The EU Through the Eyes of Asia

The Case of Singapore

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Impetus for the study

- Importance of inter-cultural dialogue and mutual perception in a globalised world;
- Recognition of a certain “cognitive dissonance” (Shambaugh 1993, 2007) between the two regions;
- Lack of data on the external image of the EU;
Breadth of the Project

2006-07: Thailand, South Korea, Japan, Hong Kong SAR, China, Singapore (the current volume)

2008-09: Vietnam, Indonesia, Philippines

And the remaining Asian ASEM countries by 2010.
Three main sources of data

• News media (print and TV):
  – Daily monitoring throughout 2006 of
    • Straits Times, Lianhe Zaobao, Business Times;
    • Channel 8 news;
• Public opinion:
  – On-line household panel survey of 400 respondents;
• Elite opinion:
  – 32 face-to-face or e-mail interviews mid-2007 with
    leading figures in politics, business, media and civil
    society;
Some general findings across the region  
(courtesy of Martin Holland)

**Popular Newspapers**
- Dominant focus of domesticity: **3rd-party focus**
- Focus of Centrality: **Minor**
- Evaluation: **Neutral-positive**
- Economic Giant (Trade)… but also an emerging active political actor (externally, third countries)
- Yet, images vary in different parts of the region (e.g. not all the above applies to Singapore)

**TV**
- Except in China, EU is **almost invisible**;
- **3\textsuperscript{rd} party focus, neutral and minor**
- International political actor focus
- Javier Solana the EU’s “face” on TV and in Press
Ranking of Leading External Political News Items

- Global geostrategic news outweigh specific interest in EU-Singapore or EU-ASEAN;
- As is generally the case in other regions studied:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Countries</th>
<th>No. 1</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>No. 2</th>
<th>(n)</th>
<th>No. 3</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>(208)</td>
<td>EU-C</td>
<td>(182)</td>
<td>M.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>(107)</td>
<td>EU-C</td>
<td>(53)</td>
<td>M.E.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan*</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>(68)</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td></td>
<td>EU-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>(186)</td>
<td>M.E.</td>
<td>(153)</td>
<td>EU-C</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>M.E.</td>
<td>(34)</td>
<td>N. Korea</td>
<td></td>
<td>USA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>(98)</td>
<td>M.E.</td>
<td>(73)</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total Leading topics</td>
<td>Iran</td>
<td>686</td>
<td>M.E.</td>
<td>407</td>
<td>China</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Focus of Domesticity: degree of relation to Singapore (local focus)

Degree of Centrality: prominence of EU as focus of the article
Information input ("frame")

- Apart from the BT (for obvious reasons), most reporting is more or less equal between politics and economics;
- 912/2,051 (45.5%) items on the economy; 804/2,051 (39%) on politics (Iran, Middle East);
- 283/2,051 (13.8%) on social affairs (Danish cartoons; bird flu);
- Very little 52/2,051(2.5%) news on environmental issues.
Evaluation of EU news

- Most reporting is neutral;
- TV is anomalous; however, with only 14 items, it is difficult to chart a course.
Social issues: pie-chart distribution

- Cartoon issues and bird flu dominate
  (apart from the ubiquitous category “other”)
Selected findings: Danish cartoons

- Positive: 6
- Neutral: 18
- Negative: 37
Interpretation

• Positive:
  – EU officials work to bridge the gulf between Muslims and Christians. EU struggles to mend relations

• Neutral:
  – daily reports of cartoon issues and global protests.

• Negative:
  – difficult state of relations between EU and Muslim world;
  – a “Clash of Civilizations” (cp. Huntington/Fukuyama)
Immigration issues in the EU

- Mostly neutral, but over 25% negative

![Pie chart showing 67% neutral, 26% positive, and 7% negative.]
**Interpretation**

- **Positive:**
  - Immigration within the EU can help the Union become a seamless economic dynamo that can compete with the United States and emerging Asian powers;

- **Negative:**
  - the EU faces the challenge of migration.
  - anti-immigrant backlash.
  - Europe lacks a continent-wide policy and may fear the social impact of globalisation.
Social legislation in the EU

- Positive: 4 (16%)
- Neutral: 12 (63%)
- Negative: 3 (21%)
Interpretation

• Positive:
  – Services legislation (Nov 2006) marks a significant step forward in forging common market policy;

• Neutral:
  – working hour regulation, job bias law, poverty line regulation

• Negative:
  – EU's efforts to liberalise its staid employment sector meet dogged public resistance.
  – unions (esp in Western Europe) are fuming at the European Commission;
Public Opinion
## Dominant Images of the EU

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>1st</th>
<th>2nd</th>
<th>3rd</th>
<th>4th</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>euro</td>
<td>Enlargement/ internal</td>
<td>European union, integration</td>
<td>Trade</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>euro</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>European union, integration</td>
<td>Individual countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>euro</td>
<td>European union, integration</td>
<td>Individual countries</td>
<td>Disparities/ unfairness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>European union, integration</td>
<td>euro</td>
<td>Economic power</td>
<td>Individual countries</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>European union, integration</td>
<td>euro</td>
<td>Individual countries</td>
<td>Exceptionalism/ problems</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>Individual countries</td>
<td>Economic power</td>
<td>Trade</td>
<td>euro</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Public opinion: Three thoughts about the EU

- integration mentioned by around 60%;
- euro by just under half;
- economic power, about a third;
- only 1% see the EU as role model for ASEAN.
### Perceptions of Most Important Partner: Present and Future

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Current Perception 1st Place</th>
<th>EU rank Perception</th>
<th>In Future 1st Place</th>
<th>EU rank</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>China</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>2nd</td>
<td>EU</td>
<td>1st</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hong Kong</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Japan</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>6th</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S. Korea</td>
<td>USA</td>
<td>4th</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>4th</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Thailand</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>5th</td>
<td>China</td>
<td>5th</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Which overseas countries or regions are the most important partners for Singapore?
How important to Singapore’s future do you consider the following regions are, on a scale of 1 to 5?
Elite Perceptions
The EU’s position in general

• In general, the responses can be compared with those revealed in the Public Opinion survey.

• The EU ranks fifth, after Asia generally, the USA, Japan and China;
  • “I don’t think Asians view the EU as a leader in world politics because we see Europe as comprising of countries that were former colonial powers and there is this aversion to Europeans because of this” (media elite).

• Bilateral engagement (esp. with the UK, France and Germany) is often deemed more important than multilateral with the EU as a whole;
General view: The EU is an Economic and Cultural Power, but not a Political Power

- Most respondents (80%) expressed the above opinion;
- Only 13% overall, and even slightly less for the political elite, thought that the EU was a political power;
- “The EU has cultural cachet,” but this was sometimes seen as snobbism and Eurocentrism;
- Over 70% viewed expansion positively, while just under 25% overall and 33% of the business elite thought that the Union could become more inward-looking and protectionist;
- There was a perception that Singapore could work cooperatively with the new EU members;
some reflections on the reflections

• EU is often considered a distant other;

• *Gravitas* in external global relations still held by the US;

• In external trade, by Asia, particularly China (Asia on the rise, EU steady state or declining in market share);

• “soft power” acknowledged only rarely;

• EU is perceived as a great economic power;

• EU image rather positive and relationship progressing;

• Yet threat of “protectionist” policies, inc. “policy taker problems”:
  – Different definitions of non-tariff trade barriers.
Raising the Visibility of the EU: general remarks from/on the volume

• On the positive side: Should the reform treaty be ratified, the single external presence (“high representative”) will help raise the political profile;
  – reach more than the political elite?

• More public outreach:
  – workshops for local journalists and students at JC and college level (working with the tertiary institutions and the MOE);
  – increasing links beyond the gov’t and business sectors: e.g. people-to-people dialogues, education, fora e.g. on environmental issues;
  – Extending also to diverse cultural events, broad dissemination of news material and broad definition of what is newsworthy about the EU.
Thank You for your attention