

# Workshop on the Future of European Studies in Asia

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## ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

### **Comparison Analysis and Synthesis: Asian elite perceptions of the EU**

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The “world’s leading economic powerhouse”? The “last bastion of protectionism”? A “great power of the future”? Images of the European Union (EU) among Asian decision- and opinion-makers are as complex and unique as the EU itself. These diverse images reflect a maturing relationship between Europe and Asia – two major global regions.

The goal of this presentation is to identify and compare leading perceptions of the EU among national elites in six Asian locations – China, Hong Kong SAR, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand. The sampling strategy involved a random selection of key elite informants and comparison of their perceptions across four categories – business, political, civil society and media. The empirical data comes from a unique pioneering multi-national comparative study, “EU through the Eyes of Asia” (2005-2007), the inaugural project of the European Studies in Asia (ESiA) network.

According to Brecher (1968, 298), elite perceptions and attitudes become one of the key inputs into a foreign policy system: “decision-makers act in accordance with their perception of reality, not in response to reality itself.” Correspondingly, the identification of the patterns of the EU’s perceptions at the elite level is assumed to enhance the understanding of the conduct of foreign policy towards the EU in Asia. This presentation focuses on the EU’s perceived current and future importance for each of the six locations and perceptions of its international leadership as well as global power. Perceptions of several special issues, such as EU enlargement, the euro and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process, are also addressed. Spontaneous associations of the EU held by the regional elites are also assessed and compared. Finally, the pragmatic implications of these perceptions are examined and some recommendations for both improving perceptions of and relations with the EU are suggested.