

The EU Through the Eyes of Asia The Case of China and Hong Kong

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ABSTRACT

Relations between the European Union (EU) and Asia have expanded rapidly over the last decades. Since its enlargement in 2004, the EU has become the largest economy in the world. Similarly, the Asian economy is booming, including in the countries of East Asia that were affected by the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997. The globalisation of the world economy means that the level of interdependence between the two regions is now at unprecedented levels. Strengthening EU-Asia relations is thus one of the EU's external policy priorities.

Discourse regarding the EU's strategy toward Asia has concentrated mainly on the promotion of trade, good governance, civil society development, bi-regional dialogue, as well as programmes on economic, commercial and development co-operation. In recent years, political and security co-operation have contributed to a wider spectrum of EU-Asia relations, presenting new opportunities for diplomatic maneuver. Certainly, what is needed is more than analyses of trade figures, tourist numbers, policy issues, common stances or areas of discord. Thus, a key aspect of the European Commission's September 2001 Communication has been "to strengthen further the mutual awareness between Europe and Asia and to reduce persisting stereotypes."

The two regions and indeed most of the world owe their sustained growth to the sheer size and appetite of the Chinese market. China is the world's largest producer and consumer of steel, the second biggest user of energy and the world's second-largest economy. In the context of its relations with the EU, China is the EU's second-largest trading partner, just behind the United States; and the EU is China's largest trading partner. It is therefore not surprising that contemporary EU-China dialogue is developing a much more prominent international profile than the EU's dialogue with the rest of Asia.

Trade and economic co-operation are of course a fundamental part of EU-China relations. However, the "comprehensive strategic partnership" – as it has become known – is based on much more than that. Yet, there is little information about how the EU is perceived in China. Further, given the conventional emphasis on the activities and importance of political elites, public perception of ordinary Chinese citizens toward the EU has received little attention.

This lecture seeks to fill this gap by examining what Europe and the EU means to the citizens in China and Hong Kong, comparing the perceptions of the EU among the media, general public and elites. Key questions to be addressed will be as follows:

- Is the EU a recognisable actor in the eyes the citizens of China and Hong Kong?
- What are the most mentioned images of the EU in China and Hong Kong?
- How would people in China and Hong Kong evaluate the current and future state of relationship with the EU?
- How important is the EU to China and Hong Kong when compared to the United States and other neighbouring nations?
- Has the enlargement process and other internal developments of the EU influenced how it is perceived by its Asian counterparts?
- What are the major sources news and information about the EU in China and Hong Kong?
- Looking ahead, as the EU's relevance to China and Hong Kong is expected to grow, what are the opportunities and obstacles concerning the roles and expectations of the EU?

To the extent that EU political leaders pay attention to the various aspects of public perceptions in the process of policy formulation, this lecture will provide scientific and rigorous information regarding the attitudes and perceptions of citizens of two of the EU's long-term partners in the Far East. This lecture invites participants to ponder upon the strengths and weaknesses of European foreign policy, trade and development policy towards China and Hong Kong, and the emergence of China as a global player.



Profile of Lecturer

Chan Ka-Lok, Kenneth, received his D.Phil. in Politics from Nuffield College, University of Oxford, in the United Kingdom, and is currently Associate Professor at the Department of Government and International Studies, Hong Kong Baptist University, China. He has also taught at the University of Warsaw and the University of Gdansk in Poland. In recent years he has taught for the Masters programme in European studies at the Institute of European Studies at the University of Macao. His interests include post-communist politics, democratisation, British politics, European union politics, Hong Kong politics and East European languages. Recent research outputs concern the politics of electoral reforms in post-Communist Europe and the perceptions of the European Union in the Asia-Pacific region. He has published articles in *Europe-Asia studies*, *electoral studies*, *party politics*, *West European politics*, the *Oxford International Review*, the *Central and East European Political Science Review*, the *International Journal of Social Psychiatry*, the *Asian Journal of Social Science*, *Studia Polityczna* (Poland), *Druzboslovne Razprave* (Slovenia), *Open Times* (China), and the *Hong Kong Journal of Social Sciences*.

About the ESiA Network

The findings that will be presented in this lecture are part of a wider study initiated by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) and the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE) – University of Canterbury, to measure the media, public and elite perceptions of the EU in the Asian region. Implemented under the framework of ASEF's European Studies in Asia (ESiA) Network, the first and second of the phases of the study involved China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand, from 2005-2007. The complete findings have been published in the book "The EU through the Eyes of Asia: Media, Public and Elite Perceptions in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand" (WWZ, December 2007). The third phase of the study will commence in Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam this year.

The European Studies in Asia (ESiA) network was initiated to stimulate European studies in the Asian region by providing a reliable platform for exchange and co-operation between European studies academics both in Asia and Europe. As an all-inclusive network, ESiA embraces all academics, institutions and networks specialising in European studies in Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) countries¹. It endeavours to strengthen existing academic links in Asia as well as facilitate the creation of new synergies within Asia as well as between Asia and Europe, through networking meetings, academic collaborations and the use of online tools.

ESiA is a flagship initiative of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) under the framework of the ASEM Education Hub (AEH). For more information, please visit <http://esia.asef.org>

¹ **The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)** is an informal process of dialogue and co-operation. It brings together Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, The Netherlands, Pakistan, The Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, South Korea, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission.