

# The Politics of Re-Orientation and Responsibility:

*European Union Foreign Policy and Human Rights Promotion in Asian Countries*

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## *Abstract*

This study focuses on the protection and promotion of human rights in the context of the external relations of the European Union (EU). It sets out to examine, in particular, the place of human rights within the framework of the European Union's foreign policy. While questions of human rights sparked a wide-ranging academic debate and resulted in enhanced levels of public scrutiny over the last decade, the research presented here attempts to fill a significant gap in scholarly attention. It does so by offering a critique of human rights promotion initiatives in the context of the Union's interaction with countries on the Asian Continent. The evidence suggests that the incremental growth of human rights competencies and agendas within the EU's legal and political systems was reflected in a number of areas of EU external activity, such as the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), EC Development Policy, EU relations with the African, Caribbean and Pacific (ACP) group of countries and the Union's New Asia Strategy. This article attempts to demonstrate how, in the context of EU-Asia relations, the EU increasingly defines itself as a value-guided, 'ethical' polity, based in a constitutional system of Treaties. As a result of this, the Union introduced a stronger human rights dimension to its dialogue with Asian partners. However, in respect of its Asian interlocutors, the EU implemented human rights strategies in a number of formats and with varying degrees of success. The text scrutinises, in particular, the Commission's 'strategy papers' regarding Asia and the process of the Asia-Europe Meetings (ASEM). Human rights concerns in the EU-Asia context continue to be widely investigated by academic literature. This paper demonstrates that the resulting, contentious, discourse about 'rights' and 'values' contains the potential to be both an 'enabling dynamic' for, and an 'inhibiting agent' of, a more intensive EU-Asia political and cultural dialogue. The text places a particular emphasis on EU human rights promotion policies towards the People's Republic of China, the Republic of Indonesia and Burma (The Union of Myanmar). It identifies and appraises three distinct EU approaches, which range from incentives-based and coordinated measures to a more coercive and punitive diplomatic arsenal.