britain are rapidly transforming

under the impact of the European Union, the Asia Pacific regions hence not only rethink their relations with the individual European countries, but also with the new economies in Asia. Judging from the work of leading Europeanists in the Asia Pacific regions, from a geo-political point of view, Asia Pacific regions have more to gain from alliances with Asian economies and societies, and more to lose by withholding such alliance possibilities.<sup>12</sup> European Studies in Asia then in general constitutes a vehicle for the study of European integration processes, and not primarily for the study of European history, languages, and civilizations. In the era of globalization, the privileged status of Europe and the west in the production of knowledge has begun to lose its hegemonic status through shifts towards pragmatic knowledge production about Europe generated in many knowledge centers in the world. If Goeran Therborn is correct, then in less than a hundred years from now Europe will be what it seems to some Asian colleagues already: a peninsula attached at the periphery to the large continent of Eurasia, significant for the cultures it historically produced, but the best it can hope for for the future “is to constitute a nice, decent periphery of the world, with little power, but some good ideas.”<sup>13</sup> It remains to be seen which function the Centers, Institutes and organizations for European Studies, no matter on which continent, will assume in this process.

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1. For an intriguing discussion of the “Asian Age” in the world economic system at the beginning of modernity see Andre Gunder Frank, *ReOrient. Global Economy in the Asian Age* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: The University of California Press, 1998).

2. For world-wide quality of life discrepancies between global regions see the statistics of the Rojas databank: [www.rrojasdatabank.org/stat2/htm](http://www.rrojasdatabank.org/stat2/htm). For the role of international organizations in maintaining or undoing discrepancies see Peter Gowan, *The Global Gamble*. London and New York: Verso, 1999.

3. Some of the contributions to the workshop are assembled in a small yet most interesting publication edited by Suthiphand Chirathivat and Poul Henrik Lassen, *European Studies in Asia. New Challenges and Contributions to the Understanding Between Asia and Europe*, (Bangkok: Centre for European Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1999).
4. See Sik Wok Moon, "Network among Asian Academics and Asian Economic Cooperation," in *European Studies in Asia*. 97-104.
5. Thierry Rommel, "Key-note speech," in *European Studies in Asia*. 11-15.
6. For a concise depiction of the global economic arena see Lester C. Thurow, *The Future of Capitalism. How Today's Economic Forces Shape Tomorrow's World* (New York: Penguin Books, 1996).
7. According to Wok Sik Moon, all the Asian countries combined received less than 30 Million Euro for educational and training purposes in the nineties. Three Centers alone in the United States alone (Center for German and European Studies) received more than that in a ten year period (1989-1999).
8. Rajendra K. Jain, "European Studies in Asia: Problems and Prospects," in *European Studies in Asia*. 31-43.
9. Dai Bingran, "European Studies in China: Challenges and Response," in *European Studies in Asia*. 55-69.
10. Shahari Talib, "Asia-Europe: The Original World Wide Web," in *European Studies in Asia*. 43-47.
11. Barry Gustafson, "Regional Integration, Economic Prosperity and Strategic Security: the EU and Northeast Asia," in *Strategic and Economic Dynamics of Northeast Asia: global, regional, and New Zealand perspectives*, ed. Rouben Azizian (Wellington: Centre for Strategic Studies, New Zealand and University of Auckland: Department of Political Studies, 1999): 94-101.

12. See Michael Yahuda, *The International Politics of the Asia-Pacific, 1945-1995* (London and New York: Routledge, 1996).

13. Goeran Therborn, "Europe in the Twenty-First Century: The World's Scandinavia?" in *The Question of Europe*, eds. Peter Gowan and Perry Anderson (London: Verso, 1997): 357-385.