

Speech at the conference "Rising Asia, Anxious Europe", May 2nd 2012. By Prorector Thomas Bjørnholm.

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Foreign Minister Villy Søvndal

Your excellencies, Colleagues and students

As the prorector of the University of Copenhagen it is a pleasure to welcome you today at the conference "Rising Asia, Anxious Europe", organised by the university's Asian Dynamics Initiative.

I will give a speech a bit later - so without further delay I will leave the floor to you Minister of Foreign Affairs, Villy Søvndal

[Villy Søvndal speeches]

Thank you Minister.

According to Ben Wildavsky from the Kauffman Foundation, the Cold War's arms race has been replaced by "a brain race". A race where cities and countries compete for talents because they consider them imperative to success in the global economy. From the perspective of the universities, I can confirm that many countries and universities in Asia are becoming great powers in academia. And I can confirm that we see a new balance of power in science and technology. Within just ten years, China has tripled its annual investments in universities – as a share of GDP. If you only take the rise in the number of university students in China since 2000 – that figure outnumbers the total number of students in the United States.

With more than 20 million university students, China has created the world's largest student population in just a decade. And from 1995 to 2005 Chinese researchers increased the number of published scientific articles by a factor five. Today, only researchers from the USA, Japan, Great Britain and Germany publish more than their Chinese colleagues. Similar investments and results can be detected in other Asian countries.

How should we react to this rising Asia in the world of academia? With anxiousness as the conference title indicates? I don't think so.

Rather, we should continue to work together and facilitate student exchange and research collaboration with our friends in Asia. Let me tell you why. Seven years ago, the Danish Council for Independent research made a brave decision. They decided to support a young Chinese researcher specialised in the genome. Wang Jun was in his late twenties when he arrived at the University of Southern Denmark. He got his phd in Århus. Later he came to the University of Copenhagen. In other words, he had close ties with Denmark. Back in China, he became a key player in establishing the world's largest facility to conduct DNA sequencing – Beijing Genomics Institute. And he became a key player for collaboration between Denmark and China. Seen from a Danish perspective, the results have been impressive. Danish researchers have worked together with Wang Jun on projects which have been published in the Mercedez and BMW of science journals – Science and Nature.

In February, Beijing Genomics Institute opened its European research centre here in Copenhagen. Chinese phd's are already in Copenhagen.

And we are sending Danish phd's to China. All of this building on trust and collaboration between partners with complementary expertise: Ying-Yang, not "anxious and rising"! Let me give you another example. Last year, I visited colleagues in India, both in New Delhi and in Bangalore. At the heart of our discussions with Delhi University is the concept of "Frugal Innovation" and how we can introduce it at the university. It is a form of innovation with great

impact because it involves finding practical and cheap solutions to complicated problems relevant to many people. Frugal Innovation is a must in country with 700 million people living off-grid – with no access to electricity and the Internet. At the same time India is a country where about half the population is under 25 years old – therefore they are able to use new technology.

Frugal Innovation has great potential, especially in countries like India and China where millions of people leave the ranks of the poor and find themselves part of a rapidly growing middle class. Almost overnight, they demand the convenience of modern life but they rarely can afford to pay the western price tag. This is where Frugal Innovation comes in handy. How can you make technology for navigating a fisher boat which is easy to operate for an illiterate fisherman? How can you design washing machines which can be used in villages where there is no clean water and no protection from bad weather and animals which normally destroy electrical installations?

We will start a programme in this area – ensuring that Danish students are prepared for such endeavours too. Furthermore, we have recently embarked on a new academic programme termed “Modern India and South Asia”.

I would like to finish with a Chinese story about sea turtles. A sea turtle is called “Haigui” in Mandarin - and it literally means “someone who returns” - just like sea turtles who return to the same beach to lay their eggs.

The egg-laying beach is often far from the feeding areas. And the turtles cross several hundred kilometers of ocean to get there. Sometimes the expression Haigui is also used to describe the increasing number of Chinese researchers who work at universities abroad – and later return to China. In this sense, Wang Jun, whom I mentioned before, is very much a sea turtle.

At the University of Copenhagen, we fully acknowledge the rise of Asia in the world of academia.

But we certainly don't perceive it as a brain race only. We also see it as a possibility for brain circulation – to mutual benefit. We are looking forward to welcoming talented sea turtles from Asia to our shores.

Just as we expect to send our own "Haiguis" to Asia.

We can learn a lot from each other and do great things together!

Thank you. I hope you will have a great conference here in Copenhagen.