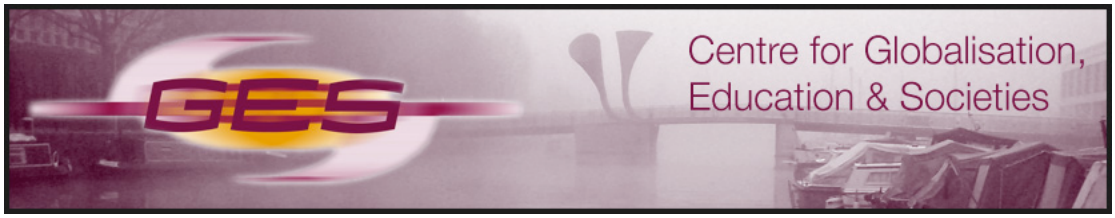

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Regionalism, 'Europe/Asia' and Higher Education

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Abstract

Since the early 1990s, European transnational capital and the European Commission (EC) have commented on the low level of exports and FDI into the Asian region and the invisibility of Europe in the Asian imagination making Europe potentially less competitive than the US in the Asian region. To overcome this problem, in 1994 the EC set out its first broad framework, - *"Toward a New Asia Strategy* - to strengthen the European Union's (EU's) presence in the Asian region. Since then, there have been a series of EC Communications (see 2001; 2003a; 2003b; 2005), strategy papers (2005) and Presidential speeches (Barosso, 2005; Blair, 2005), all with the explicit intention of developing a stronger relationship between Europe and Asia and developing a European presence in Asia. While initially a weakly articulated instrument for intervention, since the launch of the EUs Lisbon Agenda in 2000, higher education has become progressively important in the strategic armoury of the EC as a means to advance the EU's competitive economic agenda. However, I also show that the complex and often explosive politics of the Europe-Asia inter-regional structures make these mechanisms particularly unstable, while the EU is susceptible to charges of neo-colonialism and economic imperialism.

Keywords: Europe, ASEAN, ASEM, Asia, higher education, globalisation

Introduction

Since the early 1990s, European transnational capital and the European Commission (EC) have commented on both the low level of exports and FDI into the Asian region and the invisibility of Europe in the Asian imagination. In 1994 the EC set out its first overall framework *"Toward a New Asia Strategy"* to strengthen the EU's political and economic presence across the region. Between 1994 and 2005 a series of speeches and policy papers were directed at building Asia-Europe inter-regionalism, with higher education identified as a strategic instrument in this process. Initially, higher education was a weakly expressed component of Europe's Asia strategy. However, since 2000 the EC has rachetted up the stakes and strategies for becoming globally competitive, with higher education an important component. The outcome has been the development of a range of programmes and projects targeted at Asia, funded by the EU (e.g. the Asia-Link Programme, the Asia Universities Network Programme, Erasmus Mundus), and governed through the existing inter-regional structures of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM). However, the role of education in these policies and programmes are neither well documented nor well understood.[i] This paper explores the specific purpose and content of these initiatives. However I will argue that the wider politics of Asia-Europe inter-regionalism contributes to an explosive politics, making these mechanisms particularly unstable and susceptible to charges of neo-colonialism and economic imperialism.

To develop my analysis, I draw on the new political economy of regionalism (cf. Breslin, Higgott and Rosamund, 2002: 22). Through this kind of analysis I hope to contribute to a better understanding of the role of education in processes of Asia-Europe inter-regionalism and Europe's exogenous knowledge economy strategies, as well as to generate a more nuanced geopolitical account of education in the global and regional economy. In order to make some headway on this task, I begin by laying out a working understanding of regions, regionalism and inter-regionalism before looking at the geo-politics of Asia-Europe inter-regionalism since the 1960s, and particularly Europe as an actor. The second

half of the paper focuses specifically on education as an instrument in building Asia-Europe inter-regionalism, and Europe's use of inter-regional structures to further the EC's competitive knowledge economy strategies.

Regionalism, Regionalisation and Inter-regionalisms – Asia/Europe

As the recent literature on regionalism points out (cf. Hettne and Soderbaum 2000; Breslin, Higgott and Rosamund, 2002; Breslin and Higgott, 2003), not only has research on regions, regionalism and regionalisation been under-developed, but dominant theoretical approaches and explanations have been limited by simplistic assumptions, too heavy a focus on what might count as a proper region, and insufficient consideration as to why regions might emerge in the first place. More recent research has done much to correct this state of affairs.[ii]

So how might we define regionalism? Ravenshill defines it as the formal collaboration of intergovernmental collaboration between two or more states (2005). However, as Hurrell (1995) points out, this is an overly statist view, and there is some mileage in viewing regionalisation as a process of integration that arises from combinations of markets, private trade and investment flows, the policies and decisions of companies or organisations, as well as along with state-led initiatives. This wider definition opens up the study of regions to include entities such as the European Union. It also enables us to see the way a range of institutions and other actors, such as the higher education sector, might be drawn into the process of promoting and producing inter-regional relations.

In an analytical/operational sense, regionalism and inter-regionalism is an ideology which in turn shapes the strategies that give rise to formal institution building (Hettne and Soderbaum, 2000: 457). The content of that ideology cannot be known a priori; rather, and as I will show below, the content of regional projects and strategies will be shaped by political, economic and cultural objectives, or combinations of these. Inter-regionalism, the primary concern of this paper, refers to the interactions and relationships between regions; the politics of how, why and with what outcomes, these relationships are mediated, and through what projects, processes and practices.

Writers on regions identify several waves of regionalism and scholarly work contributing to our understanding of these processes. First wave regionalism and thinking sought to document and understand the regional blocs that emerged in the post-World War Two period until the 1980s, such as the *European Coal and Steel Community* (1952), the *Organisation for African Unity* (1962) and the *Association for South East Asian Nations* (1967).[iii] The theoretical terrain was dominated either by politico- normative approaches which gave priority to the desirability of post national systems, or functional accounts which considered regions to be the logical outcomes of rational decision-making (for instance in the work of Haas, see Breslin and Higgott, 2003: 168). One outcome of this work was the production of theoretical models of integration. However, this work ground to a holt in the 1970s as these models were increasingly discredited. More than this, first wave regionalism was also increasingly seen as problematic in that it assumed that the quintessential model of regionalism, the European Economic Community, could and would be replicated elsewhere. When this was not the case, for instance when the Latin American Free Trade area and the East African Common Market not only failed to develop along European lines but in fact collapsed (Breslin and Higgott, 2003: 169),

writers like Haas were forced to concede they had underestimated the power and interests of national states.

Second wave regionalism[iv] is dated to the 1990s. It emerged with the revitalization of European integration on the one hand, and the emergence of a new set of regional free trade agreements on the other.[v] Two factors were important here; one was the collapse of the Cold War which created a new set of geo-strategic alliances. The second was the rapid extension of neo-liberalism, in particular the idea of freer conditions for trade meaning that national borders were then now regarded as impediments to economic productivity and growth (Held et al, 1999). While processes of economic globalisation served as a catalyst for regionalism, internal factors also tended to condition the form that regional collaboration took. Breslin and Higgott (2003: 170) note that the spur to regionalism was particularly strong in East Asia and the Pacific. Asian regionalism, based on consensus and negotiation, however tended to take a rather different form to that of the EU or the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), both of which are particular configurations of legal instruments and institutions (see also Dale and Robertson, 2002).

Ironically, the Asian crisis in the late 1990s, while posing a serious question about the capacity of the existing Asian regional structures and processes to absorb the crisis, at the same time gave rise to some tighter thinking about regionalism within Asia, including monetary union. One of the outcomes was to "…to produce a growing regional self-definition of East Asia as a valid economic space with a discernible political voice" (Breslin and Higgott, 2003: 171).

This suggests that regions are not merely a functional spill-over; the result of closer financial integration and trade, but they depend upon and are created out of an emergent sense of collective identity. Similarly, Europe is not only an economic space, but it has and continues to emerge out of a project of identity construction which goes hand in hand with economic and political integration. Furthermore, regional identities are constructed through projects that might include inter-regional relations, while external challenges (crisis, competition with other regional blocks or nations) may have a catalytic effect on shoring up a sense of regional identity. And while it is often suggested that regions and inter-regionalisms emerge as a reaction to globalisation, some forms of regionalism and inter-regionalism (e.g. ASEM, APEC) are intended to facilitate a particular forms of economic globalisation or to ensure continued participation in the global economy, suggesting that regionalism is both a response to and a dynamic behind globalisation. This underlines that fact that theoretical and methodological approaches to regions and inter-regionalisms must take into account a world order in transformation, and the multi-scalar reconstruction of this world order (Delaney and Leitner, 1997).

Europe/Asia – Imaginaries and Emergences

In order to understand the wider political and economic framing of higher education as an instrument being mobilised by the European Commission to advance a strategic Asia-Europe relationship, it is important to elaborate on key aspects of the history and politics of the institutions and organisations involved; the European Union[vi], the European Commission[vii], Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting. Absent in this listing, though no less important, is Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) – an alliance of Pacific Rim countries dominated by the United States and excluding Europe. APEC was conceived by the Japanese and Australians in

1989 as a defence against a 'Fortress Europe' when both the US and some Asian countries were concerned with the consequences of the EU's single market (Kairns and Mingst, 2004: 189).

Observers note that there is a long history of links between the two regions, Asia and Europe. This is not only because ASEAN[viii] (1968) was created 10 years after the EC[ix] (1958), but Europe's colonial past means that much of the region has been covered already by European footsteps (Gilson 2005: 311). This is evidenced in established, though somewhat patchy, bilateral relationships between some member states of the EU with a number of countries throughout Asia, for example, Indonesia (Netherlands, Portugal), Singapore (UK), Malaysia (UK) and Vietnam (France).

The first phase of Europe-Asia relations (1967-80)[x] engaged with setting up the machinary for regular institutional contact, while a second phase (1980-1994) focused on broadening economic and political contact. During this phase EU-ASEAN relations were formalised when the EC-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement was signed in March 1980. A third phase and current phase (1994 onwards) has resulted in the creation of a new organisation, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM - in 1996), to overcome fundamental problems within the existing EC-ASEAN structure (Forster 2000: 790).

Given, as I have already noted, that the purpose of this paper is to examine the way the European Commission has mobilised higher education and inter-regionalism as a means of promoting Europe's interests in Asia, the predominant focus in this paper is on the European side of the register. Forster's (2000: 791) detailed analysis of the EU-ASEM relationship is particularly helpful in building an understanding of the complex and (often) tension-ridden nature of this relationship. He argues that by the early 1990s, it was clear that the Cooperation Agreement (CA) that underpinned ASEAN had four important weaknesses in regulating contact between South East Asia and Europe: (i) there was no EC budget to support EC-ASEAN activities; (ii) the focus tended to be on trade rather than investment; (iii) the policy instruments tended to be based on development aid and were relatively crude; and (iv) changed conditions in the wider economy had rendered the CA less relevant.

ASEAN also provided the EU with a rather limited window on Asia,[xi] and there was an increasing feeling within the EC that both the United States and Japan "…were stealing the march on the Europeans through the growing importance of the Asia Pacific Economic Council (APEC) in which the EU had been unable to gain observer status since 1993" (Forster, 2000: 791). A weak Asia-Europe link left the space open for a strong US-Asia one. The EC was also particularly concerned to engage with the growth of the various Asian powers[xii] and a wider conception of Asia than what was offered by ASEAN, and the possibilities for extending both trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) within Asia more generally.[xiii] ASEAN was also increasingly viewed as stagnant, even to its admirers (Capie, 2002: 151).

There were also other complications to the EC-ASEAN relationship. For instance, there were differing views among the EU Member States as to the kind of relationship they wanted with Asia. Added to this, in privileging ASEAN as a regional actor, this would limit Europe's opportunities for engagement with China and India – both of whom were willing to open up their economies to trade liberalisation.

Of particular significance for the EC-ASEAN relationship was a change in the nature of the EU following its transformation from the European Community to the European Union in 1992 under the Maastricht Treaty. To begin, the EC also sought opportunities to further its own political ambitions – to act in 'state-like' ways on a global stage. The active engagement with other states and regions provided a means for agenda setting and institution building in ways that advanced Europe's interest in the regional and global economies. In turn these engagements contributed to the EU's project of legitimating itself as an actor within the system of nation-states.

Within the new EU context, the idea of 'European values' also became more salient. Some Member States actively these promoted these values, using key committees within the new EU structures, in particular the European Parliament (EP) and the Council of Ministers (CM), to garner support for the insertion of European values into the various agreements and funding mechanisms. These ideals included the conditions for fair trade (labour standards, workers rights), the protection of human rights, democratic values and environmental protection.[xiv] Despite considerable reluctance on the part of the EC, it was nonetheless forced by the European Parliament to impose conditionalities on EU-ASEAN relations (Bobrow, 1998: 10). 'European values' were also strongly promoted in the various Communications from the Commission as part of its Asian strategy, with funding for education programmes conditional on the promotion of these values. This resulted in fundamental disagreements within and between the Asia-Europe regions, not only on the imposition of sanctions (for instance on China), but because this was regarded by some of the ASEAN countries as a form of neo-colonialism.

Added to this increasingly heady mix of discontent was dissatisfaction within the EC as to ASEAN's approach to regionalism. The EC is highly bureaucratic, whilst the ASEAN countries emphasize more consensual and voluntarist approaches to cooperation. This clash of cultures potentially undermines the efficacy of the various education instruments. Forster concludes his own analysis of EU-ASEM by arguing that by the early 1990s "…an economic relationship was embedded in a dysfunctional boundary agreement that no longer served the purpose of effectively and efficiently regulating contact between the two groups" (Forster, 2000: 194; Dale and Robertson, 2002).

In 1994, the EC published its communication, *Toward a New Asia Strategy*. However, it took a wider view of Asia, as a result overlooking the narrower set of geographical interests that ASEAN represented. This wider geographical embrace was driven by the view that the EU needed to head off the USA's interest in the Asian region and that it needed to engage with the emerging powers of China and India, as well as Australia and New Zealand. However the member countries of ASEAN were annoyed with their marginalisation by the EC. In a Communcation in 1996 - *Creating a New Dynamic in EU-ASEAN Relations*, the EC sought to overcome the tensions that it had generated, however, relations became progressively worse when ASEAN permitted the accession of Myanmar (Union of Burma)[xv] to its ranks. The EU immediately imposed industrial and agricultural sanctions on ASEAN. This created a major rift in the EU and ASEAN relations.

The impasse was negotiated by Singapore's Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong who proposed a new organsation; the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM)[xvi]. ASEM was a more informal, though also more institutionalised, meeting of the 15 EU member states and the European Commission, whilst ASEAN was extended to include China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (ASEAN +3). Within months the EC approved the initiative, in effect replacing the need to renegotiate the EU-ASEAN Cooperative Agreement. ASEM

provided not only a new opportunity to renegotiate 'Asia' and 'Europe' but its multi-layered structure enabled multilateral government-to-government, group-to-group, and bilateral contact. ASEM also pump-primed cross-cutting networks of non-governmental interests (business, academics and citizens), thickening the connections within and across the two regions. Gilson (2005: 308) also argues that ASEM is not only a useful mechanism for mediating Asian and European relations, but it contributes to the tripolarisation of the global economy by strengthening the 'East Asia-Europe' side (Gilson, 2005: 313).

The new Asia-Europe relation, however, has continued to be a fraught one, leaving Lee (2001) to ask why ASEM's widely celebrated appearance in the regional stage, with its lofty statements around the pursuit of strengthening links between Asia and Europe "to contribute to peace, global stability and prosperity" (Asia-Europe Meeting, Bangkok), so quickly evaporated. ASEMs more open approach to diplomacy, coupled with the lack of a core set of objectives, makes for greater difficulty in pursuing policy objectives (Forster, 2000). However, this is not the full story. Lee argues that from ASEM's inception, both the business community[xvii] and NGOs[xviii] were specifically invited to work with ASEM. This quickly turned into a form of critical engagement,[xix] so that by the time of the Third Meeting in Seoul in 2000[xx] a strong view had emerged that ASEM was being used to pursue a narrow, more instrumental, agenda of neoliberal globalisation, and that "…the ASEM process was more and more focused on supporting the WTO liberalisation agenda rather than pursuing its own mission" (Lee, 2001: 282). As a result, ASEM has been regarded a vehicle for promoting a narrow Anglo-Saxon mercantilist agenda rather than one based around human rights and development. The EC has also gone slow on promoting labour rights as part of the WTO negotiations in deference to China (Bobrow, 1998: 11).

Higher Education as an Instrument of Asia-Europe Inter-Regionalism

In its first strategy document published in 1994, higher education was identified as one of the instruments for the development of Asia-Europe inter-regionalism. However, while the earlier communiques from the Commission focused attention on the problem of an awareness of Europe in Asia which higher education was to address, more recent communications and strategy documents suggest that higher education is viewed as a sector that will contribute directly to Europe's Lisbon strategy of global economic competitiveness. In this section I trace out this development, suggesting that higher education within inter-regional structures is a useful means for promoting Europe's economic interests within the Asian region as well as Europe's knowledge economy project.

In 1994, the EC first set out an overall framework for European Commission relations with Asian countries in its Communication *Toward a New Asia Strategy*. The Strategy paper, covering South, South East and North-East Asia, emphasised the rapid changes that had taken place in the region throughout since the 1970s and the need to ensure an effective and pro-active presence in the region. The paper put forward 8 key priorities, including the development of more open free markets, sustainable development and poverty alleviation, and the strengthening of bilateral relations. It also emphasised the need for a raised profile of the EU in Asia and a more coordinated approach to relations within the region. Subsequent targetted Communications were developed for specific countries, including China (COM (95) 279, 05-07-95), India (COM (96, 275,25-06-96) and Hong Kong (COM (97) 171, 23-04-97).

This was followed with a Communication in 2001 (COM, 469) *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnership* (EC, 2001) intended to "provide a new strategic framework which would address the changes since 1994 and to establish a coherent, comprehensive and balanced strategic approach for our relations with Asia in the coming decade" (p. 5). In this second wider Communciation, the EC argued that though political dialogue had intensified during since 1994, and there had been an increase in trade, foreign direct investment from Europe into Asia continued to be poor, and there was still very limited awareness within Asia of Europe as an entity and region. The 2001 Communication also noted the acceleration of globalisation and the intensification of opportunities and challenges that globalisation offered. In the opening Summary, the EC concluded:

> …much remains to be done, for example, in deepening and broadening our political dialogue, in enhancing our bilateral trade and investment relations and strengthening our cooperation in the WTO and in ensuring our aid programmes in Asia can achieve their full potential
> (p. 3).

There are a number of points to be noted in this 2001 Communication. First, the geographical conception of Asia was expanded. So, while the 1994 Strategy paper covered South, South East and North East Asia, the 2001 paper included "…Afghanistan in the west to Japan in the east and from China in the north to New Zealand in the south, plus all points between" (p. 6). Second, the Communication indicated that the EU had increased its trade deficit with Asia – which it attributed to the EU's policy of generousness in helping the Asian region overcome the 1997 Asian Crisis. However, it is evident in the paragraphs that follow that a fundamental priority was the need to promote a more open attitude toward market liberalisation within Asia (p. 8). Indeed, the EC was particularly concerned with a perceived hesitation amongst the South Asian economies (ie, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh) with the WTO process (p. 13; p. 20), arguing that the strategy of more open approach to trade and investment had been fundamental to Europe's growth. Economic liberalisation was also presented as a key means for growth following the 1997 Asian Crisis. In this Communication they argue:

> It is in the imperative interest of both regions to see this system strengthened further, and in particular to see the early launch of a new Round of multilateral trade negotiations. These negotiations, on the basis of a comprehensive agenda including such key issues as investment and competition, will be crucial in helping revitalise growth in Asia in the aftermath of the financial crisis, and in particular to encouraging increased FDI flows to the region (COM 469, p. 10).

The Asian Crisis, however, had primarily affected the East Asian economies (Indonesia, South Korea, Thailand, Hong Kong, Malaysia, Laos and the Phillipines), leaving the South Asian economies only indirectly affected. Third, the Communication notes that the bulk of outward Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) from the EU has continued to go to North America rather than into Asia thus limiting the financial return to EU capital as well as leaving the region wide open to FDI from the US. Fourth, the Communication indicated a lack of confidence in ASEAN as a forum for effective Asia-Europe relations, suggesting that ASEAN had lost momentum following the Asian crisis. Finally, the Communication argued that;

> …there had been little development in the degree of **mutual awareness** between the two regions, with stereotypes on both sides still casting Europe as introspective and old fashioned, and Asia as a distinct and exotic continent, presenting more challenges than opportunities. Much needs to be done to raise the profile of Europe in Asia (p. 14).

A key means for overcoming what the Communication called a problem of "mutual awareness" (p. 10) was the strengthening of educational, scientific and cultural exchange within Asia through support for enhanced cooperation between higher education institutions, an intensification of academic, research and student exchanges and the promotion of structural networks enabling "mutually beneficial cooperation" (p. 19). Telling here, however, are the lines which follow this more general aim (in italics).

> Europe has a great deal to offer in the field of higher education and scientific research, yet the majority of 'Asian' students studying abroad tend to go to North America or Australasia as a first priority. *Equally, the number of European academics or students with links to Asia remains very small, while European studies remains an underdeveloped field on most Asian countries* (p. 20).

This reveals two important dimensions of the ECs agenda for higher education – one economic and the other cultural/political; that it might contribute more directly to trade as a service sector, as well as being a means for promoting the idea of Europe as a distinct entity and identity (through European studies) in the Asian imagination.

In 2003, the EC released a further Communication – *A New Partnership with East Asia* (COM 399/4). There was now a new sense of urgency for dialogue and cooperation in areas such as higher education.[xxi] In order to advance these policy areas, the 2003 Communication proposed launching a new 'visibility' strategy, "…using the resources of the both Headquarters, Delegations and Member States to spread a number of key messages" (p. 4).

An important reason for this urgency is advanced in the 2003 Communication; that recent reports on long term developments in international trade all predict that "…the centre of gravity of the world economy will have shifted to the Asia Pacific region, with ASEAN emerging as one of the world's largest exporters" (EC 2003a: 6). The Communication goes on to note that:

> Most of Europe's main economic partners and competitors are currently forging economic partnerships and alliances with the region and/or its individual members which could challenge EU interests in the region. Therefore the EU will have to play its part in this intensive interweaving of economic ties with South East Asia. Its strategy should be both offensive, seeking to improve the EU's position in this important market, and 'defensive' protecting its existing economic interests in the region (EC, 2003a: 8).

The 2003 Communication notes a worsening in the figures on EU's FDI into Asia, declining from 3.3% in 1998 and 2.6% in 1999 to1.6% in 2000; there was only a slight improvement in 2001 taking it to 1.8%. This weakened the already poor share for the EU of FDI into Asia and limited its capacity to take advantage of opportunities offered by the opening up of China (p. 9).

The EC's new strategy for visibility meant key mechanisms were now identified to take this forward; the Asia-Link scheme, and the EU-ASEAN University Network Programme (AUNP) which had been established in 2002 to promote cooperation between the two regions. Specifically the 2003 Communication notes (COM, 399/4, p. 44):

> Co-operation in higher education is key to:
>
> - improving mutual understanding and increasing awareness of Europe in South East Asia and vice-versa
> - re-positioning Europe as a major higher education partner and centre of excellence in South East Asia
> - promoting scientific and technological development thus enhancing growth and competitiveness
> - strengthening the economic and cultural presence of Europe in South East Asia (and vice versa).
>
> Lines of action
>
> - Develop regional and bilateral strategic dialogues with stakeholders at the various levels of government authorities, national associations of higher education institutions and national rectors conferences
> - Continue implementing the Asia-Link and ASEAN-EU Universities Network Programmes that are successfully promoting higher education co-operation.
> - Support scholarship activities through initiatives such as Erasmus Mundus
> - Promote cooperation in the field of culture with a view to enhancing mutual understanding between the civil societies in South East Asia and Europe, in particular through supporting the work of the Asia-Europe Foundation.

Several points can be noted regarding these Lines of Action. First, as a result of pressures within Europe (European Universities Association, European Commission, specific Member States), work was underway on the Bologna Process[xxii] aimed at reforming the higher education systems of European Member States to create a European Higher Education Area (following the Bologna Declaration in 1999) (Keeling, 2006). The purpose of this reform was to harmonise the academic degree structures of the Member States of the European Union to enable credit transfer and ensure quality assurance (Corbett, 2005: 7) as part of its own internal project—to create a 'Europe of knowledge'. Thus, not only were Rectors across Europe increasingly used to working together on the Bologna Process, but the Bologna Process itself was intended to create a higher education sector at the European scale that was internally coherent.

Second, following the Lisbon Declaration that *"Europe must become the most competitive and dynamic knowledge-based economy in the world capable of sustainable economic growth with more and better jobs and greater social cohesion"* (European Council, Lisbon, March 2000), education was now being drawn more directly into the orbit of the European Commission as a means for promoting Europe's knowledge economy strategy (Keeling, 2006). The European higher education area is conceptualised as the engine of global competition with the USA and Japan, as well as positioned to compete with those countries, such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand, who were now major exporters of education services (EC, 2005; Robertson, 2005).

Third, in order to further develop itself as a competitive Europe of knowledge and knowledge economy, instruments such as Erasmus Mundus[xxiii] were devised to enable

Europe to attract the best talent from throughout the world (not only within the European region) to study in research-based Master's programmes as well as enable European students to study in other parts of the world. The EC's position on the central role of universities in creating a future Europe can be seen in their Communication (COM 2005, 152) *Mobilising the Brainpower of Europe: Enabling Universities to Make Their Full Contribution to the Lisbon Strategy*, where universities are viewed as the 'motors of the new knowledge-based paradigm' to deliver the modern Europe.

Over the course of a decade, the use of higher education as an instrument and outcome of inter-regionalism had been transformed from a rather vague, economically-driven, foreign policy tool centred around dialogue to a more finely tuned means for advancing competitive economic and foreign policy concerns between Asia and Europe. The European Commission's S*trategy Paper and Indicative Programme for Multi-Country Programmes in Asia 2005-2006* illustrates the growing reach and complexity of the EU's Asia agenda, although as Gilson argues, the EU still retains less interest in East Asia than the region's economic and political weight would merit (Gilson 2005: 318).

The 2005-6 Strategy Paper lays out a two-tiered approach – an Asia-wide Programme and an ASEAN Programme (to include ASEAN+3 [of China, Japan and South Korea] along with India).[xxiv] *Asia-Link* is to promote partnerships higher education institutions in Europe and Asia is aimed at Asia-wide (25-35 million euro for 2005-6), while the *ASEAN-EU University Network Programme*, or *AUNP*, is directed at ASEAN member states (10-15 million euro but for all ASEAN activity, including education).

It is instructive to look more closely at the content of these two initiatives. The Asia-Link programme, administered by EuropeAid,[xxv] provides funding for projects that bring higher education institutions into partnership to develop resources, draw up new curricula, and improve administration. However, for the moment, priority is placed on low-income Asian economies, such as Malaysia, Pakistan, Vietnam, Bhutan, and China (Asia-Link, 2004). The minimum partnership must comprise two or more European partners and two or more Asian partners while grants are awarded on a co-financing basis (the Commission funds 75% of eligible costs).

In 2004 the Asia-Link Programme funded 126 projects[xxvi] involving a total of 550 institutions.[xxvii] The dominant applicants, however, tended to be European (Italy, UK, Germany) rather than Asian-based universities (basic statistics from the Asia Link Programme, 2005) suggesting the continuation of a European-centred knowledge paradigm. It will be important then in the longer term to look closely at the nature of these curricula projects, and most importantly, to ask questions around the nature and framing of this knowledge. For instance, how is 'Europe' and 'Asia' conceptualised in these curriculum projects? What kinds of questions are posed and what are the other sources and points of reference in constructing this knowledge? Are western paradigms reproduced, and if so, how does this process of knowledge production, circulation and consumption take place, and by whom?

The second main initiative, the AUNP Network Programme, has a budget of 7.8 million euro and a Secretariat[xxviii] that operates under the umbrella of ASEAN. Funds are available for 4 kinds of activities: (i) ASEAN-EU Rector's Conferences; (ii) Round Table meetings; (iii) Technical Assistance Missions; and, (iv) Follow-up Activities. To date, the content across these four initiatives has included quality assurance in higher education, the credit transfer systems within Asia and Europe, higher education and sustainable development,

autonomy,[xxix] regional cooperation in a globalising world, and borderless higher education. It will be important to study these activities in greater depth in order to discern more precisely the nature of the relationships that are being mediated and the extent of the mutual constitution of regional identity as opposed to the imposition of a European Bologna-style model on Asia. This is not a fanciful idea. The EC has actively promoted the Tuning Project—the tool for translating a discipline that is taught in different institutions and across national systems into competencies in Latin America under Tuning Latino Americana.[xxx] This is more likely to bring participating Latin American universities more into line with European universities and the Bologna Process (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2005).

For some observers, both the level of funding and scope of the programme for higher education suggests that higher education is nothing more than a bit part in a larger and more important drama that is taking place between the two regions. However, higher education offers several possibilities in this process that other sectors may not easily yield. First, it is part of an emerging market global market and lucrative industry and the EC is keenly aware that it has become a major income earner for countries such as the USA, Australia and New Zealand (Robertson, 2005). The Commission's interest in this market is evident. They commissioned a major study on the *Perceptions of European Higher Education in Third Countries* (Project 2004-3924/001-001MUN-MUNA31) which reported in 2006 in order to assess and progress this agenda at the European scale. Second, higher education institutions can be more easily mobilised within Member States national economies, not only because of their relative institutional autonomy, but because Member States themselves see their higher education sectors as playing a much greater role in processes of internationalisation and globalisation. Both Blair and Barosso, in their 2005 Presidential speeches to the EU, pointed to the importance of higher education institutions in internationalising and becoming more competitive in order to advance a knowledge-based economy.

Higher education institutions, as producers and shapers of knowledge, are well placed to insert a European identity into the Asian imaginary. However, it might also be noted that this is not an unproblematic idea, for it is not at all clear what it means to talk either about Europe or indeed a European University. Added to this is the problem of where these partnerships are located. It would seem that the EC has its eyes firmly on East Asia, however its Asian-Link programmes are located in institutions and countries shaped more by aid agendas rather than a more strategic set of interventions shaped by the overall objectives of visibility, marketability and credibility.

There are, of course, also problems with Europe's use of higher education as an instrument for inter-regionalism that arise as a result of the tensions within the ASEAN and ASEM Agreements. A key problem in the ASEM relationship is that the EC and EU members are often pursuing mutually incompatible objectives and we have seen how these different agendas (trade versus human rights) can undermine the ongoing collaborations and deliberations of Europe-Asia regionalism. Similarly, ASEMs wider embrace to include civil society has also opened it up to a critique of its neo-liberalism agenda, and to pressures for a more democratic and managed development agenda. However, the European Commission has continued, on the one hand, to rachet up the trade in education services agenda as part of the WTO/GATS negotiations and pursue knowledge economy strategies through the recruitment of brain-power (EC 2005) whilst, on the other had promoting the idea of Europe as a more civil model for democracy and a protector of

human rights. It is possible that ASEM will continue to be a vehicle for contestation around the neo-liberal nature of the EC's objectives destablising the EC's agenda.
There are other issues that raise their head. The EC has been critical of the casual and somewhat unfocused approach of the ASEAN members, and has sought to impose a more formal and rigid set of procedures on its activities. This may well lead to a clash of values between the European Commission, European partners and Asian partner as to what might count as evidence of activity and the nature of the deliverables. While these are more speculative thoughts on my part—the result of having worked with the EC on other similar kinds of initiatives, the EC's claim to statehood, and the subsequent concern with legitimacy and rule, means that it is more likely to enforce more contractual and accountable relations in order to secure legitimacy.

Conclusions

In this paper I have examined the way in which higher education has been mobilised as a means for promoting idea of Europe in the Asian imagination with the objective of strengthening Europe's presence in Asia. In the EC's early Communications, higher education was a relatively weak instrument, with a focus largely on dialogue and exchange in order to promote mutual awareness. However, since 2000, there has been a greater sense of urgency over the need to develop a stronger Asia-Europe relationship, in large part shaped by a concern with the continued weak position of Europe with regard to FDI into Asia and the need to take advantage of the opportunities offered by the opening up of China. A more complex range of instruments have been developed and deployed to develop higher education links. These are aimed at Asia in general and ASEAN in particular. However, the predominant rationale for the EC's policy and programme initiatives are largely economic; the creation of a European higher education export market, the recruitment of Asian 'talent', and the promotion of a European model of higher education for the Asian region. At the same time there is increased contestation over the ECs use of regional forums, like ASEM, to promote neoliberalism and the multilateral agenda of the WTO. And while there have been calls from within Asia to strengthen Asia-Europe relations as a counter-balance to the unilateralism of the US since September 11 (see Koh, 2001) and as a means for promoting cultural diversity, the various higher education instruments may well be regarded as a continuation of past forms of colonialism and a new form of economic imperialism. While in Koh's words "a dynamic Asia and a resurgent Europe have much to offer each other" (2001: 6), the current inter-regional mechanisms for the promotion of Asia-Europe interregionalism may be far too problematic to deliver such a worthy but heady aspiration.

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Endnotes

[i] Some work in the field of education has been carried out on comparing different regional blocs and their agreements, such as APEC, NAFTA and the EC (see Brine, 1999; Dale and Robertson, 2002), or the construction of specific regional spaces - as in the creation of the European Education Area (Brine, 2002; Novoa, 2003; Corbett, 2005; Dale, 2006), the higher education within the North American region (Barrow, Didou-Aupetit and Mallea, 2003) and Australasia (Marginson and Ziguras, 2004), there is no work on a political economy of higher education and inter-regionalism.

[ii] See for example the work of the ESRC funded Centre for Globalisation and Regionalisation at the University of Warwick

[iii] Considered as a step to strengthen anti-communist support within Asia plus a means of resolving intra-regional disputes.

[iv] (1989 - Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC); 1992 – European Community/European Union Maarstricht Treaty; 1994 - North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA); 1991 - Mercosur – Southern Common Market; 2001 – New Partnership for African Development (NEPAD))

[v] Between 1995-2003, the World Trade Organisation received 130 applications for regional agreements, noting that there were 70 pending; this contrasts with 124 that were notified to the GATT between1948 –1994.

[vi] The European Union or the EU is an intergovernmental and supranational union of 25 democratic countries known as member states. The European Union was established under that name in 1992 by the *Treaty on European Union* (the Maastricht Treaty). However, many aspects of the Union existed before that date through a series of predecessor relationships, dating back to 1951.The European Union's activities cover all areas of public policy, from health and economic policy to foreign affairs and defence. A key activity of the EU is the establishment and administration of a common single market, consisting of a customs union, a single currency (adopted by 12 of the 25 member states), a Common Agricultural Policy, a common trade policy, and a Common Fisheries Policy.The most important EU institutions are the Council of the European Union, the European Commission, the European Parliament and the European Court of Justice

[vii] The European Commission is the executive body for the European Union.

[viii] Membership is composed of Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Phillipines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam.

[ix] EU membership –[EEC – 1958] Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, Netherlands, West Germany, Denmark and Ireland; [1973] United Kingdom; [1981] Greece; [1986] Portugal and Spain; [1990] East Germany; [1995] Austria, Finland, Sweden; [2004] Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuaniam Malta, Poland, Slovakia, Slovenia.

[x] The EC began biennial foreign ministers meetings with ASEAN in 1978.

[xi] Because of its narrow focus on South East Asia rather than a wider Asia perspective.

[xii] Between 1990-95 almost half of the worlds growth came from East and South East Asia.

[xiii] By 1990, the ASEAN had become the world's tenth largest exporter, and had developed a trade surplus with the EU, while EU trade in Asia totaled $312.5 billion compared with EU trade with the USA of $234 billion.

[xiv] Portugal, for example, led the EU opposition to renewing the 1980 Agreement objecting to the relationship between Indonesia and Timor.

[xv] It was regarded as outrageous given Burma's human rights violations.

[xvi] Lee (2001: 283) argues ASEM was also a response by Singapore to the Eus East Asian strategy – an idea tht had been discussed in the EU around the time of the report on the East Asian Miracle. The idea of ASEM as an important means of bridging the political purposes of the two regions.

[xvii] The main forum is the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF).

[xviii] Given that NGOs have been marginalised within ASEM their Asia-Europe People's Forums have been a space to highlight the concerns of civil society and to articulate the people's agenda.

[xix] At the Third Summit in Seoul they established an alternative People's Forum parallel to the official meeting, seeking to formalise the non-governmental sector in the government's discussions.

[xx] Five Asem Meetings have been held; ASEM 1 Bangkok 1996, ASEM 2 London, 1998 ASEM 3 Seoul 2000, ASEM 4 Copenhagen 2002, ASEM 5 Hanoi 2004.

[xxi] Along with economic and trade issues, justice and home affairs, science and technology, transport, energy, the environment and information society.

[xxii] That is , a more competitive undergraduate degree structure; common readable degrees, credit transfer system, European system of quality assurance, elimination of obstacles to the free movement of students)

[xxiii] The Erasmus Mundus programme is a co-operation and mobility programme in the field of higher education. It aims to enhance quality in European higher education and to promote intercultural understanding through co-operation with third countries. The programme is intended to strengthen European co-operation and international links in higher education by supporting high-quality European Masters Courses, by enabling students and visiting scholars

from around the world to engage in postgraduate study at European universities, as well as by encouraging the outgoing mobility of European students and scholars towards third countries.

[xxiv] ASEAN +3 includes China, Japan and South Korea.

[xxv] The EU's development agency.

[xxvi] Projects funded include open-distance learning for Asian-European education, gender and development, Asian European masters programme, European-Chinese link in electrcal engineering. And teaching waste management.

[xxvii] These programmes are managed by the EuopeAid Cooperation Office of the EC

[xxviii] Located at Chulalongkom University, Thailand.

[xxix] This was the topic for the AUNP Second Round Table held in Barcelona (2005). Discussion centred on the role of the university in society, structure, massification, tuition fees and so on (see AUNP, 2005)

[xxx] Tuning America Latina involves 18 Latin American countries and is now in operation as an Alfa Europe-Aid project of the European Commission. At present, 62 selected Latin American univeristies are participating in the project (Gonzalez and Wagenaar, 2005: 16).