



CEJISS

Central European Journal of
International & Security Studies

The Chimera of Europe's Normative Power in East Asia: A Constructivist Analysis

Salvador Santino F. Regilme, Jr.

Volume 5 • Issue 1 • March 2011

© 2011 CEJISS. All rights reserved.

This copy is intended only for electronic distribution.

Stable URL:

All contents are copyrighted. The distribution of this material is free but limited to non-commercial personal use only. For more information about this article and/or for extended copyright, please contact info@cejiss.org.

Full CEJISS archive is free and always available at cejiss.org

THE CHIMERA OF EUROPE'S NORMATIVE POWER IN EAST ASIA: A CONSTRUCTIVIST ANALYSIS

Salvador Santino F. Regilme, Jr.

UTILISING CONSTRUCTIVISM, this work analyses contemporary relational complexities between East Asia and the European Union (EU). Mindful of the social constructivist themes of identity and interests, it is argued that there are fundamental difficulties found in these interregional relations, which must be urgently addressed. The EU continues to be undervalued and misunderstood in the eyes of East Asian publics; despite the relatively strong economic and political engagement of the Union. With the growing influence of China, the EU must reinforce its political capital amidst the failures of the Union to reconcile its policy inconsistencies juxtaposed with its self-perception as a “normative power.” This becomes more evident in the EU’s recent engagements with ASEAN as the former has been seen as undetermined in promoting human rights and democratic norms in the region. Nonetheless, EU-ASEAN relations may still be construed as a promising case for the EU to export its model of multi-level governance, and enhance its ‘actorness’ and institutional legitimacy. Finally, in order for interregional relations to be reinvigorated, the two regions must identify and pursue their mutually-shared interests such as economic development, democratic proliferation, and human rights provisions.

I. INTRODUCTION

Amidst mainstream discourse in global politics which emphasise the purported shift of the balance of power from the Atlantic to the Pacific, there appears to be a dearth of scholarly interest and public discussion over the critical relevance of interregional relations between Europe and East Asia. On the one side of the Atlantic is where the world’s most successful experiment of regional integration is located as it is in the case of the European Union – characterised as a ‘supranational polity pursuing a project of post-national democracy.’¹ Replication of the EU project appears to be elusive in Pacific East Asia despite the Association of South East Asian Nations’ (ASEANs’) reputation as the ‘world’s most successful third-world regional institution;’² regional unity is still regarded as ‘decades away.’³ Notwithstanding the notable contrast in perception between

ASEAN (and its prospects) and the EU model of supranationalism, there appears a wealth of learning and experience on regional integration and cooperation in which Southeast Asian states may cull profound lessons from the EU. The examination of this possible juncture of learning may indeed be gleaned from the interregional cooperation between these two critically-relevant regions in international relations. More importantly, such an investigation necessitates a theoretically informed, yet empirically grounded analysis of the current interregional dynamics between East Asia and Europe.

*Salvador
Santino F.
Regilme, Jr.*

2. REVIVING CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORISING

Scholarly inquiries into the interregional relationship between Europe and Asia merit not only haphazard, more materialist analyses, necessitates the deployment of theoretical analytical lenses that would unlock both the ideational and materialist interregional complexities. In this regard, a reconsideration of constructivism as an adequate international relations tool which may appropriately present and analyse these complexities. Prior to engaging with the analysis of this interregional relationship, this work first provides a brief overview and justification of the usage of constructivism to set the tone for subsequent sections of this research.

By historicising on the “great debates” in international relations theory, it is clear that the end of the Cold War (1990/1) provoked a fierce, double-edged IR debate, particularly between so-called rationalists and constructivists, and critical theorists and constructivists.⁴ On both streams of the debate, it has been remarked, since the last ten years, that the framing of the discussion was that these “isms” focused on actual international relations rather than contrasting epistemological approaches to the field.⁵ In view of the continued popularisation of the constructivist approach as a valuable analytical tool in examining problems in international politics, it is indeed insightful to deploy some of the methodological strengths of this approach in scrutinising the newly-emerging research area of EU-ASEAN/East Asian⁶ interregionalism.

Constructivism is typified by its resolute accentuation on the relevance of ‘normative as well as material structures, on the role of identity in shaping political action and on the mutually constitutive relationship between agents and structures.’⁷ Hence, the social identity of global political actors are not solely determined by materialist considerations; an argument strongly advanced by neo-realists who also emphasise that state survival is contingent on the maximisation of military power. In contrast, while constructivists recognise the centrality of materialism in in-

ternational relations, they suppose that ‘material resources only acquire meaning for human action through the structure of shared knowledge in which they are embedded.’⁸ Thus, within the constructivist paradigm, both ideational and normative structures – including institutionalised norms and ideas – shape global political actors’ interests and consequently their identities. Moreover, critically evaluating the neo-realist fixation on material-based structures, constructivists also emphasise the significance of the order of ‘shared ideas, beliefs and values’ that have structural characteristics and that may have a formidable influence on ‘social and political action.’⁹

Additionally, constructivism also explores questions of identity and interests where, by understanding how ideational structures are indeed essential, one may discover that the actors’ formation of identity actually has direct ramifications on shaping interests, and in turn, actions.¹⁰ Hence, normative and ideational structures are deemed to shape actors’ identities and interests through three modes of action: *imagination*, *communication* and *constraints*.¹¹ Through *imagination* actors recognise a gamut of necessities and possibilities through which they can act upon, based on the ideational structures, and with both practical and moral considerations. Also, via *communication*, these structures may influence actors’ actions through, perhaps, the invocation of norms of legitimate conduct. Finally, *constraints* – when influence falls short of its intentions – may be instructive in the performative actions of political actors.

Over the past two decades constructivism has clearly gained ground in rectifying the centrality of ‘methodological individualism and materialism’ that had previously dominated much international relations scholarship.¹² Since this work aims to thoroughly examine EU-ASEAN interregionalism through the deployment of international relations theory, it is essential to note that both constructivism and attempts at contextualising interregionalisms are by-products of the international conditions produced in the post-Cold War era. In terms of the growing use of constructivism, a variety of scholarly research, particularly conducted on European issues has been undertaken based on this paradigm. For instance, the roles of ideas and beliefs in EU integration processes;¹³ post-Cold War “security constructions” in Europe (by examining how weak states are “empowered” without undermining sovereignty);¹⁴ Iceland’s relationship to the EU;¹⁵ the role of “subsidiary” as a norm in the competence regime of the EU;¹⁶ are among the research priorities of the modern wave of constructivism. Notably, most of these constructivist analyses are intra-European, or at least introspective. Similarly, as EU interregionalism is also relatively new, it may indeed be illuminating to use the constructivist method as an analytical tool that can give light to interregionalism as a

foreign policy instrument of the EU – a topic of study that situates the EU as an active actor beyond its frontiers.

3. THE GENESIS OF EURO-ASIAN RELATIONS

Identity and *interests* – both of which are core concepts of constructivism – are embedded in *historicity*, examining first the historical genesis of the two regions' relations to each other is the first critical step in this analysis. Beyond the long colonial histories experienced by several parts of East Asia (especially in south east Asia), the relationship between the European Community (EC) and ASEAN is considered to be a model of group-to-group interregionalism.¹⁷ In this case, interregionalism refers to the 'interaction of one region with another' and is often portrayed as a 'double regional project' responding to the need to pool an ever greater percentage of resources in recognition of other interregional or the global dynamics.¹⁸ Although Gilson's notion of the importation of regional structures to other regions (EU to East Asia) is usually not (explicitly) intended,¹⁹ these two regions' relations focused on information exchanges and collaboration in specific policy areas; often trade and investment as well as taking into account the EU's emphasis on the promotion of normative values such as human rights and democracy.²⁰ Indeed according to the European Economic and Trade Office the official policy of the Union is 'to expand and deepen relations with other countries and regions' and to conduct regional dialogue that covers 'investment, economic cooperation, finance, energy, science and technology and environmental protection, as well as political matters such as the global war on terror, international crime and drug trafficking, and human rights.'²¹

Taking to account that the task of capturing EU-Asian relations as monolithically simple is absurd,²² the European Commission divides its relations with Asia into South Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, Central Asia, Australasia and several bilateral (EU-to-state, or state-to-state) relationships. With this in mind, this work is geographically limited to the south eastern and the north eastern regions to better explore a certain brand of EU-Asian relations. By considering the concrete cases of EU-ASEAN Dialogue and the more inclusive Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the EU apparently singles out East Asia (both Southeast and Northeast Asia). Based on the European Commission's Regional Programming for Asia Strategy Document for 2007-2013,²³ the priority for strategic cooperation between the EU and Asia is foundationally based on support for regional integration initiatives primarily facilitated by the ASEAN and the ASEM member countries. Moreover, the Singapore-based Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which is a pivotal organisation supported by the

*Europe's
Normative
Power*

EU and ASEAN, organises most of its cultural, intellectual and political exchanges involving East Asian and EU member countries.

Historicising on the origins of ASEM, the European Commission (July 1994) published a policy document entitled: 'Towards a New Strategy for Asia,' emphasising the urgency of modernising the EU's relationship to East Asia, which has recently gained political, economic and cultural significance.²⁴ In November 1994, Singapore and France proposed that an EU-Asia summit meeting be held, in which the agenda of reviving a new partnership strategy between the two regions would be discussed. Consequently, the first ASEM Summit was held in Bangkok, Thailand in March 1996, marking the inauguration of the ASEM Summit.

Since ASEM is more representative of the main political actors in East Asia, it is worthwhile to characterise the main features of such collaborative instrument between these two regions.²⁵ Firstly, since it is considered informal, ASEM is an open forum for policy-makers and state officials to deliberate on any number of political, economic and social issues of common interest and to complement efforts conducted bilaterally or multilaterally. Secondly, multi-dimensionality refers to the intentionality of the ASEM to comprise the full spectrum of relations and to dedicate political, economic and cultural dimensions of equal importance. Thirdly, espousing the virtues of equal partnership, ASEM discards an "aid-based" relationship and claims to embrace on 'mutual respect and mutual benefit.' Fourthly, ASEM is a forum designated for heads of states and/or government which aims to further strengthen exchanges between polities in all sectors of the two regions.

Notwithstanding the lack of a systematic social science research on the multi-dimensional benefits that can be directly attributed to ASEM's activities, it does function as a high-level management mechanism for some of the most important economies and aims to balance geostrategic interests in a volatile and rapidly changing region.²⁶ Also, for the EU ASEM operates as a venue to promote democratic values and the espousal of human rights among states whose record has yet to satisfy EU expectations. Meanwhile, from the East Asian perspective, ASEM functions as a first-hand examination forum of the practices of regional integration and helps build a framework in which East Asia can present itself as a regionally coherent political and economic body. This is perhaps best seen in the discursive rhetoric and power of highly-publicised ASEM activities in the global media - presenting an image of mutually-reinforcing regional organisations (ASEAN and EU) and asserting their institutional existence and legitimacy on the international political level.

Using a geopolitical perspective, ASEM may be broadly contextualised

within a 'global tri-polar context,' in which the dramatic shift from geopolitics to geo-economics, and from communist-capitalist bipolarity to inter-capitalist tripolarity is visible.²⁷ On the level of economic cooperation, according to the ASEAN (2010), the aggregate value of ASEAN trade with the EU has grown from \$186.7 billion (USD, 2007) to \$202.5 billion (USD, 2008). This is a remarkable 8% growth over the span of a single calendar year, while EU flows of foreign direct investment (FDI) also grew from \$10.6 billion (USD, 2006) to \$12.4 billion (USD, 2008) marking a 15% increase. Notably, ASEAN statistics shows that the EU-25 (excluding Bulgarian and Romania) stood as the second largest export market for ASEAN countries in 2008, trailing behind only ASEAN countries themselves, and ahead of Japan, the US and China.²⁸ While this may be accurate the data reveals that the EU-25 is significantly behind China and Japan in exporting its products to ASEAN countries.

*Salvador
Santino F.
Regilme, Jr.*

Reflective of the historic transformation of the post-Cold War international political economy, triadic economic dominance remains extreme in which 85% to 95% of international production, trade, finance, foreign investment and new technological development is accounted for the aggregate value of economies of the EU, East Asia and North America.²⁹ Examining more recent EU and East Asian interactions particularly last May 2009, top-level cabinet or ministerial heads attended the 17th ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting in Phnom Penh, Cambodia and strongly agreed, in principle, that it is critical for the EU and the ASEAN to deepen cooperation in addressing the global economic and financial crisis as well as food and energy security.³⁰ Two significant documents were produced as a result of the Phnom Penh meeting: the 'Joint Co-Chairmen's Statement' and the 'Draft Phnom Penh Agenda for the Implementation of the ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2009-2010).' The latter document is notable as it covers collaborative areas of action in economic, socio-cultural activities as well as political and security. This specific mode of engagement at the ministerial level transcends economics and also covered post-9/11 security issues such as terrorism, disarmament, and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and even human and drug trafficking.³¹ ASEM – and its related modes of action including the Ministerial Meetings – offers an insightful and classic case of interregionalism where it tenders new ways of managing changes that cover both the political and economic agenda and may have spill-over effects on intra-regional cooperation development.³²

It is also essential to underscore that the EU is considerably more progressive than the US in its recognition of ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC). TAC was originally signed in 1976 by ASEAN's

founding members, and not only determines ASEAN's organisational rules and modes of conduct, but also explicitly notes key principles that have intensified political confidence among member countries which was crucial for regional peace and stability.³³ As one of the more quintessential documents of ASEAN, the TAC articulates collectively-held principles of peaceful coexistence and active cooperation among Southeast Asian states.³⁴ As a means of fostering its institutional legitimacy ASEAN welcomes political support from other non-ASEAN states and regional partners by formally acceding to the TAC. Unlike the US which has only recently proclaimed its intention to accede to the TAC (2009) reflective of a key change in US diplomacy,³⁵ the EU had already formalised its intention to accede to the TAC. In May 2009, the EU signed two key documents: 'ASEAN Declaration of Consent to the Accession to TAC,' and the 'Declaration on Accession to the TAC,' both of which enable the EU to accede to TAC represent significant steps to intensify engagement with ASEAN.³⁶ The eventual, formal accession of the EU to the TAC regime will represent the most symbolically-important political action of the EU in exhibiting its long-term interest to engage with ASEAN as one of the developing world's most advanced regional organisations. At the symbolic-discursive level, the EU's accession to the TAC will strongly enhance its formal recognition of ASEAN as a regional institutional actor which has a share in global governance in much the same way that the EU has assumed a similar international role.

4. IDENTITY & INTERESTS OF THE EU IN EAST ASIA

Despite the economic successes and political dialogue between the EU and ASEAN, a tremendous amount of work remains to be done on re-defining the EU's relationship to East Asia since the states and publics of ASEAN members tend to hold negative and problematic perceptions of the EU and the only credible, empirically-based research on EU perceptions in the Australasian region based on an EU-funded research project at the University of Canterbury in New Zealand, implying that ASEAN states do not feel vindicated in understanding and/or challenging problematic images of the EU.³⁷ Such research – conducted through the Centre for Research in Europe – presents a transnational comparative analysis employing tripartite methodology (public perception surveys, media coverage and elite surveys) which includes the Australasian countries (New Zealand and Australia), Asian countries (both Northeast and Southeast) and Pacific countries.³⁸ The research time-frame spanned 2002-2008, and concluded that the EU is largely seen as "European actor, acting somewhere-out-there-in-the-world" (Middle East Africa, former

Soviet republics), which indicates that the EU is regarded as a distant political actor, irrelevant for the domestic Asia-Pacific political and economic discourses. Additionally, the EU is also negatively perceived in Asian countries vis-a-vis its treatment of its Muslim minority populations and Asian migrants in Europe; two issues which were generally considered as symptomatic of Euro-centrism. Among Australasian and Northeast Asian countries, the EU's self-perceived 'normative power' is seen as very remote, unknown and marginal in terms of external perceptions.³⁹ Surprisingly, the EU's international campaign against poverty and its human rights promotion is only minimally visible while EU actions as an environmental, developmental and human rights leaders were diagnosed as inefficiently communicated.⁴⁰

The economic relationship was cast in a more positive light with the EU being generally viewed as a 'ubiquitous economic giant,' though is seen as an important global counter-balance to the US.⁴¹ Irrespective of such perceptions, there is an urgent need for the EU to develop a more strategic and effective public diplomacy approach in the Asia-Pacific region.⁴²

The above findings referred to aggregate results (re: the full spectrum of Australasia and Pacific countries). In the particular case of Southeast Asian countries, research findings were telling. For instance while the EU is Indonesia's second largest export partner, the former seems to be extremely under-appreciated, given that only 8.9% of the total number of respondents listed the EU as among Indonesia's most important international partners.⁴³ Such irrelevance of the EU is also reflected in the case of Singapore where, in a student survey involving respondents from Singapore's three main universities, the EU received a 'middle to low assessment' in its importance for the country.⁴⁴ Accordingly, it has been opined that there is no immediate correlation on this assessment level of the EU as measured against variables such as sex, nationality, number of years of study, subject of study or frequency of accessing the local media for international news as key determinants for such perceptions.⁴⁵ Considering these unfavourable views of the EU it has been suggested that

If the European Union is serious about taking a greater role in the world affairs it will require a public diplomacy capability to match. ... For the Union to prosper it must project a positive image of itself to opinion formers and to the 'man in the street' both within and beyond its borders. ⁴⁶

Unfortunately, the EU as seen by the "others," in this case by East Asians, is an under-appreciated, under-valued and misunderstood actor. This dominant narrative reveals how distant the EU is from East Asian affairs, and whose image is tarnished by perceived controversial policies on

migration, Islam and Euro-centrism. Despite the EU's self-perception as a "civilian" or "normative" power, dedicated to "civilising" international relations as a function of a broader transformation of international society,⁴⁷ the EU is left unrecognised in East Asia in the former's work on normative issues of global governance such as: poverty reduction, human rights promotion and environmental sustainability. Comparatively, there seems to be a noticeable mismatch between "other's" perceptions and the self-perception of the EU. This identity conundrum has been re-echoed by the EU itself through Margot Wallstroem, Vice President of the European Commission for Institutional Relations and Communication Strategy. She confessed that

The real problem in Europe is that there is no agreement or understanding about what Europe is for and where it is going. We need a new consensus, a "common narrative." A shared perception of the new, modern story of what Europe is about.⁴⁸

On the question of which interests link East Asia to the EU, economic interests appear clearly predominant. This is important since historically the EU (and EC, 1950s) was established with strong economic interests in mind while the creation of the ASEAN (1967) was in response to geo-politics. Since then, the EU has evolved into a more complex political entity and the political discourses within the EU have been characterised not only by economic interests such as trade and investment but also other normative political values that it must consistently uphold⁴⁹. The evolution of the EU as an institutional actor with more complex interests and competencies was made possible after the enactment of the 1987 Single European Act and the 1993 Treaty of European Union. From a broader perspective, the end of the Cold War paved the way for a more dynamic global political economy such that a tri-polar world has emerged with the materialisation of a triadic economic dominance of East Asia, North America and the EU.⁵⁰

Against the backdrop of the tripolar global political economy, ASEM was created in 1996 amidst a myriad of divergent interests. The EU, known in East Asia as an economic giant, must still capitalise on its 'social and political capital' and reinvest in a more strengthened trade and investment relationship with East Asian actors. As the aforementioned figures suggest, the EU has experienced a dramatic increase in trade transactions with ASEAN, which should be fully maintained. Also, in spite of the figures that speak of a sustained and strengthened bi-regional trade relationship between EU and East Asia, the EU must ensure that this trade relationship is also felt in local communities in East Asia as publics in the

region are still fixated on the US as an economic pivot.

Similarly, on the economic front, it is critical for the EU to realise that it has much to gain as it attempts to strengthen its political capital in East Asia. The continued rise of China⁵¹ – due to its sustained economic growth – has provided the country enhanced bargaining power in the realm of regional and global governance. Thus, it has been opined that it is only the core countries of the EU (and not the EU itself) which try to bargain with and against China which consequently results in disappointing outcomes.⁵² For instance, the UK lobbied for the opening of Euro markets for Chinese goods, yet the Chinese financial services sector has remained severely restricted as this is also similar with France and Germany whose national commercial diplomatic powers have proven to be inauspiciously inadequate such that a growing trade deficit with China continues to be the trend. Such a prognosis of the absence of a coherent EU actorness towards China may also be reflected in its economic interactions with ASEAN and the Northeast Asian economic giants whose economies are still largely tied to the US.⁵³

*Salvador
Santino F.
Regilme, Jr.*

Additionally, apart from economic interests, the self-perception of the EU as a “normative power” is another considerable starting point by which the EU can reinforce its relationship to East Asia. Confronting the diversity of actors in the ASEAN and North East Asia, the EU is generally composed of high-income countries while some ASEAN members are economically lethargic and unable to revive or construct their own versions of the region’s so-called “economic miracle.” The EU has much to gain if it were to invest development aid in the relatively weak economic actors among ASEAN members not only as a reinforcement of the EU’s self-perception as a “normative power,” but also as a means of boosting its regional image. Strengthened trade relations and a more strategic development aid approach could present promising economic opportunities for EU firms as well as chances for the EU to gain regional and international political capital.

Nonetheless, the EU appears to have an unclear, incoherent and inconsistent human rights policy towards ASEAN-related issues including the on-going political crisis in Burma and illiberal policing practices of post-9/11 governments in Thailand, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia.⁵⁴ To demonstrate such policy inconsistency, the EU was apparently praised for its attempt to extend asset freezes and travel bans to members of the Burmese judiciary after the latter convicted Aung San Suu Kyi.⁵⁵ Despite such freezes and bans, and the considerable development aid given by the EU to key countries in ASEAN, it is argued that the EU’s promotion of human rights and democracy through development cooperation is ‘high on rhetoric but low on achievement.’⁵⁶

There has also been an apparent failure of the EU regarding human rights promotion in East Asia as seen through the EU's Common Foreign and Security Policy in Asia vis-à-vis the case studies of Burma, China and Indonesia.⁵⁷ A key reason behind the EU's inability to use its relationship to ASEAN/ASEM as a means for pushing the human rights agenda in Burma and even China is due to the disparity in "normative values" between these two institutions as the apparently dominant policy paradigm in ASEAN maintains that the internal affairs of its members are not within the rightful control of any other supranational body due to sovereignty issues.

Interestingly, it was noted that the marked differential gap in terms of the institutional character between the EU and ASEAN renders the human rights diplomacy of the EU largely ineffective: the EU is more value-driven as noted by its self-perception as a "normative power," while ASEAN continues to embrace the more orthodox principle of non-intervention as human rights promotion is considered a national issue. Evidence of how unique the Asian case is, it was noted that East Asia still remains to be at the end of the race as opposed to Latin America and the South Mediterranean with respect to having finalised third-generation agreements pertaining to human rights and democracy-related clauses with the EU.⁵⁸

The EU is unable to overcome this apparent mismatch of institutional values with ASEAN and is thus unable to flex its muscles as a "normative power." Indeed, the EU continues to be so deeply mired in its internal politics that in May 2009, during the last ASEM Ministerial Meeting in Hanoi, representatives of the foreign ministries of Germany, Britain, Italy and Spain were entirely absent and two-thirds of the other EU members only sent junior officials.⁵⁹ This was seen as a humiliation for ASEM, and the EU may have lost substantial political capital to China, Japan and South Korea since they, together with the ten members of ASEAN, actively participated in the Meeting.

Amidst of the rise of China as an economic and political power and the emerging discourse on the eventual materialisation of an "Asian Century,"⁶⁰ the EU's continued self-assessment as a "normative power" in international politics remains to be seen in East Asia, especially as the EU disregards symbolic, but important and highly publicised diplomatic events such as ASEM.

Notwithstanding the marked difference of the institutional-historical ontogenesis between the EU and ASEAN, a promising point of collaboration between the two could be the idea of 'cross-institutional fertilization.'⁶¹ One avenue the EU could take to overcome the "mismatch-of-values problem" with the ASEAN is to eventually export the EU model

of integration with regional cohesion and the further institutionalisation among the many aims advanced. When ASEAN's Charter (December 2008) was ratified, eventually allowing for additional members and establishing a mechanism to facilitate intergovernmental organisations' diplomatic representation to the bloc, the EU has been able to take the opportunity and formalise their collaboration in terms of furthering the institutional development of ASEAN. Indeed, in February 2010, the EU appointed a new Ambassador to ASEAN, Norbert Baas, who pledged to work on the 'institutional and capacity building assistance' of ASEAN by the EU based on the Nuremberg Declaration that espoused the EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership.⁶²

Concretely, the ASEAN-EC Project on Regional Integration Support (APRIS), an initiative worth around €4.5 million, is a framework programme meant to assist ASEAN members for the goal of regional integration.⁶³ It endeavours to learn from the experience of the EC/EU in fostering regional economic integration, to further improve ASEAN mechanisms and communications schemes and to support capacity-building programmes for the ASEAN Secretariat as well as the members including financial support for a business plan on the establishment of an ASEAN-EC Management Centre in Darussalam, Brunei.⁶⁴

5. CONCLUDING REMARKS ON CONSTRUCTIVISM AND EU-ASIAN RELATIONS

Constructivism may be characterised as being primarily concerned with human consciousness and considers the dynamic link between ideas and material factors as derivatives of how agents fundamentally conceive their material reality. Moreover, on the classic agent-structure problem,⁶⁵ constructivism is fundamentally interested in how structures generate agents and how agents generate structures. The emergence of EU-East Asian relations through its formalisation in ASEM commenced due to efforts by individual agents such as France and Singapore that first took care of the proposal of the Summit. Inevitably, such agent-initiated proposals in the mid-1990s occurred within the atmosphere of sustained and heightened institutionalisation of the EU as well as increasing economic and political confidence in East Asia amidst the rapid economic growth spearheaded by the so-called East Asian tigers.

On the part of the EU as a political actor, it is argued that it has two primary motivations. First, in the context of the Schengen Pact and the efforts towards the signing of the Treaty of Amsterdam, France and other concerned actors within the EU may have perceived the reinforced mo-

mentum of how the EU united as a single institutional entity and, consequently, felt the need to resuscitate its external relationship based on how the EU sought to legitimise itself by directly interacting with another recognised regional body such as ASEAN. Secondly, echoing a ‘realist constructivist’⁶⁶ tone, the evolving normative structure of global politics was gearing towards the formation of regional groupings and the EU’s incentive to the materialisation of ASEM was not only to legitimise itself but was also tied up within a string of EU interests in the markets of the ASEAN and Northeast Asian countries. Such discursive analysis on interests is historically grounded as some EU powers had centuries-old colonial interests in some territories of what is now called Southeast Asia.

In a post-colonial context, the normative structure of global politics allows indirect influence on trade and markets and, even in some cases, internal politics in light of power accumulation. As may be gleaned with the case of the US, one may examine the attempt of the EU to recreate its post-colonial relationship with ASEAN not only through “messianic rhetoric” (in reference to “normative power” identity vis-à-vis human rights and development problems in East Asia) but also the classic case of how the EU interacts with other regional bodies with the former’s interests as its priority. This analysis has been articulated through referring to the failure of the EU-Mercosur Free-Trade Area (FTA) negotiations.⁶⁷ The failure may be attributed to the lack of a “consensual basis” for negotiations as there was disparity between the EU’s rhetoric and the actual reality of negotiations; a critical lesson that must be learned in the case of the ASEAN-EU interregional diplomacy. Notably, it was claimed that the EU will take into account differences of development within ASEAN but, as in the case of Mercosur, the EU dismissed all requests for “special and differentiated treatment.” Moreover, it has been conceded that the birth of ASEM was an outcome of Europe’s rediscovery of Asia when the latter experienced record-breaking economic growth levels presenting new opportunities for cooperation in the early 1990s.⁶⁸

It is still worthwhile to re-examine the logic of how the normative structure in which the EU responds to is not only composed of how the EU can promote normative values but also how such actions can be quintessentially embedded within a cob-web of power interests and great-power considerations of the Union.

On a more critical note, this work has attempted to demonstrate the constructivist logic of the interregional dynamics and complexities of East Asia-EU relations in reference to the politics of identity and interests which consequently dictate the modes of action in examining renewed relations between the EU and East Asia. The analysis commenced by explaining what the general principles of constructivism are as well as

historicising the genesis of EU-East Asia relations.

At the theoretical level, it was argued that the EU suffers an image crisis in East Asia despite the intense engagement of the Union in terms of trade and economic transactions. Also, despite the self-gratifying self-perception of the EU as a normative power, East Asia remains a region where that power has yet to be fully visible as diagnosed by Chaban and Holland,⁶⁹ and Crawford⁷⁰ and Wiessala,⁷¹ who highlighted the failures of the EU's foreign policy actions and agenda in East Asia.

*Salvador
Santino F.
Regilme, Jr.*

Historically, a sense of caution must persist among EU decision-makers. Notwithstanding that the EU's recent rediscovery of East Asia is largely founded on economic interests and its quest to sustainably legitimise itself as an institutional entity,⁷² the EU must fundamentally rethink its recognition of a "social reality" that engaging with East Asia is beyond purely economic interests and its mere recognition of its identity as a kind of political messiah which will bring salvation to areas of the world where human rights and democratic norms are nothing but chimerical goals that have yet to materialise.

Given the changing regional dynamics in Asia, the EU must realistically assess that it suffers from an acute problem of projecting its identity in East Asia and therefore needs to reassert an identity that matches the Union's self-perception, prudently re-discover its mutual interests with ASEAN and North East Asia and determinedly bridge the gap of the EU's normative power rhetoric and consistent norms-based engagement with Asia. Considering the rise of China as a global power and the apparent prevalence in popular media discourse of an emerging "Asian Century," the interregional relations between the EU and East Asia will be one of the primary testing-grounds for determining the relevance of the Union in international politics over the years to come. Should the EU fail to rectify the current, disappointing failures between its self-perceived identity as a normative power and its practices in East Asia, the EU's normative power will remain an elusive chimera.

✧ SALVADOR SANTINO F. REGILME, JR. is a scholar of DAAD (Deutscher Akademischer Austausch Dienst) and is affiliated to the Democratic Governance and Civil Society Programme at the Faculty of Social Sciences, University of Osnabrück, Germany.

NOTES

- 1 Sergio Fabbrini (2005), *Democracy and Federalism in the European Union*, London: Routledge, p. 4.
- 2 Lee Jones (2008), *ASEAN and the Norm of Non-Interference in Southeast*

- Asia: A Quest for Social Order, Oxford, UK: Nuffield College Politics Group Working Paper, p. 2.
- 3 'East Asia Summit: Regional Unity Decades Away' (2010), *Asia Monitor: South-east Asia Monitor*, 1:21, pp. 8-9.
 - 4 Carl Reus-Smit (2004), 'Constructivism,' in *Theories of International Relations*, Scott Burchill (et al), UK: Palgrave, pp. 189-200; Peter Katzenstein (et al) (1998), 'International Organization and the Study of World Politics,' *International Organization*, 52:4, pp. 645-85.
 - 5 James Fearon and Alexander Wendt (2002), 'Rationalism v. Constructivism,' in *Handbook of International Relations*, Walter Carlsnaes (et al), UK: Sage, pp. 52-72.
 - 6 In this paper, the operationalisation of the term "Asia" broadly refers to ASEAN members as well as the Northeast Asian states (Japan, South Korea and China), and when the term "East Asia" is used, it includes both the ASEAN member states as well as the Northeast Asian states.
 - 7 Reus-Smit (2004), p. 188.
 - 8 Alexander Wendt (1995), 'Constructing International Politics,' *International Security*, 20:1, pp. 71-81.
 - 9 Reus-Smit (2004), pp. 188-191.
 - 10 Jeffrey Checkel (1998), 'The Constructivist Turn in International Relations Theory,' *World Politics*, 50:2, pp. 324-348.
 - 11 Reus-Smit (2004), pp. 198-199.
 - 12 Checkel (1998), pp. 324-348.
 - 13 Thomas Risse-Kappen (1996), 'Exploring the Nature of the Beast: International Relations Theory and Comparative Policy Analysis Meet the European Union,' *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 34:1, pp. 53-80.
 - 14 George Flynn and Henry Farrell (1999), 'Piecing Together the Democratic Peace: the CSCE, Norms, and the "Construction" of Security in Post-Cold War Europe,' *International Organization*, 53:3, p. 505.
 - 15 Matus Misik (2008), 'Fish v. National Identity: Iceland and the EU from Constructivist Point of View,' *Sociologia*, 40:4, pp. 299-325.
 - 16 Kees Van Kersbergen and Bertjan Verbeek (2007), 'The Politics of International Norms: Subsidiarity and the Imperfect Competence Regime of the European Union,' *European Journal of International Relations*, 13:2, pp. 217-238.
 - 17 Manfred Mols (1990), 'Cooperation with ASEAN: A Success Story,' in Geoffrey Edwards and Elfriede Regelsberger (eds.), *Europe's Global Links: The European Community and Inter-Regional Cooperation*, London: Pinter Publishers, pp. 66-83; Andreas Lukas (1998), 'EC-ASEAN in the Context of Inter-Regional Cooperation,' in Guiseppe Schiavone (ed), *Western Europe and South-East Asia: Co-Operation or Competition*, London: Macmillan, pp. 105-116; Heiner Haenggi (2000), 'Interregionalism: Empirical and Theoretical Perspectives,' Paper prepared for the workshop Dollars, Democracy and Trade: External Influence on Economic Integration in the Americas, Los Angeles, CA, 18 May 2000.

- 18 Julie Gilson (2005), 'New Interregionalism? The EU and East Asia,' *Journal of European Integration*, 27:3, pp. 307-326.
- 19 *Ibid.* pp. 309-311.
- 20 Haenggi (2000), pp. 4-5.
- 21 'External Relations,' European Economic and Trade Office, available at: <<http://www.deltwn.ec.europa.eu/modules.php?op=modload&name=News&file=article&sid=50>> (Accessed 16 March 2010).
- 22 Chris Patten (2010), 'The Relationship between the EU and Asia: One or Many?' Commissioner for External Relations, available at: <<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/02/368&format=HTML&aged=0&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>> (accessed 09 December 2010).
- 23 'European Commission, Regional Programming for Asia: Strategy Document 2007-2013,' European Commission, available at: <http://www.eeas.europa.eu/asia/rsp/07_13_en.pdf> (accessed 12 December 2010).
- 24 'About ASEM,' ASEM/Asia-Europe Meeting, available at: <<http://www.asem-infboard.org/page.phtml?code=About#character>> (accessed 22 January 2010)
- 25 *Ibid.*
- 26 Gilson (2005), pp. 307-326.
- 27 Christopher Dent (2004), 'The Asia-Europe Meeting and Interregionalism: Toward a Theory of Multilateral Utility,' in *Asian Survey*, 44:2, pp. 214-215.
- 28 'ASEAN-European Union,' ASEAN, available at: <<http://www.aseansec.org/4970.htm>> (Accessed 07 March 2010).
- 29 Dent (2004), p. 214.
- 30 'ASEAN, EU Ministers Urge Closer Cooperation to Tackle Economic Crisis,' BBC, 30 May 2009.
- 31 *Ibid.*
- 32 Gilson (2004), pp. 307-326.
- 33 Mark Manyin (ed.) (2004), U.S. Accession to ASEAN's Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, United States: Congressional Research Service, pp. 1-23.
- 34 'Text of Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia and Related Information: ASEAN Knowledge Kit,' ASEAN Secretariat, <<http://www.aseansec.org/TAC-KnowledgeKit.pdf>> (Accessed 01 December 2009).
- 35 Manyin (2004), pp. 2-20.
- 36 'ASEAN, EU Sign Two Agreements about EU's accession to TAC,' Xinhua News Agency, 28 May 2009.
- 37 Natalia Chaban and Martin Holland (2005), 'The EU through the Eyes of the Asia-Pacific: Selected Findings from a Four-Country Survey of Media Coverage and Public Opinion,' NZ: University of Canterbury, NCRE, available at: <http://wwwsoc.nii.ac.jp/eusa-japan/download/eusa_ap/paper_MartinHolland.pdf> (accessed 01 December 2009).
- 38 Natalia Chaban and Martin Holland, 'In the Eyes of the World,' *Public Service Review: Europe Union*, 16, pp. 441-443.
- 39 Ian Mannings (2002), 'Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms,' *Journal of Common Market Studies*, 40:2, pp. 235-258.

- 40 Chaban and Holland (2005).
- 41 Chaban and Holland, pp. 441-443.
- 42 Natalia Chaban (et al) (2006), 'The European Union as Others See It,' *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 11, pp. 245-262.
- 43 Martin Holland (et al) (2009), *The EU through the Eyes of Asia Volume 2: New Cases, New Findings*, Singapore: World Scientific Publishing, pp. 1-271.
- 44 Barnard Turner (2009), 'The Perceptions of the European Union among Tertiary Education Students in Singapore,' *Asia Europe Journal*, 7:2, pp. 225-240.
- 45 Turner (2009), pp. 226-238.
- 46 Stephen Twigg, (2005), 'Preface,' in Philip Fiske de Gouveia and Hester Plumridge (eds.) *European Infopolitik: Developing EU Pubic Strategy*, London: The Foreign Policy Centre, pp. VI-VII.
- 47 Christopher Hill (1990), *European Foreign Policy: Power Bloc, Civilian Model – or Flop?*, Boulder, CO: Westview Press, pp. 31-55; Francois Duchene (1972), 'Europe's Role in World Peace, in Richard Mayne (ed), *Europe Tomorrow: Sixteen Europeans Look Ahead*, London: Fontana, pp. 32-47; See also: Manners (2002), pp. 236-257.
- 48 Margot Wallstroem (2009), 'Communicating a Europe in Stormy Waters,' available at: <<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=SPEECH/05/396&format=HTML&aged=1&language=EN&guiLanguage=en>> (accessed 19 December 2009).
- 49 Georg Wiessala (2006), *Re-Orienting the Fundamentals: Human Rights and New Connections in EU-Asia Relations*, Aldershot: Ashgate.
- 50 Dent (2004), pp. 213-236; and Katzenstein (2000), p. 353.
- 51 For an in-depth analysis see: Martin Jacques (2009), *When China Rules the World: The Rise of the Middle Kingdom and the End of the Western World*, New York, USA: Penguin Group.
- 52 John Fox and Francois Godement (2009), 'Running Rings around the EU: China II,' *International Herald Tribune*, 22 April 2009, p. 6.
- 53 See: Christopher Dent (2001), 'ASEM and the "Cinderella Complex" of EU-East Asia Economic Relations,' *Pacific Affairs*, 74:1, pp. 26-33.
- 54 See: John Sidel (2007), *The Islamist Threat in Southeast Asia: A Reassessment*, Washington: East West Center, pp. 19-56.
- 55 Seth Mydans (2009), 'EU Reacts Sharply to Ruling by Myanmar,' *International Herald Tribune*, 14 August 2009, p. 4.
- 56 Gordon Crawford (2002), 'Evaluating EU Promotion of Human Rights, Democracy and Good Governance: Towards a Participatory Approach,' *Journal of International Development* 14:6, pp. 911-936.
- 57 Wiessala (2006), pp. 55-94.
- 58 Michael Reiterer (2006), 'Interregionalism as a New Diplomatic Tool: The EU and East Asia,' *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 11, pp. 223-243.
- 59 'It's Time Europe paid serious attention to ASEM,' *The New Straits Times Malaysia*, 12 June 2009. This article is available at: <<http://www.aseminfo-board.org/NewsAndMedia/InTheNews/?id=187>> (accessed 10 December 2010).

- 60 See: Kishore Mahbubani (2008), *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, New York, USA: Public Affairs.
- 61 Reiterer (2006), pp. 223-243.
- 62 'Stronger EU-ASEAN Relations Seen,' *Inquirer Global Nation*, 14 February 2010, accessed December 10, 2010 <<http://globalnation.inquirer.net/news/breakingnews/view/20100214-253132/Stronger-EU-Asean-relations-seen>> (accessed 10 December 2010).
- 63 "Overview of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations, ASEAN, <<http://www.aseansec.org/4970.htm>> (accessed 07 March 2010).
- 64 Ibid.
- 65 Georg Ritzer and Douglas Goodman (2000), *Modern Sociological Theory*, 5th Edition, New York, NY: McGraw Hill, pp. 508-538.
- 66 Samuel Barkin (2003), 'Realist Constructivism,' *International Studies Review*, 5:3, pp. 325-342.
- 67 Alfredo Robles (2008a) contends that the failure of an EU-ASEAN Free Trade Agreement can be gleaned from the the breakdown of EU's negotiations with Mercosur wherein "special differentiated treatment" (SDT) was not applied to low-income Mercosur countries. Robles asserts that ASEAN's low-income countries may be the only to expect "SDTs." Nonetheless, even high- and middle-income ASEAN countries may still face an arduous task competing with key EU economic actors. Also, Robles (2008b), argued that there is a misguided perception on how the fast-paced process of the EU and ASEAN towards FTA negotiations was considered a success. Accordingly, the EU was compelled to agree to take the ASEAN negotiation format which implied the inclusion of Myanmar, amidst the reinstatement of EU sanctions against Myanmar. This shows policy inconsistencies in the EU's relations to East Asia. See: Alfredo Robles (2008a), 'The EU and the ASEAN: Learning from the Failed EU-Mercosur FTA Negotiations,' *ASEAN Economic Bulletin*, 25:3, pp. 334-344; and Alfredo Robles (2008b), 'An EU-ASEAN FTA: The EU's Failures as an International Actor,' *European Affairs Review*, 13, pp. 541-560.
- 68 Bart Gaens (ed) (2008), *Europe-Asia Interregional Relations: A Decade of ASEM*, Hampshire, UK: Ashgate.
- 69 Chaban and Holland (2005), pp. 441-443 and Chaban and Holland.
- 70 Crawford (2002), pp. 911-936.
- 71 Wiessala (2006), pp. 55-94.
- 72 Dent terms this search for EU identity through East Asia as a "Cinderella complex." See: Dent (2001), pp. 25-52.

*Salvador
Santino F.
Regilme, Jr.*