

Chapter 4

Assuming Superpower Status? Evolving Asian Perceptions of the EU as a Political and Economic Actor

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“Here in the United States I hear ‘who is Europe, where is Europe? They are looking for China and for India. Europe is increasingly fading away beyond the horizon ...”

Joschka Fischer, 30th March 2007

As the former German Foreign Minister suggests, the EU faces a global relevance challenge. Its unique attributes (consensus, soft-power, rule of law and regionalism) are often difficult for outsiders to interpret or value appropriately: too often these characteristics are seen to imply complexity, ineffectiveness and delay. Only since the turn of the 21st century has Europe begun to ponder quite how it is viewed externally and what the consequences of its international

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image might be (both for domestic European reasons as well as for influencing international issues). A special issue of the journal *European Foreign Affairs Review* in 2007 underlined the past missed opportunity to investigate “not just why and how the EU behaves differently because of its different configuration...” but “if such a distinctiveness is likely to feed back into the EU’s internal and international credibility, and possibly also into the self-identification of the Europeans as a political group”.² The absence of any empirical evidence upon which to evaluate these ideas was also noted as was the unique exception of the “research team focusing on perceptions in the Asia-Pacific region”,³ members of whom have authored the chapters in this volume.

And yet another recent report has suggested that EU citizens themselves support a stronger, single EU global role. In a poll conducted in June 2007, close to 90% of respondents called for the EU to take on greater responsibility on the world stage.⁴ In particular, 84% wanted a greater EU aid contribution to assist development initiatives, 74% called for the EU’s trade competences to be better used as a mechanism for influencing third country behaviour and 68% wanted to see higher levels of EU troops committed to international peacekeeping missions. These findings broadly confirmed what has been evident in *Eurobarometre* results over the last decade: European citizens value the EU’s global role and are often more progressive than the EU’s official intergovernmental position on key international issues by calling for ‘more Europe’ not less.

This newly discovered interest in the EU’s global role among academics and practitioners is welcome, albeit long overdue. The analysis presented in this publication continues to be ground-breaking and complements the limited existing empirical assessment of how the

² Lucarelli, Sonia, ‘The European Union in the Eyes of Others: Towards Filling a Gap in the Literature’, *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 12, No. 3, 2007, pp. 249–270, p. 268.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

⁴ For full details see the German Marshall Fund of the USA publication *TransAtlantic Trends 2007* <<http://www.transatlantictrends.org/trends/index.cfm?lang=eng>>

EU is perceived in Asia (and should be read in conjunction with the first volume). The individual country chapters in this volume have presented a rich array of empirical data, nuanced and specific to each geographical context, examining how the media represents the European Union and how this is translated into the images and perceptions held by citizens in Asia towards the EU. The aim of this chapter (and the following one by Natalia Chaban) is to highlight some of the broad themes that emerge through a comparative analysis. To what extent did the different Asian societies and media share similar perceptions of the EU? To what extent could regional differences be identified? And, what factors helped differentiate ‘Asian’ responses? The focus for comparison in this chapter is on two specific frames — the EU seen as a political actor and the EU seen as an economic actor. As the previous chapters have already hinted, the twentieth century belief that the EU was predominantly just a global economic player has to be modified: the EU’s twenty-first century political role is increasingly being reported and recognised and while not perhaps a ‘giant’, Asia no longer disregards the EU for being a political ‘dwarf’.

Before turning to the findings, the EU’s economic and political development since the Maastricht Treaty needs to be explored in order to provide a relevant contextualisation for interpreting both the media and public perceptions. What, then, was the ‘reality’ of the European Union’s formative years? First, while the European integration process turned fifty on the 25th March 2007, the European Union is a comparatively new construct as it was only legally recognised on 1st November 1993 with the final implementation of the Maastricht Treaty. Less than two decades is perhaps a short period to develop brand awareness, especially where the brand fails to convey a consistent image or gain wide audience appeal.

Maastricht — or to give it its official designation, the Treaty of European Union — did, however, mark substantive changes to Europe’s common economic and political competences even to the extent some may argue (and to the horror of the EU’s intergovernmentalist Member States) of laying the foundations for a future federal EU construction. The introduction of Economic and

Monetary Union (EMU) including the Euro (building on the success of the Single European Market), the establishment of the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) and the binding commitment to global development and poverty alleviation in the Treaty's defining Articles all signalled a European ambition that went beyond past rhetoric and facilitated the emergence of a new enhanced EU global role. Matching these ambitions in some areas has been problematic, most notably in executing CFSP in the former-Yugoslavia and in Iraq, but these headline disappointments should not detract from the evident progress and impact the EU has come to exercise in foreign affairs. The EU together with the Member States provides over half of all global development aid and the United Nation's Millennium Development Goals have now been incorporated into the EU's own development policy. The EU has matured from a state of political infancy into a recognised and needed political actor in the post-Soviet world. The fledgling Euro has also confounded the early sceptics and within its first five years has appreciated some 30% against the US dollar and is increasingly used as a foreign reserve currency (especially in Asia and the Middle East). This new phenomenon coupled with the EU retaining its place as the world's largest trader and finally addressing the vagaries of the Common Agricultural Policy for third countries, has consolidated the EU's reputation as an economic powerhouse.

Developments since the turn of the millennium have further enhanced the EU's international significance. First, the introduction of the 'High Representative for CFSP' has considerably raised the EU's external profile and the 'single face' of Javier Solana has almost become emblematic of EU foreign policy. The launch of the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP) has gone a long way to addressing the soft-power limitations of Europe's previous foreign policy mechanism, European Political Cooperation. The ESDP mandate is to provide for autonomous action in both decision-making and in the means to act and as such appears to be at least a potential competitor with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization). Within the first seven years (2003–9) of operation, some twenty-three ESDP missions have been deployed covering

conflict and reconstruction missions as far afield as Aceh, Darfur, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Georgia and the Palestinian Territories.⁵ The complementary developments of EU Battlegroups (currently numbering thirteen consisting of 1,500 troops each), a common Defence Agency to enhance interoperability, a European Gendamerie, military policy-making structures, the “2010 Headline Goals” as well as the EU’s formal 2008 Security Strategy Paper, have considerably added to the EU’s international standing. While still bound by the rule of law, effective multilateralism and a respect for international institutions, the EU of the twenty-first century has developed into a credible international actor, albeit one that rejects unilateralism and seeks consensus and compromise rather than confrontation.

While it would be foolhardy to suggest that in any sense the EU is a military superpower, it can perhaps claim that moniker in terms of its development policy and trading prowess. Whether this new reality is reflected in the media or has penetrated public and elite opinion has been a focus in this volume. In the following section some of the comparative themes that are evident in the nine individual case-studies are highlighted and it is to this data that the chapter now turns.

COMPARATIVE RESULTS

The Media⁶

First, the dataset involving the nine media studies is presented in Table 1 listing the newspapers and television channels monitored in the analysis in this collected volume. The first item in each case is a popular daily with the largest public circulation; the second newspaper listed is the leading business daily; and the third item is an English-language daily printed in each area (largely read by elites);

⁵ For full details see <www.ISS.Europa.eu>.

⁶ All the data presented in this collection is from the ESiA research project. The full datasets can be made available to ASEF partners on request.

Table 1: The thirty-five news outlets monitored in nine locations⁷

	Popular Daily	Business Daily	English-Language Daily	TV News
2006				
Mainland China	<i>People's Daily</i>	<i>International Finance</i>	<i>China Daily</i>	CCTV
Hong Kong SAR	<i>Oriental Daily</i>	<i>Hong Kong Economic Journal</i>	<i>South China Morning Post</i>	TVB Jade
Japan	<i>Yomiuri</i>	<i>Nikkei Shimbun</i>	<i>Japan Times</i>	N/A
South Korea	<i>Chosun Daily</i>	<i>Macil Business</i>	<i>Korea Herald</i>	KBS
Singapore	<i>Lianhe Zaobao</i>	<i>Straits Times</i>	<i>Business Times</i>	Channel 8
Thailand	<i>Thai Rath</i>	<i>The Manager</i>	<i>Bangkok Post</i>	ITV
2008				
Indonesia	<i>Kompas</i>	<i>Bisnis Indonesia</i>	<i>Jakarta Post</i>	TVRI
The Philippines	<i>Philippines Daily Inquirer</i>	<i>Business World</i>	<i>Manila Bulletin</i>	GMA 7 24 Oras
Vietnam	<i>Youth</i>	VNET	<i>Vietnam News</i>	VTV1

⁷ The project conducted in 2006 covers the period from 1st January to 31st December 2006, with the exception of Japan. The data for Japan only covers the printed media for the period 1st July — 31st December 2006. Besides, the 2006 data from television news excluded the month of January. In 2008, data of all news outlets covers the period between 1st January and 30th June 2008.

Table 2: Overall distribution of EU news items across 35 media outlets

	TV	Popular	English	Business	Total
2006					
China	131	686	596	564	1,977
Hong Kong	13	745	454	952	2,164
Japan	n.a.	247	92	493	832
Singapore	14	684	1,009	675	2,382
S. Korea	30	342	183	387	942
Thailand	16	76	610	156	858
2008					
Indonesia	50	248	236	154	688
Philippines	1	55	126	72	254
Vietnam	21	19	159	29	228
Total	276	3,102	3,465	3,482	10,325

and finally, the most popular prime-time news television broadcast in each country is given.

Table 2 presents the overall findings for the twelve months of 2006 across five Asian locations of South Korea, mainland China, SAR Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand. Data presented here only covers the second half of 2006 for Japan, and for Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam the period of analysis was 1 January–30 June 2008. During this period there was a total of 10,325 articles or news reports that mentioned the EU either as a minor factor or major topic. Given this figure represents thirty-five media outlets, the extent of EU coverage appeared remarkably limited overall. The most striking finding is given in column one, television. Less than one item a day involving the EU appeared on all of the eight prime-time news broadcasts.⁸ Not only was the EU virtually invisible on the Asian television news, the data where it existed, was dominated by China with 131 news items — more than 60% of the 2006 sample and equivalent to the EU featuring on prime-time Chinese television roughly three times a week. Similarly, in the 2008

⁸ The sample period for the 2006 prime-time television news broadcasts only covered eleven months — from February to December.

data, near 70% of the EU's appearance on TV news was in Indonesia. Elsewhere on Asian prime-time television the EU was never mentioned more than four times a month! The levels of EU coverage in the popular press were at comparatively similar, if low, levels for mainland China, Hong Kong SAR, Singapore, South Korea, Japan and Indonesia with under an average of two items a day appearing in these most widely read papers — *People's Daily*, *Oriental Daily*, *Lienhe Zaobao*, *Chosun Daily*, *Yomiuri Shimbun* and *Kompas*. In striking contrast, in three out of five Southeast Asian countries — Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam — the popular press rarely covered the EU. Consequently, for citizens who rely predominantly on television news and the popular press across Southeast and Northeast Asia, finding information on the EU is generally difficult with a significant number of people likely to have at best just a passing and obscure understanding of the importance of the EU internationally.

If we assume that each country's influential elites are also likely to be high consumers of both English-language and 'business' newspapers, then arguably a more reassuring conclusion may be drawn. However, the overwhelming level of EU reporting in Thailand's English-language *The Bangkok Post* (representing 71% of all EU news in Thailand), *Vietnam News* (responsible for 70% of all EU news in Vietnam) and Philippines' *Manila Bulletin* (accounting for 50% of all EU news in the Philippines) also suggests that such readerships may well be expatriate rather than local in nature. Turning to the 'business' dailies, remarkably, *Nihon Keizai Shimbun* reported 60% of all EU news in Japan (by far the greatest percentage of all EU stories reported for each location), followed by the *Hong Kong Economic Journal* and Korea's *Maeil Business* which account for 44% and 41% of all EU News in each location respectively.

Notably, regional differences are apparent. While the EU was found most often in the 'business' dailies in North East Asia, (except in mainland China), English-language dailies dominated the reportage of the EU in South East Asia, (with Indonesia as an exception). Interestingly, China and Indonesia shared a very similar pattern: relatively high visibility of the EU in popular news media (popular daily and television news) and a lower coverage in the business press.

Overall, the modest level of reporting raises serious issues about the EU's visibility and identity in Asia: if newspapers are still important for conveying international news images (and in technologically advanced societies this may not be the case for much longer), it is hard to be secure in concluding that the EU has an undisputed and transparent presence. Opaque may be a better description. However, if people prefer to access television for international news, the conclusion is even less sanguine with significant public diplomacy implications. Other than in China and Indonesia, the EU was rarely seen on prime-time news. Moreover, press coverage was low in volume (especially in the case of South Korea, Thailand, the Philippines and Vietnam).

The analysis in this chapter considers just two comparative aspects of this wider dataset — the presence of the EU as both a *political* and as an *economic* actor as presented in the media across nine locations. The following chapter focuses on the *social, developmental* and *environmental* nature of the EU's actions. Together, such a focus can provide an initial estimate of the broad public exposure and awareness of the EU among Asian citizens. Table 3 provides the complete dataset from the nine locations and all media outlets. The overwhelming

Table 3: Overall distribution of frames across all media outlets

	Political (%)	Economic (%)	Social (%)	Environment (%)	Development (%)	Total
2006						
China	38	43	14	2	2	1,977
Hong Kong	25	53	14	7	1	2,164
Japan	43	47	7	2	0	832
Singapore	35	45	14	3	2	2,382
S. Korea	31	48	18	2	1	942
Thailand	39	42	15	2	2	858
2008						
Indonesia	42	46	6	3	2	688
Philippines	28	53	6	9	4	254
Vietnam	53	37	4	5	1	228
Overall	35	46	13	4	2	10,325

description of the EU used in the Asian media surveyed characterised the EU in either economic (46%) or political (35%) terms, with some evidence of a more nuanced EU global role as both a social and environmental reference point. While the economic importance of the EU is hardly surprising, the emergence of the EU as a recognised political actor is an interesting development: the traditional criticism of the EU suffering from an “expectations-capability gap” in its international relations may need to be rethought.⁹

The EU as a Political Actor

As shown in Table 3 depictions of the EU as a political action were commonly found in all of the nine locations, while Vietnam was unique in this being the dominant frame (although these 120 news items were largely reflected through the English-language press as noted above); elsewhere the economic frame was the main focus of EU reporting. Hong Kong SAR recorded the lowest level of political

Table 4: The EU as a political actor: internal and external frames

Countries	Internal	External	% of External News
China	130	642	83
Hong Kong	157	386	71
Japan	100	261	70 ¹⁰
Singapore	205	652	75
S. Korea	65	230	78
Thailand	41	304	87
Indonesia	75	217	72
The Philippines	16	57	78
Vietnam	40	81	66
Total	829	2,830	76

⁹ Hill, Christopher, ‘The Capability-Expectations Gap, or Conceptualizing Europe’s International Role’, *Journal of Common Market Studies*, Vol. 31, No. 3 (1993), pp. 305–28.

¹⁰ This data has been modified from that used in the chapter on Japan in Volume I which recorded a 68%–32% internal/external split.

news both in absolute terms (538 items) and as a percentage of all EU news stories (25%).

A closer examination of those reports where Europe was presented as a political actor unearths a significant common perspective: around three-quarters of these news items related to an external view of the EU in the world compared with less than one-quarter focused on internal European questions. This emphasis was particularly clear for Thailand and China where 87% and 83% of reports respectively, involving the EU as a political actor were externally focussed.

This similarity found across the different Asian contexts extended to the dominant EU international involvements that were reported. In general, while these topics obviously reflect the international events of 2006 and 2008, it is noteworthy that the EU is now being presented in the Asian media as an international political actor.

In 2006, some 57% all such external political news stories across the region concerned just three EU actions: the EU's intervention in the Iran nuclear issue (654 items), involvement in the Middle-East (excluding Iran; 445 pieces of news) and EU-China relations (296 stories). There was a clear pattern of priority among the media in China, Hong Kong, Singapore and Thailand as illustrated in Table 5. For Singapore, Thailand and China over 25% of their coverage of the EU's external actions were related to items on Iran (with Hong Kong SAR at 24%). For the Middle East, coverage in Singapore (21%) and Thailand (22%) outstripped the others and not surprisingly, EU-China relations were most frequently covered by the Chinese mainland and SAR media (25% and 18% respectively).

South Korea, together with Japan and Thailand to a lesser degree, were exceptions to this topical consensus. Rather than Iran, South Korea's nuclear concerns were understandably focussed much closer to home and the EU's mediation in this issue was the most widely covered story involving EU foreign affairs. These concerns were seemingly shared also by Japan but largely missing elsewhere. Interestingly, EU-China relations were a topic widely ignored by the Korean and Japanese media (just 6 items out of 230 identified in the external political frame in Korea; 7 items out of 261 in Japan). Attention to EU policy towards the Middle East and Iran were the

Table 5: Ranking of leading external political news items

	No. 1 (n)	No. 2	No. 3
2006			
China	Iran (201.5)	Home (159)	Middle East (107.5)
HKSAR	Iran (92)	China (68)	Middle East (42)
Japan	Iran (65)	Middle East (54)	North Korea (15)
S. Korea	North Korea (38.5)	Middle East (36)	Iran (34.5)
Singapore	Iran (184.5)	Middle East (138)	China (55)
Thailand	Iran (77.5)	Middle East (67)	Sri Lanka (17)
Leading topics	Iran (655)	Middle East (444.5)	China (296)
2008			
Indonesia	Kosovo/Serbia (57)	Middle East (29)	Home (28)
Philippines	Kosovo/Serbia (13)	Home (10)	Iran (5)
Vietnam	Home (16)	Kosovo/Serbia (12.5)	US (10.5)
Leading topics	Kosovo/Serbia (82.5)	Home (54)	Middle East (31.5)

second and third most commonly cited news topic in South Korea. In addition, the Thai media chose to look at EU's monitor mission in Sri Lanka. But overwhelmingly, the EU's external political action is clearly located in Middle East in the eyes of Asian media.

The 2008 landscape is quite different from that of 2006. In all three cases the EU's involvement in the Kosovo/Serbia conflict was prominent, followed by each of the three countries' concerns regarding their own political relations with the EU rather than elsewhere in the world. This focus of the EU's political actorness 'at home' was rarely found in the six locations in the 2006 data. Coverage of EU external action in the Middle East was minimal in the Vietnamese news media, which was more interested in EU-US relations. On the other hand, Indonesia did focus attention on the EU-Middle East stories, especially the Israel-Palestine conflicts. In the Philippines, the Iranian nuclear issue received more attention than any other issue.

Remarkably, three themes stood out among the various political stories reported in the nine Asian locations: the EU as a key negotiating party in the Iranian nuclear issues; EU-Russian relations; and

EU-US relations. These were found in all nine locations monitored. Furthermore, the EU's political involvement in ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations), China, Georgia, Middle East, Montenegro and NATO were all reported by eight out of nine locations (EU-ASEAN relations was absent in South Korea; Sino-EU relations and EU-Middle East stories were absent in Vietnamese news; EU's involvement in Georgia was ignored in Thailand; EU-Montenegro relations was not found in the Philippines; and the EU's participation in NATO was neglected in Indonesia).

Turning to the smaller of the two political frames — those stories internal to the EU itself — the leading theme common to the nine locations was EU enlargement (which represented one-in-five of the 829 intra-EU political news items analysed). There were two distinct groups camouflaged by this average figure: over one-third of the internal EU political news items in Singapore were about enlargement; coverage of this issue in Hong Kong SAR, mainland China and Japan, was more than one-in-five. And when the Asian media reported on enlargement, the focus was not on the 2004 process, or on Romania, Bulgaria and Croatia, but generally about Turkey!

Additionally, the 2006 and 2008 data witnessed the process of the failed Treaty of European Constitution 'transformed' into the Lisbon Treaty, with 9% of the total EU-internal political news. Singapore, Indonesia and Vietnam gave relatively high attention to the Constitution/Lisbon Treaty and often placed this in relation to the new ASEAN Charter.

In support of the media emphasis of the EU as a political actor in other parts of the world, it was not surprising (albeit a relief to those still trying to construct a single EU international personality) that in all regions the dominant political face of the EU was Javier Solana, the High Representative for CFSP. Among 3,590 political-framed news items, Solana was featured in 390, much more frequently than the 'runner up', President of the European Commission José Manuel Barroso (120 news items). Turning to institutions, the Commission was the most visible representative, with 304 pieces of news referring to it. However, the EU Council presidency was rarely featured.

More positively, the press is now comfortable in using the acronym EU without any explanation that this refers to the ‘European Union’, putting Europe on par with the commonly accepted substitution of ‘USA’ for the United States of America, for example. This may sound like a trivial point, but the fact that the term ‘EU’ has been accepted as a self-explicit acronym is indicative of a wide-spread public awareness. No longer is the EU confused with either trade unions or insurance unions! Interestingly too, in the media the term EU3 (France, UK and Germany) is often taken as synonymous with speaking for the EU (a reflection perhaps of the 2006–8 interaction with Iran, where it was the EU3, not the EU Council presidency Troika that led).

However, this potentially reassuring response to Henry Kissinger’s now 37 year-old question “who speaks for Europe?” has to be somewhat moderated by the continuing presence of key Member States (the EU3) within news reports about the EU’s international political character.¹¹ While theoretically it might be sustainable to argue that this Janus quality to the EU’s international image is an accurate reflection of institutional and treaty realities, it does nothing to clarify or promote the EU as a single actor in the eyes of the Asian media.

The EU as an Economic Actor

While the emergence of the EU as a global political actor in the Asian media is a welcome sign of multidimensionality in EU news reporting, as noted already, traditional perceptions have not waned totally, with the EU still presented as primarily an economic actor in almost half (47% in 2006; 45% in 2008) of all EU news reports in the monitored Asian media. Table 3 provided the geographical breakdown revealing comparatively modest variations. While Hong Kong and the

¹¹ The much cited reference to Henry Kissinger’s complaint about foreign policy under the European Political Cooperation procedure of the early 1970s remains a useful shorthand for criticising the EU’s multiple personalities in external political relations.

Philippines (both 53%) had the highest volume of EU economic stories, last placed Vietnam still had a high level of coverage (37%) of the EU as an economic player in its EU news items. This general pre-occupation with the EU as a mercantilist entity matches the trading realities for all our analysed locations. At worst, the EU was a country's fourth most important trade partner (Indonesia and Philippines) and at best first (China) for both imports and exports. To what extent, then, does the Asian media reflect these general trends in its coverage of the EU?

First, an obvious but important observation: in each of the individual media studies (television, popular, English-language and business press), the business press recorded the highest volume of EU items with an economic focus. While this was most dramatically the case for Singapore and for China, the average for all six business papers monitored in 2006 was a remarkably high level of 66%. In the 2008 data, EU economic news accounted for 77% of the volume of the three business dailies. Here the regional similarity ends, however: in five cases the English-language press are in second place (*China Daily*, *The Japan Times*, *Korean Herald*, *Bangkok Post*, and *Business World*), in Hong Kong it is the popular newspaper *Oriental Daily*, whereas television was the second most important source of EU economic news stories in Singapore (albeit based on a particularly small number of news bulletins). In Indonesia, the EU was featured as an economic actor in about 40% of the news in both *Bisnis Indonesia* and *Jakarta Post*.

Within the dataset two separate economic themes are clearly apparent: the EU as a trading partner and the EU in relation to business and finance (see Table 6 for details). These two topics combined accounted for over two-thirds of all news stories on the EU as an economic actor (over 80% in Hong Kong SAR and Japan; over 70% in mainland China and Singapore; over 65% in the Philippines and Vietnam; over 60% in South Korea and Thailand; 56% in Indonesia). Under the heading of *trade*, the issues discussed in relation to the EU covered bilateral trading issues, the WTO Doha Round, anti-dumping duties, Free Trade Areas and trade protection. For example, in Thailand the majority of all *Thai Rath* stories (the most widely read

Table 6: The EU as an economic actor — the most visible themes

	Trade (%)	Business/ Finance (%)	Industry (%)	State of Economy (%)	Agriculture (%)
China	50	23	20	5	2
Hong Kong	33	50	3	12	2
Japan	29	51	14	4	1
Singapore	37	35	15	8	1
S. Korea	37	24	14	22	0
Thailand	42	19	23	8	7
Indonesia	26	31	24	15	5
Philippines	31	35	11	11	10
Vietnam	38	27	11	18	5

Thai popular daily paper) that framed Europe as an economic actor dealt with trade restrictions or anti-dumping measures that the European Union had imposed on Thai exports.

News reports on the Euro, European interest rates, merger regulation and competition rules, foreign direct investment and taxation predominated in the *business and finance* category. Within these topics there was a diversity of positive stories (trade surpluses, strong economy, economic cooperation) and negative ones (trade restrictions, lack of progress at Doha, energy crises, problems with the European economy) presented. From a European perspective what is quite remarkable is the striking disinterest in the EU's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), a topic which has historically been something of a media favourite (critically) within the European media. Even in the Philippines and Thailand which have experienced agricultural disputes with the EU, this subject only accounted for 10% and 7% of the coverage of the EU as an economic player respectively. In contrast to consistent *Eurobarometre* findings on European attitudes, for Asia, the CAP seems no longer newsworthy.

Notably, in mainland China, Thailand and Indonesia, *industry* was the third most frequent sub-frame in the EU's economic reportage. These stories included the EU's action in various industry

sectors, including plans to diversify energy production and rules on aviation industry inside the EU. In South Korea and Vietnam, the *state of economy* and depictions of how strong/weak the economies of the member states were, was the third most visible economic EU story.

The face of Europe in economic affairs was less clear-cut than that for the political arena where Mr. Solana — representing the Council — dominated. The media used both the Governor of the European Central Bank (ECB), Jean-Claude Trichet, and the former Commissioner for Trade, Peter Mandelson, to symbolise the EU as an economic entity (and thereby extended the institutional complexity and opaqueness of the EU). In total, Trichet was cited in 306 news items among the 4,807 pieces of economic-framed EU news, while Mandelson was mentioned in 292 news items. Turning to the supra-national institutions, remarkably, both the ECB and EC were featured in 1,027 pieces of news, a number much higher than the third most visible institution in economic reporting (the European Parliament mentioned in only 79 news items). The profile given to the ECB was particularly high in Hong Kong's media, which alone accounted for 501 Central Bank citations.

Consequently, both the ECB and DG Trade were the leading institutional bodies mentioned in these news reports, with the more usual addition of the European Parliament appearing through its Community budget oversight responsibilities. The terms 'euro' and 'euro-zone' were regularly used to complement EU brand awareness. However, once again these common EU symbols were in conflict with the ever-present Member State presence: just as was found in the analysis of the political frame, France, the UK and Germany were frequently used to moderate the EU's collective economic message.

The use of metaphors within the economic frame revealed different categories being used. Examples covered metaphors from the natural world, from transport and of movement. However, the most prevalent metaphor related to the human body, actions and emotions. The EU was typically described as either in "sickness", "death" or paradoxically in "revival"; emotionally the EU was often

seen to be disappointed, worrying or even in grief, although images of “pleasure” and “optimism” were also to be found. But in the area of human action metaphors, the dominant language was less ambivalent: in such metaphors the EU was general described as “at war”, “under pressure”, “challenged”, “tension” with the process of economic and monetary integration viewed as a “game” and a “gamble”. Metaphors do matter when individuals are interpreting complex messages, but their appealing simplifications may deceive as well as illuminate.

To summarise, the media in the Asian region surveyed — the eight television prime-time news broadcasts, the twenty-seven press (popular, business and English-language newspapers) — published or broadcast 10,325 EU news items over the whole year in 2006 and half year in 2008 demonstrating that coverage of the EU is unquestionably modest. Where the EU was reported, it predominantly described Europe as an economic global power and as an external political actor elsewhere in the world and not as necessarily locally relevant to bilateral issues in the region. While the television and press marginally favoured describing the EU in economic terms, the comparative closeness of the findings for two frames (politics and economics) was striking and demonstrated that the EU is no longer presented as a monolithic bloc but its different roles are beginning to become effectively differentiated by the media. The EU’s economic prowess is still recognised, but this is now balanced by recognition of an active emerging political international role, even when that role is with a third country elsewhere. Against these common themes regional differentiations were also evident with mainland China the most noteworthy case given its distinctive coverage of the EU on the television media.

So, if the EU is largely peripheral in the media is that necessarily problematic? There are certainly risks that can be associated with inaccurate or inappropriate perceptions generated through the media. The data suggest that there is a potential expectations deficit: if the EU is not given prominence and its role in the region is under-reported, reduced expectations of Europe’s involvement may be an inevitable consequence. A self-fulfilling logic — lower

demands leading to reduced media interest leading to lower demands — could ensue. Given that the EU is a significant economic partner for all the regions covered in this research and has growing political and security relationships, misperceptions based on media choices pose significant policy challenges, such as a possible undervaluing of the EU-ASEAN/ASEM¹² relationship and an overvaluing of say EU-MERCUSOR or EU-India relations.¹³ Any such downgrading runs the risk of missed opportunities for both the EU and Asia. While under-reported, the positive development unearthed by the findings is the emerging perception of an EU that is more economically and politically balanced: Europe's image is no longer just that of Fortress Europe; rather the EU as an international, hopefully benign, international actor is being observed and reported more often and more accurately. Provided that this media trend continues (and the EU's global role continues to expand) new opportunities for matching Asian needs and objectives with what the EU might be in a position to provide are possible.

So what then do the citizens of China, Japan, SAR Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, Indonesia, the Philippines and Vietnam think about the EU? Does the low level of EU coverage distort perceptions? How is the EU seen through the eyes of Asians — if seen at all?

¹² The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation. 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. See: <<http://aseminfoboard.org>>.

¹³ The ASEM process seems to have been largely ignored by the Asian media: over the whole year of 2006, across six locations in Asia, there were only 205 ASEM stories identified in the survey's media outlets. This figure was boosted somewhat after the holding of the ASEM 6 Summit in Helsinki September 2006 (see Chapter 6 by Suet Yi Lai and Natalia Chaban in this volume).

Public Opinion¹⁴

Cultural assumptions — especially those imported from Europe — are to be avoided when assessing public opinion: civil society, the ideal “civic culture”¹⁵ and democratic expectations taken for granted in Europe do not necessarily travel well. Indeed, the very notion of ‘public opinion’ is a Western invention based around an informed, literate and globalised citizenship presumed to be an essential democratic attribute. In newly industrialised societies, democratic values are recent transplants and literacy levels while rising are still incomplete. Importantly, individuals in such Asian societies often tend to identify more strongly with their local identity and political context than with the State let alone the external world. From the Berlaymont Building on Rue de Loi in Brussels the EU may appear a Colossus striding the world: in Hanoi, Bangkok or Shanghai public opinion might be more concerned with events closer to home. Consequently, participants were asked to give an indication of how often they accessed international news and their preferred media. Before examining these findings a methodological note is necessary: the relatively small sample size (total $n = 3,605$) means that the survey results need to be interpreted only as indicative of general trends and certainly no direct causality between media effects and public opinion are being drawn.

Bearing in mind that respondents in six out of nine countries participated in the survey online (with Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines as an exception) and therefore would have an unimpaired technological access to foreign news, the results were quite surprising. In none of these six countries did half of the respondents access international news on a daily basis; when “daily” and “several times a week” were combined into a composite score then at least over 70% of surveyed mainland Chinese, South Koreans, Thais and those from Hong Kong achieved a reasonably regular level of awareness of

¹⁴ The surveys ($n = 400$) used stratified online panels in China, Japan, SAR Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand; telephone interviews in the Philippines and Vietnam; and face-to-face interviews were conducted in Indonesia) conducted in November 2006 and November 2008. See the Introduction for further details.

¹⁵ Almond, Gabriel Abraham and Sidney Verba, *The Civic Culture*, Boston: Little Brown, 1965.

Table 7: Regularity of accessing foreign news (% of respondents)

	Daily	Several Days a Week	Combined ("regular")	Once a Week	Rarely/ Never
China	46	38	84	9	8
Hong Kong	43	29	72	14	14
Japan	31	36	67	11	22
Singapore	46	22	68	12	20
S. Korea	33	40	73	13	13
Thailand	45	31	76	9	15

Table 8: Preferred media for accessing foreign news (% of respondents)

	TV News	Newspapers	Internet	TV Programmes	Radio
2006					
China	98	97	82	40	31
Hong Kong	99	98	49	31	29
Japan	95	78	48	28	7
Singapore	98	98	59	27	24
S. Korea	98	92	55	35	18
Thailand	95	93	69	20	9
2008					
Indonesia	53	39	13	32	8
Philippines	62	35	30	26	19
Vietnam	90	62	22	26	4

foreign news. Conversely, 22% of our Japanese sample and 20% of those from Singapore admitted to virtually never accessing foreign news!

The preferred news medium for accessing international news at least confirmed the methodological assumptions underpinning this research: namely that television news and newspapers remain the primary sources for individuals to learn about foreign affairs. A minimum of 95% of respondents across the surveys conducted in 2006 listed prime-time television news, with the exception of Japan where the figure fell to 78%. The data do reveal two unexpected findings: first, the continuing relative importance of radio for foreign news delivery (used by around one-in-four respondents in China, Hong Kong and Singapore); second,

the growing use of the internet. These figures, however, may well over-represent this phenomenon given that the survey in six locations was itself conducted online through the internet and may therefore have biased the sample on this specific variable. Importantly, the three survey results from 2008, differed markedly from those of 2006. In both Indonesia and Philippines, the usage of TV news and press to access foreign news was low compared with other locations; whereas in Vietnam, TV news was much more popular as a source of foreign news than newspapers. Nor did radio seem to be a preferred media for foreign news for Indonesians and Vietnamese. The reliance on internet was significantly lower in the three Southeast Asian countries.

Turning to the perceptions of the EU held by the sample, an estimation of the actual importance of the EU to each country was investigated. As noted above, the EU is among the top three economic partners for seven of our selected areas, the fourth most important to Indonesia and the Philippines. Table 9 provides the summation of perceptions of the EU's comparative bilateral importance. Remarkably, only respondents in China had an accurate perception of the importance of the EU to their own country, with the Japanese, Singaporeans and

Table 9: Perceptions of the most important foreign partners: now and in the future

	Current Perception	EU Rank	In Future	EU Rank
	1st Place		1st Place	
2006				
China	USA	2nd	EU	1st
Hong Kong	China	4th	China	4th
Japan	USA	6th	China	4th
Singapore	China	6th	China	4th
S. Korea	USA	4th	China	4th
Thailand	China	5th	China	4th
2008				
Indonesia	USA	7th	USA	5th
Philippines	USA	5th	USA	2nd
Vietnam	China	4th	China	5th

Indonesians undervaluing the role of the EU the most dramatically (the first two placed the EU as only the sixth most important partner, while Indonesians placed the EU as the seventh). A possible explanation here is the comparatively high profile of the EU on *CCTVI* influencing perceptions (as well as China’s official pro-EU policy). When current and future primary partners were investigated, Indonesia and the Philippines were the exceptional cases: for Jakarta and Manila, the importance of the USA remained constant (ranked first now and in the future); in contrast, while mainland Chinese respondents also considered the USA China’s most important current partner, America was replaced by the EU in the future scenario. For all other locations in the survey, the growing importance of China was clearly visible in the respondent’s perception and expectations.

Putting the accuracy of the respondent’s ranking of the EU to one side, when asked what were the most important issues to be kept in mind in bilateral official relations with the EU there was clear priority given to economic issues in the majority of areas with over 70% of Thai respondents, around 60% of respondents in South Korea, Indonesia and Vietnam identifying this as the priority with over one-third ranking trade similarly highly in China, Hong Kong, Singapore and the Philippines (Figure 1). Once again, the odd-man-out was

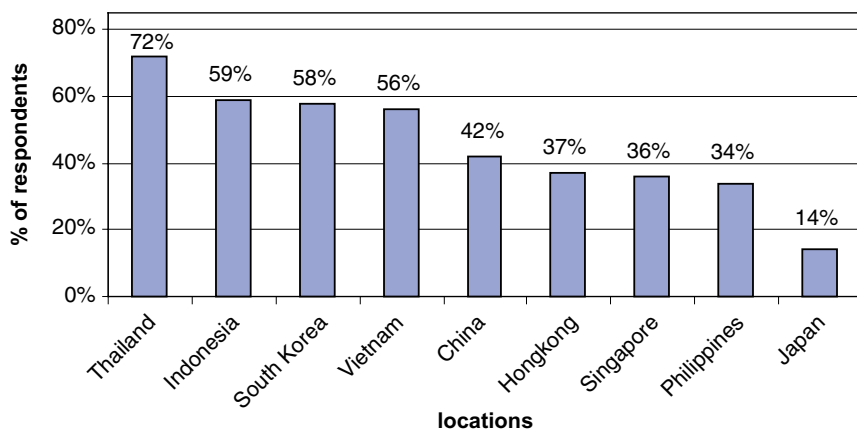


Figure 1: Most important issues to be kept in mind when developing policy with the EU — economic issues

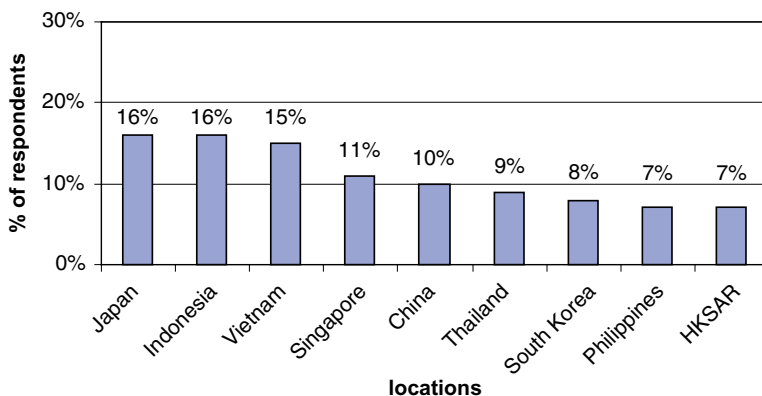


Figure 2: Most important issues to be kept in mind when developing policy with the EU — political issues

Japan with just one-in-seven regarding trade as Japan’s priority with the EU.

This exceptionalism, or at least the inverse finding, is further underlined in Figure 2: the Japanese respondents demonstrated comparatively more interest in political issues. In contrast, for all other locations, the EU relationship was clearly apolitical. Furthermore, culture and religious issues concerned many of the Japanese respondents, with more than 10% of respondents (the same in Singapore) mentioning ‘culture/religion’, while respondents elsewhere paid little or no attention to such issues when thinking about their country’s relations with the EU. Interestingly, one in every four Japanese respondents brought up Japan-US relationship when talking about Japan-EU relations, often noting that Japan should be mindful when dealing with the EU so as to prevent any damage to the Japan-US relationship, for example.

Views on the EU as a developmental aid donor only appeared in the 2008 surveys. For these three developing Southeast Asia countries, the EU’s development assistance did receive recognition from 10% of respondents. Issues that are given priority by the EU such as environmental protection and human rights promotion, received scant attention, registering score of only 3% and 4% respectively across the nine regions. Although skewed by a small response rate, human

rights was the second most significant area in the mind of the Filipino when dealing with the EU (with 12% of respondents emphasized such importance).

Irrespective of this perceptions and reality mismatch, an average of 87% of all survey respondents thought that their country's relationship with the EU was positive (either "improving" or "steady"). Within this overall similarity there were some antagonistic trends displayed: in Japan (again) just 11% and in Hong Kong 14% described the relationship with the EU as "improving". In Vietnam, 77% of respondents chose "improving" while 15% said "steady". In the three of the Southeast Asian countries, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand, 14%, 8% and 7% respectively stated that bilateral ties were worsening reflecting the agricultural trade and aviation embargoes imposed by the EU. This negative view was less than 2% on average in the other six locations.

The measure of public perceptions that produced arguably the most interesting and distinctive comparative findings related to the mental images respondents had to the notion or concept "the European Union". In sum, four clear themes emerged (three positive towards the EU, one negative) when respondents were asked "When thinking about the European Union, what three images spring to mind..." As shown in Table 10, the common currency, the euro, has clearly stamped its identity on Asian citizens as the leading symbol representing the EU (only in the Philippines' case was it is not among the first four most frequently mentioned images). It is, in a sense, the "face" of a single Europe. While no doubt the architects of Economic and Monetary Union will rejoice in this now wide-spread recognition of the euro, as an accurate image of the EU27 it is both confusing as well as indicative of a powerful cognitive impact. At the time of the survey in 2006, the euro-zone consisted of just twelve of the then twenty-five Member States (although the Maastricht Treaty does make future participation obligatory for all members other than those with a 1992 negotiated "opt-out" clause). Thus the symbol of the collective EU27 in reality only represented around half of the Member States. The power of this image, though, was significant and it was the most commonly cited 'EU image' in China, Hong Kong

Table 10: Spontaneous images of the EU

	1st	2nd	3rd	4th
China	Euro	Enlargement/internal	Union/integration	Trade
Hong Kong	Euro	Trade	Union/integration	Individual countries
Japan	Euro	Union/Integration	Individual countries	Disparities/unfairness
Singapore	Union/integration	Euro	Economic power	Individual countries
S. Korea	Union/integration	Euro	Individual countries	Exceptionalism/problems
Thailand	Individual countries	Economic power	Trade	Euro
Indonesia	Monetary/Economic Union	Trade/Business	Euro	Democracy, good governance, rule of law
Philippines	Union/integration	Monetary Union	Development Aid donor	Employment
Vietnam	Union/integration	Monetary/Economic Union	Euro	Democracy, good governance, rule of law

and Japan, and the second most in South Korea and Singapore: only in Thailand was mention of the euro comparatively rare. The euro has undoubtedly helped to raise the profile of the EU and shape a benign international perception.

The second theme to emerge was also economic in nature: the role of the EU as a commercial power. This perspective was most evident in Thailand where “economic power” and “trade” were frequently used images, and even more so in Indonesia where “monetary/economic union” and “trade/business” were the first and the second most recognized images. However, it is interesting to note the weaker association with Europe’s economic prowess compared with the dominance of the euro image and to underline that the old image of “Fortress Europe” was rarely in evidence.

A third image that emerged suggested a positive political perspective. Other than in Thailand and Indonesia, the values and virtues of the process of European integration — be that preventing war, creating multiculturalism or enhanced prosperity — were among the top three most cited EU images (and in the Philippines, Vietnam, Singapore and Korea this was the dominant image articulated). It is both insightful as well as sobering to reflect on this Asian perception of the contribution made by the integration process especially if one were to contrast this with the more stereo-type *Eurobarometre* Member State findings that too often emphasise the negative impact of the EU rather than extol its original ambitions and successes. It would appear that the EU looks much more successful and worthwhile from afar than it does from within. In addition in the 2008 data the EU’s image as a “promoter of democracy, good governance, and the rule of law” or as a “development aid donor” surfaced. The EU’s ‘developmental face’ was restricted to these three Southeast Asia countries, however.

The final theme draws us back to the split personality of the EU and the enduring impact of the nation state. In five locations (Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Singapore, South Korea and Thailand), respondents also conceptualised the image of the EU through individual countries with this mediating lens most pronounced in Thailand. If we combine Thailand’s three other economic-based images to this

perspective, it would appear that Bangkok has the more pragmatic view of the EU and the least idealistic one

Looking at all nine locations, however, perhaps, this combination of an awareness of “common” EU images as well as recognition of Europe as a conglomerate of individual countries is a realistic and balanced assessment of the current nature of European integration. Encouragingly, however, the positive common themes were more pronounced than those images that emphasised European diversity over unity.

The Elites

Generalisations are harder to delineate from the eight¹⁶ different stakeholder studies partly because the information was collected through face-to-face interviews that lent themselves to discursive comments and a wider utilisation of open-ended responses in contrast to the more structured online public opinion surveys. In addition, the size (a total of 236 interviews) and the selected nature of the sample only permits broad conclusions to be suggested given the local diversity of the political/government, media, business and civil society elites questioned.¹⁷ The findings from the public opinion surveys as well as the focus on economic and political issues in the media would suggest that it is these issues — rather than social or environmental concerns — that would dominate across all of the selected Asian elite representatives. To what extent was this the case?

Distinguishing between the EU as an international economic presence and its global political role produced some clear patterns

¹⁶ At the time of writing, the data of Indonesian elite interviews was not available.

¹⁷ Thirty-two interviews across the four elite sectors were conducted in each of three locations (Japan, Singapore and the mainland China); thirty-three interviews conducted in Vietnam; thirty-one interviews were done in both Hong Kong SAR and the Philippines; twenty-seven were completed in S. Korea but only eighteen in Thailand. The Thai figure was a consequence of the political turmoil created by the military coup during which period the interviews were to be conducted. Cumulatively, sixty-two political elite interviews were conducted, sixty-one media interviews while fifty-eight civil society and fifty-five business sector interviews were completed.

across our selected elites. In terms of Europe's trade and economic relations, an Asian elite consensus was clear. Significant majorities of the Singaporean, South Korean, Japanese, Vietnamese, mainland Chinese and Hong Kong elite samples referred to the EU as a great economic power. In terms of bilateral priorities China's business, civil, media and political elite were adamant that economic relations overshadowed all else: the topics cited were familiar — the ongoing arms ban, anti-dumping and the value of the Yuan. On average, over 70% of interviewees agreed with the view that the EU constituted an economic "great power".

In contrast to this common view, Asian stakeholder perspectives of Europe's international relations were more nuanced. In Hong Kong, the new political authority of the EU was embraced by under one-quarter of those sampled, while in Singapore it was only the interviewed political elite who were sympathetic to this emerging international EU role. The data on Japan gives the most sophisticated interpretation: three-quarters of their elite affirmed that the EU played an international leadership role while distinguishing between the EU as a strong normative power with some diplomatic influence, yet with constrained military capacity. The emphasis of the EU's normative power was uniquely found in Japan, with sixteen out of the thirty-two elites articulating this. This may be explained by the fact that Japan also sees itself as a normative actor, so places special emphasis on such aspects.

In general, however, when the issue of military capability and effective involvement in international relations was raised, the EU compared poorly, especially when matched against the USA. For the Hong Kong elite, "EU economic power is strongly endorsed while its political and military powers are questioned"; Singapore's elite insisted that the EU "lacks political power" and "is too diverse to be a military power" with the EU seen at best as a "broker" rather than a leader; for Koreans, the EU "is a great power in terms of economy, diplomacy, and norms but that is not the case in political and military terms"; and in China the EU was perceived "to be a significant source of power and influence, but not necessarily as a leader in the global political arena. In this regard, the EU might be considered just one

great power among many in the multi-polar world”.¹⁸ According to one Filipino, the EU “is mainly an economic power, sometimes normative, whereas in political field, it lacks unity and the US is still up there”; while for a Vietnamese interviewee the EU “has an important voice un the world politics, but not yet a leader, one reason is its internal divergence”.¹⁹

Following on from the consensus on the EU’s economic profile within Asia, the elite findings on the EU’s regional importance were all broadly similar and presented an overall perspective that saw the EU as one of many players impacting on their society (China, Russia, Japan and the USA were also mentioned), with South Korea evaluating the relationship with the EU the lowest comparatively (3.3 at present and 3.8 in future on a five-point scale). In assessments of the long-term relevance of the EU, encouragingly, the rating of the future importance is higher than of the present in all targeted locations. However, the degree of ‘improvement’ varied. In Hong Kong and Japan, the elites saw the EU modestly growing in importance (from 3.6 to 3.8 in the former and from 4.0 to 4.2 in the later) with the EU’s future role most highly ranked by government and civil society in Hong Kong and by civil society elites in Japan. However, the perceived economic dominance in the EU relationship was also criticised by Hong Kong elites who wanted greater cooperation and exchanges in areas beside economics. Although the EU looks destined to remain an important player in Japan’s vision of their future interests, there was a paradoxical elite belief that while the major future issues related to economic and environmental concerns, these concerns were generally couched within mutually ambivalent disinterest.

Conversely, Singapore’s elite were primarily focused around prospects for an EU free trade agreement (FTA). As a result, the significance of the EU rose from 3.5 to 3.9. Vietnam shared the

¹⁸ Quotations taken from the individual country chapters in the previous volume of this publication: Holland, Martin, Peter Ryan, Alojzy Nowak and Natalia Chaban (eds.), *The EU through the Eyes of Asia*. Singapore/Warsaw: ASEF/University of Warsaw, 2007.

¹⁹ Quotations extracted from the 2008 data.

same figures with Singapore. Interestingly, while China's elites were less 'starry-eyed' about the future importance of the EU to China than the public survey, the EU was clearly identified as an important long-term relationship. Further, all Chinese elite sectors saw this importance increasing in the future to very high levels not found in any other elite survey (ranging between 4.2 and 4.6 on a five-point scale). The position of South Korean elites was towards the extreme end of the multi-polar perspective and reflected the peninsula's geo-strategic context, very low level of past engagement balanced against the on-going EU FTA discussions. The EU's potential as a mediator with North Korea was cited as a unique aspect of the importance of Europe among South Korea's elite. Like their counterparts, Korean elites also saw the EU relationship moderately strengthening in the future (from 3.3 to 3.8). The Thai figures were slightly higher than that of Korea, 3.4 at present and 3.9 in the future. The highest increase was found in the Philippines (3.5 to 4.1).

Turning from the level of generality to specificity, a common element across the elite interviews concerned Europe's public diplomacy and communication strategies. In a majority of locations, the role of the European Commission Delegation Office was assessed as widely unknown outside trade circles, a theme also found in other studies of the EU's external representation in the region.²⁰ Asian elites remain fixated on national European embassies or Chambers of Commerce as the better points of contact. The commentary on Japan best describe the general analysis within the region: no Japanese elites "could envision, or indeed currently had, beneficial contact with the EU body. The business elites were even less constructive in their responses, as many of them had never heard of the Delegation, and those that had could see little scope for constructive interaction between their organisations and the Delegation".²¹

²⁰ Chaban, Natalia, Serena Kelly, Jessica Bain, 'European Commission Delegations and EU Public Policy: Stakeholders' Perceptions from the Asia-Pacific', *European Foreign Affairs Review*, Vol. 14, No. 2, 2009, pp. 271–288.

²¹ See Chapter 6 in this volume for a fuller discussion of this perspective.

The elites were also asked to comment on two specific EU topics: the Euro and the impact of EU enlargement. The Euro was generally viewed as a significant international currency, although a large proportion still regarded the US\$ as the stronger and preferred international currency. This was especially the case in Hong Kong (48% of respondents agreed) as its currency, Hong Kong dollar, is pegged to the US dollar, and to a lesser degree in mainland China, South Korea and Singapore (39%, 36% and 29% respectively). While there was some diversity across the elite sectors in China, the overall view was again supportive of the euro's international role and prospects. Surprisingly, in the Philippines, a traditional ally of the US, all except two respondents viewed the euro more positively when comparing it with the US dollar. According to them, the euro was not only of higher value, it was more stable than the US dollar as the economy in the EU was healthy and huge. The Vietnamese case was the most extreme: while 42% of the respondents viewed the US dollar as the most popular and universal international currency in the world, 38% disagreed and argued that the euro was stronger and more stable than the dollar and hence better.

Remarkably, Chinese (both the mainland and Hong Kong) and Thai elites were virtual unanimous in their belief that EU enlargement did not present any significant risks to their economies, even if the consequences of Eastern enlargement were seen very much as a two-edged sword both in political and economic terms. Elites in Japan, South Korea, Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam were perhaps more realistic in perceiving competitiveness risks as well as potential economic openings through enlargement. Interestingly, some elites from the Philippines and Vietnam mentioned concern over potentially losing developmental aid from the EU — an issue that was not found elsewhere. Given the major economic impact that both these issues potentially have — reforming the current international currency status quo and enhancing the EU's position as the leading global trader — the phlegmatic approach of Asia's elite was surprising. It will be interesting to revisit these perceptions after a decade when some of the longer-term ramifications may have become more apparent.

To conclude this comparative overview of elite perceptions, the elites were asked the same question as that given in the public survey: what images come to mind when you think of the EU? The Chinese and Hong Kong elites paralleled to a degree their public's perceptions by listing the euro and the example of positive integration as key mental reference points. In addition, there were also strong images related to the EU's economic prowess across all countries. In all locations except Thailand, the image of 'unity, integration or grouping up different countries' was another common answer. Moreover, Korea conformed to the dominance of the euro, while those in Singapore, the Philippines and Vietnam departed from this otherwise pervasive image of the euro found elsewhere (as well as differed from Singaporean and Vietnamese public opinions in this respect). Another similarity among these three ASEAN countries was the emphasis on the EU's cultural richness. Uniquely in Hong Kong, the EU flag was also mentioned (adding an interesting addendum to the controversial axing of this symbol from the revised Lisbon Reform Treaty).

The profile of elite opinion is in parts compatible with the public opinion findings, and in parts distinct. Broadly, the elites appear less enamoured with the EU's political persona and more focused on economic realities. As such their opinions are to some extent inconsistent with the news media projection of the EU as a balanced political and economic power. But as acknowledged earlier in this chapter, the qualitative nature of these elite perceptions while rich, are not quantitatively significant and should be treated as highlighted themes rather than empirical proofs. Taken in conjunction with the media and public opinion evidence, cumulatively the comparative analyses presented here paint a compelling portrait of how Asia perceives and interprets the European Union in economic and political terms. While these are the dominant frames in all nine studies, the broader analysis has also indicated that the EU is increasing being viewed as a more diverse and multi-faceted actor and it is this wider theme that the following chapter address in its analysis of Europe's image as a social, environmental and developmental actor.