

Asia in Europe, Europe in Asia

Report >
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It has been more than 50 years since the processes of decolonization changed the landscape in Asia and its relations with its former European colonizers. Global movements of capital, knowledge and people have shown us that social spaces and cultures cannot alongside to each other as areas marked off with boundaries, but have to be viewed as articulated moments in a network of relations and understandings. At the beginning of the new millennium, it is important to reassess the academic, social, and cultural relations, which bring Europe and Asia together, both from a contemporary and historical perspective.

By Srilata Ravi and Mario Rutten

For a long time, the colonial relations between Europe and Asia have been the main focus of academic discussions. More recently, debates have centred on contemporary aspects of the Europe-Asia partnership in terms of international relations and economic linkages. To complement this political and economic interest in the Europe-Asia relationship a workshop on "Asia in Europe, Europe in Asia" was held in Singapore on 7 and 8 December 2001. It focused on the academic, social, and cultural linkages between the two regions and its associated scholarship in the field of history and social sciences.

The various aspects of the academic relationship between Asia and Europe formed a central theme of discussion. Following Satish Saberwal's (Jawaharlal Nehru University, Delhi) overview of what Asians have done with things European in terms of technology, institutional forms, modes of knowing, and the level of values, the discussion focussed on Southeast Asia as a field of study and its implicit Eurocentrism. Henk Schulte Nordholt (University of Amsterdam, UvA) emphasized that in many respects Southeast Asia is a region by default, while Southeast Asian Studies has been framed by a post-colonial predicament. He argues that foreign institutions and scholars have to a large extent determined the research agenda of Southeast Asian

Studies, a situation that would have been unthinkable in the South Asian context. In line with this argument, Syed Farid Alatas (National University of Singapore, NUS) explored the possibilities of a reversal of this academic dependency. He believes one practice that would auger well for the emergence of alternative discourses is to lessen reliance on European or American standards that may not be appropriate and, at the same time, work towards the upgrading of local publication capabilities. He emphasized, however, that such a development of local

publications can only work if evaluators and promotion or tenure committees give as much credit to locally published works as to international publications.

A second important theme in the Asia-Europe relationship that came up for discussion was the actual interaction between the two regions in the domains of science. In this connection, historical case studies were presented on archaeology in Thailand, health in India, and seismology in Japan. In the case of seismology, Gregory Clancey (NUS) showed how the act of framing an "earthquake problem" in Meiji Japan

was conducted by Westerners, who had in fact been hired to teach and research other science topics in Japanese academic institutions. At a time when the Japanese government invested in a model of planned science and technology transfer from the West to Japan, a branch of "Western learning" could develop spontaneously in Japan and eventually be exported abroad as a Japanese specialty. In this way, the peculiar trajectory of seismology is an interesting addition to the debate on Asia-Europe interaction in the field of science and technology.

A third theme in the Asia-Europe relationship is the contemporary social and cultural relations between the two regions. One of the ways in which these relations can be studied is through research on migrants of Asian origin in Europe. Case studies on the social linkages between Gujarati migrants in London and their relatives in India, and on the social position of Vietnamese immigrants in France, for example, showed how differences within the migrant community in Asia influence social relations in Europe, and vice versa. Such a complex pattern of socio-cultural interaction between Asia and Europe was also shown in research that dealt with Western cultural productions in the Vietnamese context: the representations of the Vietnam War in Western media and the construction and reassessment of mixed-race (Franco-Vietnamese) consciousness in European literature.

In terms of the influence of popular culture between Asia and Europe, Chua Beng Huat (NUS) emphasized the absence of Europe in the Asian popular sphere today. He pointed out the dominating American influence in Southeast Asia in the field of film, music, and food, which has resulted in

an almost total erasure of European elements in popular cultural productions in the region. At the same time, Hindi films from India, Chinese pop music, and television series from Japan have become increasingly popular among large sections of the population of Southeast Asia. Interestingly, the popularity of these cultural consumer products from Asia is not so much related to their cultural proximity. One of the most important developments in the context of globalization today is the fact that one loses sight of the origins in the context of globalized consumer cultural products. In that way, capitalism has truly become a cultural phenomenon, free from its national or regional roots.

The organizers propose to bring out an edited volume of a selection of the papers presented. The workshop was a follow-up of an earlier meeting in Amsterdam between scholars from the NUS and the IIAS and University of Amsterdam in December 2000. It is hoped that the collaboration between the two institutions will be continued in the years to come. Plans are being made to organize another such workshop in Amsterdam in December 2002. <

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Asia in Europe: Indian migrants from Gujarat in front of their community building in London.

Mario Rutten

New Global Networking in the Automobile Industry

Since Ford originated the mass-production system in the early 20th century, the automobile industry has been the spearhead of many of the organizational and production models that have led to a transformation of competitive practices. Globalization of the Japanese automobile industry started in the early 1980s and spread more rapidly after the Plaza Agreement of 1985 and the appreciation of the Yen. Japanese cars, more than ever before, are increasingly produced outside of Japan, and Japanese brands dominate Southeast Asian markets. It is widely believed that, during the 1980s and the 1990s, Japanese automobile manufacturers had a comparative advantage to their competitors because of their systems of production and labour organization.

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By Yuri Sadoi

The aim of the international conference, "New Global Networking in the Automobile Industry- The Effect of Technology Transfer in the Case of Japanese Transplants in Southeast Asia and Europe", held at the National Museum of Ethnology in Leiden, was to explore the relationship between Japanese global production networks in the automobile industry and its consequences for technology transfer. The Japanese overseas production networks in the automobile industry were explored, as well as their consequences for host countries' policy making, industrial organization, skill formation, and technology transfer in Southeast Asia and in Europe. The two-day conference addressed two themes: on the first day, the focus was on Japanese industrial organization and technology transfer, while the programme on the second day was concerned with the changing relationship between work organization, skill formation, and technology transfer.

An opening statement by Dr C. Touwen-Bouwsma, Chairman of IIAS Academic Committee, was followed by the keynote speech "Industrial Organization, Culture, and Technology Transfer" by Professor J.A. Stam, Erasmus University Rotterdam, on the first day. This day was devoted to host countries' policy issues on economic and technology devel-

opment in order to put Japanese industrial organization at overseas locations into perspective. The direct and indirect implications of the Japanese automobile overseas production's industry policy on technology transfer were examined. Automobile policies of specific countries (Thailand, Malaysia, the Philippines, and Indonesia) and regions (ASEAN, EU) were discussed. Current issues with regard to the effects of the Asian financial crisis, the recovery process, and how the prospective of Asian Free Trade Agreements will affect the automobile industry in the region were also discussed.

The keynote speech on the second day, entitled "Intellectual Skill and its Transferability", was delivered by Professor Kazuo Koike, Tokai Gakuen University, Japan. His speech was followed by discussions aimed at examining the transferability of the Japanese human resource development system to the Japanese dominated Southeast Asian automobile industry and comparing these systems to those in the European automobile industry, in which Japanese presence is very limited. The role of the Japanese automotive producers in introducing the Japanese employment system and their influence on training pattern and skill upgrading were also discussed in detail. Presentations of intensive field studies on skill formation in countries such as Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, and France raised important issues concerning work organization, labour training, and incentives for enterprises and individuals.

In total, sixty scholars and researchers - most of whom were social scientists with a particular interest in the automotive industry - as well as company representatives attended the conference (including the speakers), with between forty to fifty people present each day. Speakers were invited from Japan (four), Southeast Asia (five: Thailand, Philippines, Malaysia, and Indonesia), and from Europe (six). Thirteen papers in total were presented. Through bringing together scholars from these different academic and international backgrounds, the discussions during the conference shed new light on the study of the globalization of the Japanese automobile industry and its consequences regarding technology transfer for the host countries of Japanese foreign investment in the automobile industry.

The overall quality of the papers was outstanding and much commented upon both during and after presentations. As all the participants received the proceedings of the papers in advance, insightful discussions and comments were actively raised throughout the conference. A selected number of papers presented at the workshop will be published as a research monograph. <

This conference was sponsored by the Japan Foundation, NWO, Luf, CNWS, and the IIAS.

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