

The Political Economy of European Studies in Europe and Asia: Programmes, Pitfalls, Prospects

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Introduction

As will become clearer in the following, this background paper is not drafted by someone who is a broad European Studies specialist - other than his undertaking a deal of research and writing on EU-Asian relations – but, rather someone who comes from the field of comparative politics with an area specialization on Southeast Asia. This particular background makes me sensitive to an important issue that also impacts upon my colleagues in Asia teaching and researching in another “area studies” specialization, namely that of the European Union. This issue is that of the tension, albeit a creative tension, between classical disciplinary allegiances (economics, law, history, even language studies etc.) and a concentration on one particular cultural or geographic area, namely Europe. During the numerous evaluation missions I have undertaken in Asia, and especially those for the ESCP programme in China, it became clear that many university administrations were reluctant to see Masters in European Studies degrees created and wanted the traditional disciplinary degrees to be maintained, with European Studies being merely an option. In Europe, specialists on Asia are confronted with a not dissimilar problem created by the fact that their career promotion depends on advancement in research (and to a lesser extent teaching) in their “home” discipline, with their area specialization being of secondary importance. Given that European Studies, by its nature, as practiced both in the EU and Asia is inter, or multidisciplinary, the tension between administrative, economic and career constraints, and the ideal way to undertake the tasks at hand, is exacerbated

In the following I wish to draw from the experience of my own institution in the European Studies programmes we offer and attempt to draw out a number of approaches that can be seen in the way European Studies curricula are developed and to what needs they respond. In the second lengthier part of this background paper this internal European experience is juxtaposed with insights drawn from the observation of European Studies programmes in Asia.

A. The Political Economy of European Studies in Europe

1. A French Example

In Europe there are strong political imperatives behind the flourishing of European Studies curricula. In particular, the development of a sub-discipline in European integration studies can be seen as a vital element in the development of the European project of an ever-closer union. The availability of both national and European funding both for the development of European Studies and the creation of a common European Research Area (i.e. the development of trans-European networks of collaborative research) in the social sciences

provides additional incentives. European Studies in Europe has reached a critical mass where it has become almost a discipline in its own right. At the very least it is possible for the teacher or researcher to so “label” him or herself and still find career opportunities. This is not the case in a number of other “area studies” specialisations.

While probably all of us in the academic community would prefer to live in a world in which intellectual and scientific interest takes precedence over other considerations, nevertheless, the real world is rather different. It is, to use the words of the great American philosopher, Madonna, a “material world”. In reality we have to take into account questions of demand as well as supply, or rather more simply, are our curricula and degrees marketable? With the increasing role of the private sector in higher education the imperative to ascertain whether our graduates will find intellectually and financially enriching jobs should be of concern to us. At the same time the concern to develop marketable curricula can sit uneasily with another major imperative, namely that of ensuring continuity and sustainability in our teaching and research by making sure we are grooming the next generation of scholars so as at some point in the future we of the older generation will be happily made redundant!

The situation in my institution, the Institut d’Etudes Politiques, or Sciences Po as it is more commonly and affectionately known, demonstrates this dichotomy. In point of fact we offer two Masters programmes in European Studies. The first, a Master of Research degree is housed in our doctoral school. The second, a Master of European Affairs is housed within the professionally oriented graduate school programmes of the Institute. The former programme has ostensibly as its ambition to train researchers in comparative politics and comparative sociology with a European specialization, while the latter seeks to educate practitioners in the area of European Affairs, a specialization promoted as akin to that of professional training in an MBA or a MPA. In practice, the different orientations of the two programmes do not lead to radically different results, for only about one in four or five of the Masters of Research graduate students would actually go on to write a PhD thesis and seek employment in teaching and research.

Be that as it may, it is illuminating to examine the course presentation for the Masters of European Affairs. According to the Sciences Po web site¹ the programme is designed to prepare graduates to work in four areas:

- a. The European Union public service (Commission, Parliament, Council, etc)
- b. National public services:
 - Permanent delegations in Brussels, embassies of non-members, representative bodies of international organisations
 - Cooperation bodies / inter-ministerial coordination bodies
 - Ministries of foreign affairs
 - National experts
- c. Political professions: parliamentary assistants, members of ministerial cabinets.
- d. Interest groups, lobbying: regional representative offices, corporate lobbyists, consultants and advocacy groups.

This listing would seem to suggest that European Studies programmes in Europe and, in particular, their great diversity, are at least to some extent designed to respond to specific needs in the labour market. The question that immediately springs to mind is whether this is, or should be, the case in Asia.

2. Curricula: “Europe... where you sit, is what you see?”

¹ www.sciences-po.fr/formation/master_scpo/mentions/affaires_europeenes/index.htm#2

To simplify it is helpful to classify European Studies curricula in Europe as taking one of four approaches. In using the term European Studies, I am using it in the sense underlying most programmes in Asia, namely that of European integration studies:

- a. **Europe from an “area studies” perspective: the European Union as *sui generis*.** In this approach the unique aspects of European integration are stressed by taking generally a long-term view juxtaposing the present period of unification with previous periods of conflict and disunity.
- b. **Europe from a comparative politics / comparative sociology / comparative economics perspective.** With the development of studies of what has been described as the “new regionalism” this approach would appear, in my view, to have increasingly greater currency.² Above all, given the sense in which regional integration worldwide is one of the ways nation states and societies are attempting to cope with globalization, the comparative regionalist school is on the ascendant.
- c. **An international relations perspective.** As the EU has both enlarged and deepened, so has the study developed of the European Union as a global actor. The particular forms of soft power used to promote its interest expressed in the notions of civilian power Europe³ and Europe as a normative power are coming under increasing scrutiny.⁴
- d. **European Law.** Given the high level of institutionalisation in Europe, the one discipline that has now been in part captured by Europeanists is that of European law. Indeed the corpus of legislation and the professional opportunities offered for the specialised graduate is sufficiently great to ensure promising careers.

In reality, as far as I can gather, none of the above four approaches exists in a kind of pure form associated with a particular European Studies programme in Europe. This diversity is undoubtedly a source of enrichment for the whole European project.

B. The Political Economy of European Studies in Asia

1. Finding a “Niche Market”

When one turns to the Asian situation it is clear that a large number of these potential employment outlets mentioned above are not available to Asian graduates in European Studies. The various Asian foreign ministries can only absorb a limited intake of European specialists and probably they, like foreign ministries elsewhere, award a priority to language skills on the grounds that “one learns about one’s geographical area of competence by being posted there”. There is clearly a need to encourage the foreign ministries and other State bodies to appreciate and to value the kinds of competence obtained in a European Studies programme. Elsewhere in the public sector, the employment opportunities for graduates in European Studies are limited, or so is my initial impression. As China and India take on more assertive international roles, attempting to project their soft power, it can be hoped that employment opportunities will open up overseas in international organisations for graduates in European Studies. Once again, creating this demand will require efforts in both adapting,

² On this approach, one which is largely shared by this author, see: Fredrik Söderbaum & Timothy Shaw (eds) *Theories of the New Regionalism: A Palgrave Reader*, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2003 and Mario Telo (ed.) *European Union and New Regionalism: Regional Actors and Global Actors in a Post-Hegemonic Era*, Aldershot, Ashgate, 2001.

³ See Mario Telo, *Europe: a Civilian Power?: European Union, Global Governance, World Order*, new edn, Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007.

⁴ See Ian Manners “Normative Power Europe: A Contradiction in Terms”, *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40 (2) 2002: 235-258 and Zaki Laïdi, *La norme sans la force : l’énigme de la puissance européenne*, Paris, Presses de Sciences Po, 2005.

and communicating on the usefulness of, a European Studies curriculum. The one area of hope, is that provided by employment opportunities in the private sector. It would appear but common sense to assert that European multinationals in Asia should be the first target for employment of Chinese graduates in European Studies. Moreover as Chinese and other Asian multinationals develop and expand in relation to the world's largest market, namely the European Union, they should too become a niche for Asian European studies graduates. Yet have these labour market opportunity questions been really addressed in the setting up of European Studies programmes in Asia?⁵

Prior to the possibility of obtaining European Union funding various programmes in Asia had rather different outcomes. What many consider to have been then the best European Studies programme in Southeast Asia, namely that of the National University of Singapore was abolished by a fiat of the then Vice Chancellor who disbanded the sub-department in charge of the programme making it into a virtual degree.⁶ At the Baptist University of Hong Kong a similar type of programme one which places an emphasis on learning one or two European languages other than English has survived. These two experiences, and experiences elsewhere in Asia have confirmed that the strong support of university administrations is vital for the continuation of European Studies programmes. With the end of EU financing for the 18 Chinese European Studies centres supported under the ESCP project, in my view, possibly at least half will disappear, not only because the critical mass of sustainable competence has not been reached, but also because the commitment of university and other authorities is lacking.⁷

The first question that confronts the organizer of a European Studies curriculum is to answer the question, why? Ever since former Commission President Romano Prodi declared that the European model of integration was an “export product” of the European Union. When one looks at the various European Commission financed European Studies Programmes in Asia - starting with the initial ill-fated three university Filipino consortium through to that of the successful European Studies programme in Thailand at Chulalongkorn University - followed by the rather atypical programme in Vietnam and finally to two heavy weight programmes, that in China, which at least in its first stage is drawing to an end and that in India which should begin shortly – they all have at their origins a willingness on the part of the European Union to make a political statement in these Asian countries. This unilateral political motivation is somewhat more subdued in the jointly financed programmes in Japan and Australia, for example.

2. Politically Inspired Decisions and their Consequences

In Asia there are incentives to promote European Studies, incentives often, but not always, vectored through the various European Union delegations. This can only be applauded. For a political scientist, one who is often struck by the gap between discourse and action, the willingness by the European Commission to follow declarations by acts (i.e. funding and investment) is indeed refreshing. However, the ability to acquire EU funding can also have

⁵ A somewhat superficial “tracer study” on job opportunities was organized by the German consultancy GOPA in charge of the ESCP project. Unfortunately it was not really possible to make judgments on such a small pool of graduates given the ESCP had only been functioning for two or three years. However, this was besides the point for this particular consultancy firm the study merely provided further cash flow.

⁶ Indications are, however, that this will change soon and that at NUS a new programme will refind the former autonomy and glory of its predecessor.

⁷ Given that China is no longer a developing country and given the massive European trade deficit with China it is going to become increasingly difficult to justify funding European Studies in China as a form of development assistance.

some unintended side effects, namely that certain institutions and individuals without a prior commitment to European Studies may simply re-label an existing centre or programme without providing any new content. The Asia-Europe Institute at the University of Malaya under its first director was one such blatant subterfuge. Lest the impression be given of suggesting this only occurs in Asia, there are also numerous European examples of putting the “cart” of funding, before the “horse” of a sound motivating project. For example having just undertaken for the first time evaluations within the FP 7 research programme I was struck by the disparity between applications anchored in a clear, coherent research programme and those that were merely not very subtle attempts to obtain funding, per se.

a. Partnership Mismatches in Asia

To state the obvious, in Asia, the EU has to deal with governments as they are, not how some Europeans at least would like them to be. The strongest example of political imperatives outweighing others, with the possible exception of the Vietnamese programme I shall return to shortly, is in China. The motivation behind the ESCP was essentially political, both from the European Commission and also from the Chinese Ministry of Trade.⁸ This is not to suggest in the least that political motivations are somehow inferior, or even misguided, compared to other, say, academic ones. Far from it, they are simply, different resulting in the outcomes they engender being different from those they would have resulted from a purely academic motivation. One tangible result, both in Vietnam and in China, was that the EU had to accept the organizing partner proposed by the governments of these countries: respectively the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences. In my view these were rather unfortunate choices, not because of the quality of institutions nor people, but simply because these two academies have different agendas from those of local universities and, even more so, of European academic partners. As official think tanks linked to central governments their role is to advise their administrations. In the case of the Chinese ESCP this led, it could be argued, to a mismatch with the other Chinese actors in the university system. As is often the case this resulted in disagreements over orientations and access to funding. Moreover the administrative cultures were quite different leading to unnecessary tensions. At least in the Chinese case existing European Studies centres were given a new boost and some newer ones encouraged. In Vietnam the three-year programme died at the end because the Vietnamese counterpart offered no teaching and there was no effective relaying of European Studies expertise into Vietnamese universities where a receptive audience did exist. Indeed my three years of experience in the European consortium involved with the Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences left me with the distinct impression that the latter saw the whole programme as merely a short-term rent-seeking exercise.

b. Partnership mismatches in Europe

EC supported European Studies programmes in Asia come under the auspices of DG Relex and not as is the case in Europe under DG Education or DG Research. One of the results has been that private sector consultancy groups, whose very existence depends on being well and truly attached to the “Brussels’ teat”, have become involved in drafting various bids. The advantage of this is that these consultancy firms possess technical competence, access to decision makers and the kind of sensitivity to the expectations of the

⁸ As EU-China relations are essentially economic, the interlocutor of the Commission in China, as in India, has been the Ministry of External Trade. It was it, and not the Ministry of Education, who designated CASS as the Chinese partner. In India having to work through the Ministry of Trade, who was involved in an administrative “turf war” with the Ministry of Education meant that an initial project from 2001-2 for European Studies centres in India was never implemented.

Commission at times lacking in academic institutions. In the best cases a rather dynamic synergy can thus emerge with each party accepting his/her responsibilities and the ensuing rewards. In the worst case, these private consultancy firms can treat academic partners in a perfunctory manner, once the contract with the Commission has been won. In my over ten year's experience the most reprehensible private consultancy group I have encountered is GOPA, who as leader of a consortium with six European academic partners, won the technical assistance contract for the European Studies Centres in China programme. The contract having been won they then failed to provide a consortium agreement and, in effect, barred their partners from any major contribution to, and thus benefit from, the technical assistance contract. Furthermore, by virtually using only the human resources from one EU member state, ie their own Germany, they betrayed the pan-European nature that should be at the bottom of any cooperation with Asia. Fortunately it would seem that GOPA is an isolated case.

c. Triangular marriages

Three would appear to be the favourite number in Brussels. The Erasmus Mundus programme, for example, requires that at least three and normally five universities share in the awarding of a degree for it to be able to obtain this particular label. Marriages of two are already difficult enough, both in life and in academia, but threesomes are even more complicated. Yet the involvement of at least three partners seems to be a minimum requirement for European Studies to be able to obtain support from the European Commission, and in the case of Australia and Japan, from national governments. The difficulty is that, for many observers, generally there is a dominant partner, a subsidiary partner... and a sleeping or nominal partner. This situation is generated by two structural factors, namely possession of the required competence and, as previously intimated, variable levels of internal support provided by university administrations. In the short term these threesomes may function while the EC funding lasts but, as was the case in the first EC supported programme in the Philippines, involving De La Salle, Ateneo de Manila and the University of the Philippines, it was impossible to continue afterwards, when the previous partners returned to functioning in a competitive relationship with each other.

The most flagrant case of an engineered marriage in European Studies I have witnessed recently was the creation of the Silk Road Combined Centre in European Studies involving four universities in Northwest China, only two of which possessed some initial competence. Given that some of these partners are several hundred kilometres away from the others and, more importantly, that no financial provisions were made for joint activities, the future of this politically correct initiative⁹ seems dim indeed.

d. The conundrum of supporting established centres versus new start-ups

EU delegations in Asian countries are confronted with a difficult dilemma in regard to supporting European Studies. On the one hand, their overriding brief is to strengthen relations with the host country and to promote a positive vision of the EU. On the other hand, they have to meet the expectations within Europe and amongst Asian academic institutions, on promoting academic quality. In my experience, not only in Asia but also in the United States and Australia, this comes down in practical terms to either supporting existing European Studies centres with a proven track record or helping start ups. Both positions can be intellectually and honestly defended. In recent years the tendency has been to support start-ups. The results however are mixed. To take the Japanese case, for example, while it is generally accepted that the start up consortium in the Kansai region has made great strides,

⁹ Aid to northwest China is indeed a priority in Beijing in its relations with external actors.

the new consortium in Tokyo - which was chosen over a competing consortium with a proven track record – has been to date something of a disappointment. Once again this dilemma is something felt also in Europe, where, for example, in evaluating research proposal sent to the EC we are also at pains to make sure new candidates and new entrants should also be given a chance.

Final thoughts

To state once again the obvious, European Studies, like most academic endeavours, is fragile depending ultimately on individuals. We all have examples of areas of expertise in particular institutions that die with the departure of key staff. The challenge is to ensure institutional continuity that survives the absence of particular individual inputs. Once again this is both an Asian and a European challenge. To give but two examples. In Alfredo Robles, the Philippines has undoubtedly the most internationally respected scholar in European Studies in Southeast Asia.¹⁰ Yet a lack of support for developing his expertise in his home institution and the demand for his competence elsewhere means that he has joined, like many of the Philippine's finest intellectual workers, the brain drain from this country at least temporarily. To use a sporting analogy, European Studies centres are a little like a football team requiring "strikers" as well as "defenders", goal keepers as well as the mid field that ensure final victory. Directing and managing a centre are skills that are not necessarily acquired during a career in research and teaching. A second example concerns Fudan University in Shanghai where under the long term leadership and generous commitment of Professor Dai Bingran, the European Studies Centre has been able to impose itself as one of the top two or three centres in China. The key to Professor Dai's success is the nurturing of at least two new generations of scholars who will ensure the sustainability of this centre.

Following from the previous rather personal, perhaps even quixotic, analysis let me be transparent in my own special pleading. If resources are scarce, which they are, and political will in short supply, which it may well be, both should perhaps be directed in priority to the young upcoming scholars, the docs and post-docs, who are the key to the sustainable development of European Studies in Asia. Hopefully many of the participants in this workshop would share this objective.

Conclusions

One cannot expect the demand for Asian European Studies graduates, and thus European Studies per se, to develop spontaneously. In a sense, the "suppliers of the supply", in other words, European Studies centres in Asia, will need to sell more effectively their programmes and their graduates. It is paradoxical that in Europe today graduates with good Chinese language skills, as well as knowledge of contemporary China gleaned through specialised degrees, can now seek top jobs and demand premium salaries. The objective in Asia should be to stress the importance of knowledge of the EU as an appropriate complement to skills in, hopefully, more than one European language. For this to occur, adapting European curricula in European Studies – and then developing new elements that correspond to the needs of the Asian "market" – is of utmost importance. Moreover as in Europe, significant amounts of time and effort will still be required in ensuring the support of local university administrations and national governments in Asia.

To conclude on an optimistic note. As the European Union as an entity continues to impose itself as a global actor of the first order – a rise concomitant with the beginnings of the demise of the US hegemony - so will national governments, the business community and civil

¹⁰ His latest work, *The Asia-Europe Meeting: the Theory and Practice of Interregionalism* is due for release by Routledge early in 2008.

society in Asian countries gradually become more cognisant of the “unidentified political object”, to use Jacques Delors’ felicitous phrase, that is Europe. Hopefully, as this happens, support for European Studies in Asia will strengthen at the grass roots and European Studies graduates will find the job opportunities they deserve.¹¹