ASIA **and** **EUROPE**

Essays and Speeches
by
Tommy Koh

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by
Tommy Koh

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ASIA AND EUROPE

Essays and Speeches by Tommy Koh

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Dedication

*I would like to dedicate this book
to all the governors and colleagues at ASEF*

Tommy

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Foreword

Jay-Hee Oh

ASEF Governor for Korea

Chairman, ASEF Board of Governors

The year 1996 marked a watershed in the relationship between Asia and Europe. The first Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) was launched in Bangkok in March 1996, with the participation of 26 leaders, 10 from Asia, 16 from the EU. It was a historic event aimed at establishing a balance among the three major poles of the political and economic spheres — North America, Asia and Europe — by strengthening the weak link between the two regions of Asia and Europe.

ASEM, which was initiated by Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong of Singapore, held its second meeting in April 1998 in London. The next meeting will be held in October in Seoul this year.

Among the decisions taken at ASEM I in 1996 was the adoption of Singapore's proposal to establish the Asia–Europe Foundation (ASEF). This was exceptional since ASEM had vowed to avoid institutionalisation of the ASEM process. Establishment of the Foundation therefore is a manifestation of the importance the leaders attach to enhancing understanding and exchanges between the peoples of Asia and Europe. ASEF was subsequently founded in February 1997 in Singapore with the mission of promoting intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

The challenge faced by ASEF in implementing the instructions of ASEM leaders was daunting, to say the least. It fell upon

Professor Tommy Koh to take up this challenge as ASEF's first Executive Director.

Professor Koh, Singapore's former ambassador to the United Nations and to the United States of America, successfully rose to the challenge with skill, creativity and passion. His dual background as both a seasoned diplomat and an accomplished scholar proved to be an invaluable asset.

Under his able leadership ASEF has developed within a short time into a prestigious institution. More than fifty high-quality projects have been conceived, planned and implemented under the auspices of ASEF. ASEF's achievements, which were presented by Professor Koh at the second Asia-Europe Meeting in London, received support and recognition from ASEM leaders.

The ASEF Board of Governors met in Vienna in May 2000. They decided that, at ASEM III in October this year in Seoul, the Board would report to the leaders on the progress made in ASEF's activities and propose financial plans and other ways to expand the work of ASEF. The Asia-Europe Vision Group, which was initiated by the Korean Government, recommended the expansion and strengthening of ASEF's work in its report to ASEM III.

This volume bears witness to the efforts, commitment, creativity, passion and wisdom of Professor Koh. It also showcases ASEF's rich accomplishments and is an important documentary of ASEF's contributions to the advancement of the ASEM process.

Professor Tommy Koh completes his term as ASEF's Executive Director at the end of October 2000. The mark he has left on ASEF and the ASEM process, however, will last for generations to come.

Foreword

Edmond Israel

ASEF Governor for Luxembourg

Past Chairman, ASEF Board of Governors

Through his lectures and his writings Professor Tommy Koh holds a fascination for the people who read and hear him. And these people come from a wide range of society, from many different parts of the world.

This is because while Ambassador Tommy Koh is rooted in the culture of Asia where he was born, his thinking is borderless. It crosses the boundaries of civilisations and cultures. He is a man of the 21st century and represents New Thinking for a New Century.

For me personally, it has been a gratifying experience to know Tommy, to become his friend and to work with him at ASEF. ASEF carries quite distinctly the imprint of his personality and of his thinking. He has held the position of Executive Director of ASEF since its inception in February 1997. In the last three years, Tommy, a thinker and doer, has led the institution to implement nearly 60 major projects in its mission statement to promote engagement between the civil societies of Asia and Europe and to forge mutual understanding between the two regions.

We are grateful to Tommy for these achievements. At the same time I want to express my appreciation to those who have taken the initiative in publishing his writings. Tommy's essays and speeches reflect his personal conviction of the need to create

bonds of understanding and friendship between the peoples of Asia and Europe, so that Asians and Europeans may be prepared to address the challenges and grasp the opportunities of this common world of ours.

Dear Tommy, we wish you well. We are also confident that in the future we can continue to count on your support. We know that you will continue relentlessly to communicate to the world your message, a message of peace and tolerance that invites all of us to build a better world for our generation and the generations to come.

Acronyms

AEBF	Asia–Europe Business Forum
AFTA	ASEAN Free Trade Area
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEF	Asia–Europe Foundation
ASEM	Asia–Europe Meeting
APEC	Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation
EALAF	East Asia–Latin America Forum
ECB	European Central Bank
ESCB	European System of Central Banks
EEC	European Economic Community
EMU	European Monetary Union
EU	European Union
EURATOM	European Atomic Energy Community
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNP	Gross National Product
IMF	International Monetary Fund
MBA	Master of Business Administration

NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
NIEs	Newly Industrialising Economies
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OSCE	Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe
PLO	Palestine Liberation Organisation
SOM	Senior Officials Meeting
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
WTO	World Trade Organisation

Introduction

Asad Latif

Asia played an ancient role in the making of Europe. Europa was an Asian princess whose abduction by the Greek god Zeus, disguised as a white bull, is said to have formed the basis of the continent that bears her name today. Since those mythological times, Asia's contribution to Europe has undergone many transformations. Sadly, they include Asia having turned into Europe's Other.

The transformations preceded colonialism, but led on directly to it. "Asia suffers, yet in its suffering, it threatens Europe: the eternal, bristling frontier endures between East and West, almost unchanged since classical antiquity," Edward Said wrote in his classic book, *Orientalism*. Today, it is colonialism that provides the most formidable legacy of Europe's role in the shaping of Asia. From ideas to institutions, from language to law, and from values to venison, the realities of post-colonial Asia bear the enduring stamp of Europe. Attempts to recover Asia's authentic pre-colonial past by erasing the European intrusion have not succeeded, no matter how sincere and fervent they have been. Europe arrived as the quintessential Outsider, but stayed on to become the inexhaustible Insider. It became an ineradicable part of Asia's past.

There was a twist to that story after the Second World War. The rise of the United States, the challenge from the Soviet Union, and the Cold War eclipsed Europe in the process of dividing it into two camps. Decolonised Asia fared worse. Korea,

Vietnam and Afghanistan became sites for the contending imperiums of Washington and Moscow, deadly terrains where Asians were forced to choose between the capitalist and socialist versions of peace, justice and utopia. Europe watched listlessly from the sidelines of history.

The fall of the Berlin Wall and the downfall of the Soviet Union initiated the phase of history which the world inhabits today. Interestingly, even as the defeat of the socialist alternative attested to America's supremacy in the Cold War, it presaged the arrival of a world in which the reunification of Europe would redraw the boundaries of international relations. In Asia, that other theatre of superpower engagement, the denouement would not be as dramatic, but the region, too, resumed a journey that had been interrupted by the forced march of the Cold War.

In the aftermath of that march, which turned out to be a detour after all, Europe and Asia found a new freedom to walk together, if they so pleased. Finally, after hundreds of divisive years, the two continents could look towards the single destination of equality.

A pleasant step was taken in 1996, when a proposal by Singapore Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong launched the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) to chart the widening contours of the intercontinental relationship. The Singapore-based Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) appeared the following year as the most concrete result of that new-found engagement.

Professor Tommy Koh is something of an enigma. He is one of Singapore's foremost "Americans": he served as its hugely successful ambassador to Washington. When he turned "European" on being appointed director of ASEF, it appeared, even to his many admirers, that his new job indicated little more than the logic of diplomatic turnovers. A successful ambassador to the North Pole should be able to function equally well in the South Pole, and anywhere in between.

But Professor Koh, also an Ambassador-at-Large, took his Atlantic job to heart with the same quixotic seriousness that had defined his Pacific foray. His job was quixotic in an inverted

sense. Good envoys would not be required were relations between countries and continents to be good: They are necessary precisely because realities, tilting one way or the other, are never balanced to make relations good enough. A good diplomat does not tilt at windmills: he tries to ensure that windmills are not built on tilted ground.

As Asia and Europe initiated a new phase in their relations, there was a need for someone who could bridge the two sides by being rooted enough in one to reach out meaningfully to the other. Professor Koh took on the job.

The lectures in this book reveal how this intellectual, part nomad and part pilgrim, crossed boundaries because, being a citizen of the world, he is contained nowhere and rooted everywhere.

His speeches span the three crucial areas of economics, politics and culture.

Economics

On economics, he notes in one of his lectures that ASEM “is not and should not be viewed as being at the expense of Europe’s transatlantic ties or East Asia’s transpacific ties”. Rather, ASEM is the third side of the triangle linking the three centres of the global economy: North America, Western Europe and East Asia. That said, it is easy to forget, as he observes elsewhere, that although the US economy accounts for 25 per cent of the world economy, the European Union (EU) actually contributes more: 29 per cent. As for East Asia, its share of the global economy grew from a mere 9 per cent in 1965, to 15 per cent in 1975, to 24 per cent in 1993, and to 25 per cent in 1996, the year before the Asian economic crisis struck. That growth gave Europe an expanding stake in the region. Thus, in 1996, the EU exported US\$123 billion of goods and services to East Asia, more than even the US. These facts make the “huge knowledge gap” between Asians and Europeans all the more lamentable, although the gap can be explained partly by America’s looming

profile in contemporary affairs. The Asian crisis, terrible though it was for the countries affected, had one silver lining, however: It reiterated the need for Europe to remain engaged economically in the region. Indeed, Europe's contribution to Asia's recovery was substantial and, commendably, it prevented protectionist forces at home from hijacking the international agenda.

Professor Koh examines these issues and others, such as the lessons of the EU for Asian integration, and the euro's implications for the global balance of economic power and hence Asia's own prospects in the new era. His overall concern is to underscore what both regions must do, in partnership with the US, to first sustain and then increase the momentum towards globalisation in the direction set by the World Trade Organisation. There will be obstacles to trade and investment liberalisation, he acknowledges frankly, but there is no alternative to the process, he says, equally bluntly.

Politics

Does East Asia, home to the successful 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have the political will to take cooperation a step further and realise the vision of an East Asian Community? Asia's remarkable economic growth and social development were fostered in part by increased intra-regional trade and investment, which gave rise to the need for more consultation and dialogue. The 1997–1998 crisis slowed down that process, but it has also the beneficial result of showing East Asians “the desirability of uniting the region and building new institutions to serve the region”. Professor Koh does not deny the diversity of historical experience and current conditions that prevents East Asia from attaining the degree of integration seen in Europe now. But he hopes (and this is the hope of a thinker well-versed in the sobering realities of international affairs) that an East Asian Community is not a pipe dream. After all, what the EU is today began as the European Economic Community. And where economics leads, politics has little choice but to

follow. The trend towards an East Asian Community, muted though it is now, forms one of the underlying themes of the essays in this book.

Another political theme is the disagreement between Europeans and Asians over human rights and democracy. Professor Koh does not fudge the difference by settling for a fictitious universalism that denies the divergent historical and political trajectories of the two continents. Neither does he conclude that the twain shall never meet. What he does is to show why and how Europeans and Asians can work towards the bridging of a real divide by seeking to learn from each other's perspectives and perceptions. Learning is a far more worthwhile effort than the easy denunciation that takes the form of attributing motives to and casting aspersions on the other side's arguments and dismissing them as self-serving. Whether or not readers are convinced by what he says, his work as an intellectual peace-maker, building on the realisable foundations of empirical evidence, is undeniable. Astringent but not acerbic, pointed but not pugnacious, that role is one which more Tommy Kohs should be shouldering. In that context, what stands out is his ability to hold a mirror to both Europe's and Asia's views of each other even as he remains a Singapore official and interlocutor. That ability is, perhaps, the advantage which a scholar-diplomat enjoys. He seeks to base the necessary compromises of diplomacy on the dispassionate intellectual rigour which scholarship enjoins on its devotees.

Culture

Professor Koh's devotion to culture provides yet another strand of these lectures. It is a defining and sustaining strand. Man does not live by bread and rice alone, as he says; neither can even politicians politick all the time. Humans need culture to be themselves. So do Asians and Europeans, inheritors of two ancient civilisations. It is culture that makes them what they are today. With a keen, instinctive feel for the agency of culture in

the making of secure individuals and societies, he suggests how its resources, both traditional and evolving, can act as a catalyst in healthy and balanced interactions between Europe and Asia. He has no patience for philistines, but he also gives no quarter to culture vultures which fly in others' borrowed skies. In one of his lectures on culture, he confesses that he feels like a mosquito in a nudist camp: "I know what I am supposed to do but I am not sure where to begin." That jocular exercise in modesty is belied by his exploration of how the arts and culture can use the possibilities created by the international market in ideas to create networks between Asia and Europe. Their exchange should take three forms, he says: the exchange of finished products; the exchange of techniques or forms; and the sharing of the creative process. He calls for an index ranking countries by the quality of life, an index that would include cultural (and environmental) indicators in addition to economic and social factors.

After the conclusion of a major international conference in Singapore, a participant asked: What is the difference between a journalist and a diplomat? He gave an answer. A journalist is a person who bursts into a press conference and accosts a diplomat with the question: "Didn't you just say that woman has a face which would stop the hands of a clock?" A diplomat is a person who replies without batting an eyelid: "No, I said that when I look into her eyes, time comes to a standstill."

As the audience roared with laughter, the speaker noted that the target of his compliment was the consummate diplomat, Tommy Koh. There are no ugly women and men in this book. There are only humans, some ordinary and others extraordinary, and the continents they inhabit. Professor Koh's success lies in the extraordinariness with which he invests their everyday lives. He says that even while Europeans and Asians go about being themselves, day after anonymous day, they are building something precious.

It is a sustainable world. That world is not exclusively Asian or European. It belongs to all.