



**ASIA-EUROPE COMICS COLLABORATION:**

*“Beyond Superheroes: The art of furthering cross-cultural understanding between Asia and Europe”*

**SEPTEMBER 2005 – APRIL 2006**

## **CONCEPT PAPER**

### **Background and Purpose of ASEF’s involvement in Comics**

*“The ancestors of printed comics drew, painted and carved their time-paths from beginning to end, without interruption”*

*- Scott McCloud, author, “Understanding Comics” and “Reinventing Comics”.*

Comics, with their roots in cave paintings, are a powerful idea. As a facet of our popular culture, they are typically associated with humour and entertainment. But the comics art form has also been successfully adapted as an informational and educational tool, with exceptional results. Because of their reader-friendliness, comics have been effectively employed to convey and explain events, concepts and messages that may otherwise not attract the interest of a wide general audience. The people behind the comics are very often those with a high level of social consciousness and purpose, and who want to make a difference to people’s lives through their work.

Comics’ influence on the masses rivals other conventional mass communication channels, such as theatre, film and television. Its reach to the grassroots - across all age-groups and in many different societies - is aided by its portability. Being visual, it requires basic literacy on the part of the reader, as opposed to a high degree of education and IT skills. In printed form, it frees comics from the limitations of wired communications or broadcasting infrastructure. In other words, this medium can be employed to reach out to audiences on both sides of the digital divide.

The comics genre therefore has untapped potential to further cross-cultural understanding. Specifically, through the use of a common visual language, we can use the comics as a vehicle to raise greater awareness in Asia about Europe and vice versa, and to relate encounters among the regions’ peoples. ASEF proposes to initiate a collaborative process between Asian and Europeans creators, leading to successive comics publications on such encounters and shared concerns between the two regions.

## Objectives

To achieve:

- A continuing process of collaboration that will deepen understanding amongst Asian and European creators, storytellers, artists and communicators by encouraging cross-cultural exchange and production.
- Products in published form that will promote discovery of the interrelationships between Asian and European peoples and societies, by relating their common concerns and aspirations through each other's stories.
- A self-sustaining series of further projects to realise the above goals, through sales of the eventual publications.

The publications would:

- make new in-roads to complement existing ASEF efforts to promote awareness, mutual understanding and dialogue on a range of issues between Asia and Europe;
- facilitate the development of a network of creators, artists, writers, and commentators engaged in the Asian and European comics medium;
- encourage and provide opportunities for multilateral Asian-European collaboration between artists and researchers
- create a wider body of popular and reader-friendly material on Asia-Europe relations using the comics art form.

## Framework

1 A team of established resource persons and upcoming creators and practitioners from Asia-Europe will form a collaborative team to work on a publication. Before the team meets, online discussions will enable them to exchange views on a prospective list of subjects, topics or issues that are relevant to their societies and which challenge them to come up with novel story-telling angles that would seize readers' attention, for example:

- Natural catastrophes that have stirred a common international outpouring of sympathy, support and action, e.g., European responses to the 26 December 2004 Asian tsunami, from relief to rehabilitation;

- Aspects of globalisation that societies in both regions are grappling with, e.g., how economic restructuring or integration as factors behind economic transformations have resulted in social tensions, and the responses to meet these challenges;

- Shared concerns about environmental degradation and experiences in successfully sustaining development, e.g., support for cultural heritage preservation and eco-tourism;

- European man-in-the-street perceptions of Asia and vice versa: is diversity overlooked?

- How societies in Asia and Europe are dealing with immigration and/or talent attraction: threat or boon?

- Success stories from Asia and Europe in dealing with the scourge of AIDS (or others), etc, etc.

2 The team will first convene at the International Comics Festival in Brussels for an exploratory meeting to:

- understand each others' work, against the background of their respective societies and cultures
- agree on an Asia-Europe theme for the publication.
- establish a workplan for the coming year

On the sidelines of this exploratory meeting, the resource persons could give presentations at public workshops being held for festival-goers. Our participants could also seize the opportunity to showcase their own work and widen their circles by meeting other practitioners.

3 The publication team would consist of:

- 2 – 3 resource persons,
- 8 – 10 participants.

Resource persons will be selected on the basis of their wide experience and established presence in the field of comics. They would be individuals who are already renowned for their contribution to this genre, not only within but beyond their national boundaries.

Targeted participants would be promising creators, artists and writers with a strong sense of social purpose who are interested in developments and issues that impact people's lives. They would see the ASEF comics publication project as an invaluable opportunity to be part of an international production team and to gain experience and access to a network of international comics practitioners. They would be committed to remain engaged with the bi-regional collaborative process. Participants will be selected on the basis of suitable portfolios, story ideas and motivation statements (See "Call for Participation").

### **Timeline (tentative)**

- |                            |   |
|----------------------------|---|
| August 2005                | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ To draw up a prospective list of initial themes for the initiative</li><li>○ To design the workshop programme</li><li>○ To select Workshop facilitators</li><li>○ To call for participation</li></ul>   |
| September 2005             | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Electronic discussions amongst artists and resource persons commences</li></ul>   |
| October 2005               | <p><u>Exploratory meeting at the International Comics Festival, Brussels</u></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ To establish the theme and approach for the first publication</li><li>○ To establish a workplan to realise the publication in under one year</li></ul>                               |
| 05 Oct '05 ~<br>09 Oct '05 | <p>Youths and Comics Programme (by Sustainable Development Agency)</p> <p>05 – 10 Oct 2005:<br/>Public Workshops organised in conjunction with Youth and Comics Programme.<br/>Potential topics:<br/>- Gaps in perception between Asia and Europe<br/>- How to collaborate to produce a series of outputs</p> |

*10 – 12 Oct 2005 (to be confirmed):*

Brainstorming meeting of resource persons and participants (programme to be confirmed)

April 2006

Interim Meeting

August 2006

Launch and distribution of Publication

## **Contacts**

Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)  
31 Heng Mui Keng Terrace Singapore 119595

[www.asef.org](http://www.asef.org)

Mr. Chin Hock Seng  
Director  
Public Affairs

Tel: +65 6874 9725  
Fax: +65 6872 1207  
Email: [chinhs@asef.org](mailto:chinhs@asef.org)

Ms. Soh Lai Yee  
Project Executive  
Public Affairs

Tel: +65 6874 9729  
Fax: +65 6872 1207  
Email: [laiyee@asef.org](mailto:laiyee@asef.org)