



The ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project

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Introducing the Project

Today's advances in the life sciences and biotechnology have created implications which have hitherto been unforeseen in the world. Today human beings have the capabilities, among others, of making more or less exact replicas of themselves, directly creating entirely novel genetic imprints of organisms, designing their offsprings so that they have desired characteristics, decoding genetic information so that many diseases which have so far been intractable are now within the purview of being cured, but on the other hand creating possibilities for discrimination and exploitation, to name but a few of these implications.

These capabilities call for society to pursue collaborative, sustained effort to understand these social and cultural implications. The ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project is a contribution toward such effort. The acronym 'LEMLIFE' stands for *'legal, ethical and management aspects of the life sciences.'* Funded through the ASEAN-EU University Network Programme (AUNP), which is a collaborative programme between the European Union and ASEAN to foster closer relationships among institutions of higher education in the two regions, the Project aims at promoting better understanding and awareness of bioethical issues through research and production of teaching material intended both for students and the general public. The material to be developed will form a basis for an international graduate degree program on bioethics at Chulalongkorn University later on.

The Project is an interdisciplinary one, comprising disciplines such as philosophy, law, management and the life sciences. There are altogether fourteen participants, coming from eight universities from the

EU and ASEAN. The EU participants are: Dr. Brigitte Jansen and Prof. Dr. Jürgen Simon from Lüneburg University and the European Academy of Environment and Economy (Prof. Simon is the European co-ordinator of the Project), Prof. Dr. Carlos-Romeo Casabona from the University of the Basque Country, Prof. Dr. Nikolaus Knoepffler from Jena University, and Prof. Dr. Ruth Chadwick from Lancaster University. Unfortunately, Prof. Chadwick could not come to Thailand to attend the first workshop of the Project (see below), and Dr. Minakshi Bhardwaj came in as the representative of Lancaster and as a participant in the workshop. On the ASEAN side, there are nine participants: Dr. Soraj Hongladarom, who is the ASEAN co-ordinator and the main contact person of the Project, Dr. Somparn Promta, Dr. Sutham Yoonaidharma, Dr. Pareena Supjariyavatr, Dr. Siriyupa Roongrerngsuke, and Dr. Sarote Pornprabha. These are all from Chulalongkorn University so are local participants, and there are three more professors from ASEAN universities: Prof. Dr. Leonardo de Castro (University of the Philippines), Prof. Dr. Le Dinh Luong (Vietnam National University) and Prof. Dr. Chan Chee Khoon (Universiti Sains Malaysia).

The participants come from diverse disciplines and backgrounds. Drs. Soraj, Somparn, Profs. Chadwick, Knoepffler and de Castro are philosophers; Profs. Simon, Casabona, Drs. Sutham and Pareena are lawyers; Prof. Chan, Drs. Jansen, Siriyupa and Sarote are experts on management issues. Prof. Chan in particular is a health policy analyst with a side interest in science and technology policy. Prof. Le is the only practicing scientist in the group; he is Director of the Center for Biotechnology at Vietnam National University in Hanoi.

The participants will meet regularly throughout the two-year duration of the Project. There will be four workshops, the first of which was already held at Chulalongkorn University in Bangkok last January. The later ones have been scheduled to take place in Bilbao or Lancaster, Lüneburg and then back to Bangkok again for the final meeting.

The First Workshop

The first workshop of the ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project was held from January 24 to 26, 2004, at the Sasin Graduate School of Business Administration, Chulalongkorn University.

The workshop represented the first actual gathering of the participants of the ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE project. Its main objective of the first workshop was to ‘jump-start’ the project by inviting all the participants of the Project to meet each other in person in an intensive, three-day session of meetings and discussions.

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Prof. Yongyuth Yuthavong

The event was attended by some fifty people from various institutions and academic fields in Thailand. There were also surprisingly some foreign observers who were interested in bioethical issues. The opening statement of the workshop was graciously given by Prof. Dr. Tatchai Sumitra, President of Chulalongkorn University. His talk focused on the need for interdisciplinary and collaborative work among not only people from various academic fields, but also among people from different universities and regions of the world. Thus he especially welcomed this Project, which combined at least three major academic fields, i.e., philosophy, legal studies and management science, and he warmly extended his welcome to all the international participants of the Project. Later on the two representatives of the AUNP Programme, whose

The main output of the Project includes production of teaching material, including design of the international degree program, newsletters such as this one, a website and a series of meetings and seminars aiming toward creating better understanding of bioethical issues among the public.

office is based also at Chulalongkorn University, came to the floor to greet the participants and the attendees. The first talk was given by Dr. Nandana Gajaseeni, a biologist who is now working as Deputy Director of the ASEAN University Network (AUN) and is acting as the ASEAN co-chair of the AUNP Programme. Then her European counterpart, Dr. Michel Gaebel came to present his speech. The talks focused on the role of the AUNP in promoting active collaborations among universities in the two regions. The representatives of the AUNP Programme were delighted that the participants of this Project organized a three-day workshop in order to talk about bioethics, biolaw and biomanagement and to promote their studies not only at Chulalongkorn, but also at the other participating universities and beyond.

The keynote speech was given by one of Thailand’s foremost scientist, Prof. Dr. Yongyuth Yuthavong. Prof. Yongyuth was once Director of the National Science and Technology Development Agency, the country’s leading science policy organization and President of the Thai Academy of Science and Technology. His talk, entitled “Toward Good Governance in Biotechnology and Life Sciences,” stressed the importance of the need for a sound basis of bioethical education so that the complex issues surrounding the issues are adequately comprehended. He detailed the various arguments, both pro and con, on a number of issues such as the use of genetic manipulation of organisms in agriculture, human cloning and stem cell research, gene-based diagnostics, medical biotechnology and a number of others. Most importantly, he told the audience how important it was for the lay populace to have a sound understanding of the issues so that they can be active members in the debates and discussions that will undoubtedly ensue. He called for a balance between the need for the country to drive ahead in its science and technology development programs, and effective understanding, debates and discussions on the social, legal and ethical

implications of these advances.

The next lecture was presented by Dr. Nares Damrongchai, also from the National Science and Technology Development Agency. He talked about this current project, "DNA Analysis for Human Health in the Post-Genomic Era." This project is part of an APEC-wide study of technology foresight, and aims at identifying and detailing the various salient issues that emerge as a result of the advances in genetic studies of humans. He emphasized that such studies need to take into serious considerations the social, economic and historical factors that affect each locality where the genomic study is introduced. Even though Dr. Nares is not formally a participant of the Project, his contribution was a valuable addition to the richness of the thoughts and ideas presented during the workshop. And it clearly contributes to the workshop's main objective of promoting awareness of bioethics among the Thai people.

Dr. Soraj Hongladarom then gave the next lecture, which was a summary of the ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project as a whole. This was to introduce the Project formally to the audience, and the content included the history of the Project, as well as its main aims and objectives, the works to be done and results envisaged, the identities of the participants of the Project and their institutions. Then there followed presentations and discussions on the following: human cloning and stem cell research (presentations given by Dr. Brigitte Jansen and Dr. Somparn Promta), genetic research, pharmacogenomics, databanking, and gene therapy (presentations by Prof. Dr. Le and Prof. Dr. Simon), intellectual property rights, bioprospecting, trade related issues (presentation by Prof. Dr. Casabona), genetically modified organisms, agriculture, agribusiness (presentations given by Dr. Jade Donovanik and Dr. Minakshi Bhardwaj), organ transplantation, death criteria and euthanasia (presentations by Prof. Dr. de Castro and Prof. Dr. Knoepffler), and finally on Violent Outbreaks: SARS, Nipah, and Management of Public Health, with presentation given by Prof. Dr. Chan. Each topic was preceded by one or two lead presentations and followed by free flowing discussion and the attendees of the workshop all enjoyed the intensive discussions and their quality throughout the three-day period. As one can see, the topics are very wide ranging, and in fact one cannot delve into any kind of in depth discussion and analysis here. Nonetheless, the workshop aims rather at identifying the salient bioethics issues that need to be addressed, and as such many issues have been identified so that they can be worked on later,

either by the participants themselves or by the members of the audience who might start working on their own.



Some participants in the workshop. From left: Dr. Brigitte Jansen, Prof. Nikolaus Knoepffler, and Prof. Leonardo de Castro

In the morning of January 26, the participants of the Project met together for a business meeting and the result was a very fruitful one. The participants talked and argued with one another, trying to iron out what was to be done for the next twenty-four months of the Project. Basically the group agreed on which part to take in the writing up of the course material, which is the main output of the Project. There are going to be twelve 'extended' syllabi on a variety of courses, which are intended to be offered to the students in the international graduate program on bioethics later on. These syllabi will be collected and published together in a volume. This volume is not intended to be used solely at Chulalongkorn; on the contrary, it will be published in book form and made available to the public. Moreover, the group worked together on the structure of the international program. Modeled on the regulations of Chulalongkorn, the program, leading to an M.A. degree, will consist of 36 credit hours, 12 of which are research for the M.A. thesis and the remaining 24 are distributed to 8 courses. There will be four required and four elective courses. The twelve extended syllabi will represent the twelve courses to be offered in the program.

The workshop concluded with another public discussion forum on the role of universities in the global debates on bioethics. Here the participants emphasized the fact that what universities can do best is its role in education. As Prof. Yongyuth said on the first day, there was an urgent need for the public to become better educated in order for them to understand what is going on and in order that they are able to function effectively in a democracy where decisions are made. There was a discussion on whether the role of

universities should be a neutral one, acting as a neutral forum for the debates to take place, or whether it should take a more active role and act on what they believe to be right. As one can expect, there was no

consensus on this point, but this also serves to show that there are more work to be done and more avenues and possibilities to explore in the near future.

Buddhism and Bioethics

Another in the series of meetings and workshops is a seminar on Buddhism and bioethics, scheduled around June or July, 2004 at Chulalongkorn University. The seminar will be in Thai and is planned out of recognition that Buddhism plays a central role in Thailand in deliberations concerning matters of value. Hence the religion is unavoidable in any discussion on bioethical issues. Topics to be explored include: theoretical perspectives on Buddhism and bioethics—Does Buddhism actually have anything relevant or original to say about bioethical issues?; How should one look at the Buddhist tradition in order to

find answers or insights?; and Buddhist perspectives on a variety of topics such as human cloning and stem cell research, organ transplantation and brain death criteria, genetic research and implications of the genome project. It is expected that papers presented during this meeting will be edited and published in book form afterwards. Foremost Buddhist scholars in Thailand will be invited to present their views during the meeting. The public will be invited to attend. Please stay tuned for more information about this exciting meeting.



Contact Us

Dr. Soraj Hongladarom, ASEAN Co-ordinator, ASEAN-EU LEMLIFE Project, Department of Philosophy, Faculty of Arts, Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok 10330, Thailand. Tel. +66 (0) 22 18 47 56; Fax +66 (0) 22 18 47 55. Project website: <http://www.asean-eu-lemlife.org/>; Email: Soraj.H@chula.ac.th