

CANADA THROUGH ASIAN EYES:

A look at online news coverage of Canada in South and Southeast Asia

INTRODUCTION

How is Canada seen in foreign lands? There are surprisingly few systematic studies of perceptions of Canada on the world scene, and more specifically, how Canada is portrayed in the media of other countries. In an effort to contribute to a better understanding of how Canada is portrayed in South and Southeast Asia - one of the fastest growing regions both in terms of population and economic strength - the Southeast-Asia relations division (PSE) recently completed a study of how news stories portrayed Canada in over 37 news sources in the region. Those stories mentioning Canada were examined over a specific three month period: October to December, 2003. The news stories were classified by topic to identify patterns and trends in the media coverage.

Although not claiming to be comprehensive (the study focussed primarily on the larger English-language on line newspapers in the region) it does provide a fascinating snapshot of how Canada is covered by the media in a number of major Asian countries. The range and number of stories that discuss, or at least mention Canada, are greater than first expected. Here are some of the general findings of the analysis:

- Canada is seen as a leader in e-government.
- In those countries where Canada has a significant trade and investment presence (ie. Indonesia), this investment appears to generate significant print media coverage.
- There is substantial coverage of immigration issues, with a recurring theme of how immigrants are treated once they arrive in Canada.
- Social policy issues in Canada are frequently viewed through a “human interest” angle, and specifically, how Canadian social issues and values relate to Asian social issues and values.
- In many stories on international trade and economics, Canada is frequently lumped in with the “Western Block” ie. with the United States and Western Europe, and this group is seen as adversarial and hostile to the interests of developing countries.
- Canadian government “travel advisories” for countries in the region receive significant coverage.
- Sports and culture are frequent reporting subjects. Reporting on sports focussed on Canada’s performance in soccer, car racing, etc. rather than intrinsically “Canadian” sports such as hockey.