



# APAC News

COLUMBIA WEATHERHEAD EAST ASIAN INSTITUTE ASIA PACIFIC AFFAIRS COUNCIL

Sept. 26, 2006

## Upcoming Events:

- **9/26** Talk: Professor Gerald Curtis: "Assessing the New Abe Administration in Japan"
- **9/26** Film: "Churning the Sea of Time: A Journey Up the Mekong"
- **9/28** APAC Roundtable: Where is Thailand Headed?
- **9/29** China Forum Language Table
- **9/30** "The Bonesetter's Daughter: An Opera Work-in-Progress"
- **10/4** APAC Private Sector Internship Panel and Harvest Moon Mixer

## Columbia Students React to Thai Coup

Thailand's military staged a coup early last Wednesday morning, catching Prime Minister Thaksin Shinawatra, who was in New York attending annual UN meetings, off-guard.

Demonstrations against Thaksin's alleged corruption shook Thailand earlier in the year. The Prime Minister nonetheless commands a strong following in the country's rural areas, where his social programs are popular.

Columbia students from Thailand and students who have worked or interned there have reacted in different ways to news of the coup. Aaron Clarke, who served as journalist in Bangkok over the summer, said, "What this coup proved to me is that Bangkok's urban middle class—who largely supported the military takeover—care



*The Thai military deploys in front of parliament in Bangkok (Photo courtesy of Keystone)*

deeply about democracy and political reform. They saw the ousted Prime Minister

*Continued on page 3*

## Secretary General of ASEAN Addresses WEAI

Perhaps chief among the few drawbacks attributable to Columbia University's now annual World Leader's Forum is the jam-packed schedule attached to the weeklong event. At times, this allows for little slippage and makes for some interesting geopolitical snags such as when a Bolivian leader's speech almost overlaps with the head of a Southeast Asian regional organization.

Those who were able to attend the talk by H.E. Ong Yeng Keng, Secretary General of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), were treated to a candid and light-humored discussion by the leader of Asia's fast-emerging political

and economic union.

At first working from prepared remarks, Ong Yeng Keng, discussed the future of ASEAN through a comparison with the European Union and then followed with a brief synopsis of the relationship between ASEAN and the United States. Noticeably careful in his choice of words, the secretary general sanguinely attested to the importance of the United States as a trade partner and ally in combating terrorism.

With that said, Ong was careful to outline *Continued on page 2*

## In This Issue

<i>Japanese Shrines</i>	2
<i>APAC Introductory Meeting</i>	2
<i>Asia-Related Events On and Off Campus</i>	4
<i>Jobs and Internships</i>	4

## Hong Kong's Secretary of Justice, Wong Yan-lung, Speaks at Columbia

Hong Kong's Secretary of Justice, Wong Yan-lung gave a talk entitled "Judicial Independence, Rule of Law and Human Rights" at Columbia on September 14.

Mr. Wong, who was appointed to head the Hong Kong Special Administrative Region's (SAR) Department of Justice last October, emphasized the continuity of legal institutions and practices in the city since its return to China in 1997.

China's National People's Congress (NPC) in deciding Hong Kong constitutional questions, Mr. Wong disputed charges that the SAR had lost its judicial independence.

In particular, Mr. Wong argued that Hong Kong's observation of basic human rights had, if anything, deepened since the territory's early days as a British colony and since its return to Beijing.



While he acknowledged the powerful role played by *Continued on page 3*

## Go 3 Blocks, Make a Left at the Shrine

By Patricia Slattery

Japan is a land full of surprises. While there for two weeks I found out just how astounding it could be. Imagine you're walking down a street in Kyoto, admiring the *yukata* of the young women and trying not to melt in the sweltering August heat. Then imagine the shock of coming upon a magnificent shrine in the middle of a shopping area. Yet it was so much a part of the landscape that it did not seem to be out of place in the slightest.

Shrines hold important historical as well as spiritual places in the hearts and minds of the Japanese. It is certainly a testament to their importance and value that this shrine still stands in pristine condition while a shopping center thrives around it. A shrine like this one was especially important during the time I visited August, that of the Obon festival. The Obon festival is a time of praying for the souls of one's ancestors and also a time of *bon odori*, or bon dances performed at various time all over Japan. The time of Obon is also very significant as a time of family gathering in Japan and you can often see families going to shrines together.

It was certainly a touching and awe inspiring moment for me as I stood there at the entrance to such a special site. I could feel the importance of this shrine by merely



Bottom and top: Shrines in Japan (Photos by Patricia Slattery)

taking in its beauty and the reverence with which people treated it. If you should ever have the chance to visit Japan I highly recommend toughing out the late summer heat and humidity to be part of one of the most festive times for Japan.



## APAC Holds Introductory Meeting

The Asia Pacific Affairs Council held its introductory meeting on Wednesday, September 20 to an overflow crowd of students drawn, no doubt, as much by APAC's offer of free sushi as the subject matter: APAC's plans for the year and the plans of six other Asia-related student groups, Korea Focus, Southeast Asia Students Initiative, Japan Exchange Forum, China Forum, Greater China Initiative and China Action.

After a late start—the sushi lined snaked out the door and past the kitchen—APAC's Co-Chairs, Brandon Hall and Manfred Elfstrom introduced themselves and the organization. Representatives of the other groups then introduced themselves and their missions and stayed around to answer students' questions. More photos are available on page 4.



## ASEAN Talk, contd.

Continued from page 1

the importance of SE Asian identity to ASEAN. In a response to a question from one less-informed audience member who questioned whether China might one day be admitted, Ong noted that while ASEAN does not solely rely upon geography to define its member-states, that a country like China would have a hard time passing itself off as inherently "Southeast Asian".

The ASEAN bloc is currently composed of 9 member states: the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam, Laos, Myanmar (Burma), and Cambodia. Papua New Guinea has observer status while Timor Leste (East Timor) is likely to apply for membership this year. ASEAN+3, a dialogue group for the wider region adds China, Korea, and Japan to the mix.

While the secretary general initially seemed hesitant to discuss the role of China in relation to ASEAN, he did not shy away from meatier questions such as one addressing the issue of human rights violations by the junta in Myanmar.

In response to this issue, Ong made this analogy: ASEAN is a family and Myanmar is like the prodigal son returned home. While ASEAN will never actively expel Myanmar from the family, the more that this maligned offspring does to reflect poorly on the family, the less the family will publicly defend it. Ong noted that the issue of Myanmar's military state is currently before the Security Council of the UN, and that naturally, ASEAN would comply with any resolution that emerged from these talks.

In discussing the growth and development of ASEAN, Ong asserted that the union aspired to reach a level of economic interconnectedness similar to that of the EU, but that at the present time, only high-skilled labor, and not low-skilled labor was able to transfer freely between member states. In addition, he suggested that while a universal currency was initially rejected due to the dramatic range of economic impacts it would have bloc-wide; however, the secretary general did not rule the possibility out for the future.

The secretary general, enlivened by the intimate setting in Davis Auditorium, chatted individually with attendees afterwards.

## Talk by Hong Kong's Secretary of Justice, contd.

*Continued from page 1*

days as a British colony and since its return to Beijing.

Where Hong Kong's laws under the British did not originally contain any human rights provisions whatsoever, Mr. Wong said that the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), which was adopted by the SAR in the 1970s, now creates enforceable rights under the Basic Law, the territory's mini-constitution.

There are, moreover, nineteen articles in the Basic Law that deal explicitly with human rights.

Mr. Wong described recent court decisions concerning phone tapping and requirements of prior notification for demonstrations as walking a careful line between the demands of security and civil liberties, with the court rejecting broad, heavy-handed police powers in both cases.

Mr. Wong held up Hong Kong's legal system as one of the best-graded legal systems in Asia, pointing out that its judgments have been cited in courts in the UK, Australia and Canada.

On the issue of universal suffrage, which has brought hundreds of thousands onto the city's streets in recent years, Wong stated emphatically, "Yes, there will be universal



*Protesters for universal suffrage in Hong Kong (Photo courtesy of the website [www.gonomad.com/](http://www.gonomad.com/) beourquest)*

suffrage in Hong Kong"—but said that the question should be "how" not "when" (i.e. he believed that discussion of a timetable for the transition to full democracy was unproductive).

Audience members brought questions about Hong Kong's compliance with international refugee and women's rights

conventions, as well as the treatment of Filipinos and other minority groups.

More general questions touched on the equality of Mainland-Hong Kong talks, as well as the prospects for political reform within China's one-party system. Throughout, Mr. Wong answered with the cool of a seasoned politician.

## Coup in Thailand, contd.

*Continued from page 1*

Thaksin as a threat to it."

"What remains to be seen is whether the military junta can bring about meaningful political change, and how quickly they can return the governance to the people."

Clarke added, "An irony of the military coup is that it was engineered--or at least legitimized--by Thailand's constitutional monarch, King Bhumibol. Although his powers are constitutionally limited, the throne is probably more powerful under Bhumibol today than at any other time in its history. Make no mistake, the elderly king who is revered throughout Thailand, is a masterful politician."

Tatchalerm Sudhipongpracha, a first-year SIPA student and former member of Thailand's civil service, said, "While the

recent military takeover in Thailand has been inundated by an influx of Western criticisms, the historic event last Wednesday, jokingly dubbed 'Coup de Lite', was widely welcomed by the Thai electorate up and down the country."

"I do not wish for the West to regard the coup d'etat in Thailand as an unfortunate end to the most liberal democratic government in Southeast Asia. Instead, it is in all actuality a step backward to move forward for the Thai society."

"The telecommunications-tycoon-turned politician, prior to the dramatic end of his political life, was notorious for his audacious tendency to emasculate all the democratic institutions, including our beloved Monarchy. He deviously hijacked democratic processes... for his business advantage. I personally

welcome, as do many other democratically-minded Thais, the coup and remain sanguine that the downfall of the Thaksin regime would be the start of positive changes in Thai political development."

In contrast, Olivier Roux, who interned in Thailand this summer, described the coup as a "surprise and a shock". He added, "Dissension against Thaksin was apparent but never to the extent that he would be overthrown by the military. In one night, Thailand's democratic heritage disappeared into oblivion."

APAC and the Southeast Asia Students Initiative (SEASI) will co-host a roundtable discussion on the coup this Thursday from 6:30-8:00pm with Professor Kikue Hamayotsu. All are invited to come and ask questions and share their opinions. Details on the event can be found on page four; flyers with further information will be posted.

## APAC Introductory Meeting Photos



## Asia-Related Events On and Off Campus

### Tuesday, September 26

**Talk by Professor Gerald Curtis: “Assessing the New Abe Administration in Japan”** 1501 IAB, 5-6:30pm

**Film: “Churning the Sea of Time: A Journey Up the Mekong River to Angkor”** Asia Society and Museum (725 Park Avenue), 6:30-8:30pm

### Thursday, September 28

**APAC Student Roundtable: “Where is Thailand Headed?”** 707 IAB, 6:30-8:00pm

### Friday, September 29

**China Forum Language Table:** 918 IAB, 4:00-6:00pm

### Saturday, September 30

**Discussion: “The Bonesetter’s Daughter: Opera Work-in-Progress”** Asia Society and Museum (725 Park Avenue), 7:30-9:30pm

### Wednesday, October 4

**APAC Panel on Internships in Asia Followed by Harvest Moon Mixer**, IAB 918, 6:00pm

## Job and Internship Opportunities

### Jobs

#### **Drum Associates**

Is seeking bilingual Japanese / English credit specialists and an assistant relationship manager to work in Chicago and New York City. Visit [www.drumassociates.com](http://www.drumassociates.com) for more information.

#### **Asia Society**

Is seeking a development director, membership assistant, assistant director for cultural programs, electronic media director, on-call assistants for events and a director for its Center on U.S.-China Relations. Visit: <http://www.asiasociety.org/about/careers.html> for more information.

#### **Catholic Relief Services / Cambodia**

Is seeking a program manager for an anti-trafficking project based in Phnom Penh.

Visit [www.crs.org](http://www.crs.org) for more information.

#### **Internships in China**

Is seeking media trainers and legal trainers to increase the ability of Chinese journalists in covering rule of law, environmental, public health, sports and cultural issues. Visit [www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com](http://www.chinadevelopmentbrief.com) and click on “job offers” for more information.

### Internships

#### **OpenMind Project in Thailand**

Is seeking interns to develop material on eco tourism, wildlife protection, basic computer training, English teaching, and teacher training. Visit: [www.openmindprojects.org](http://www.openmindprojects.org) for more information.

#### **AsiaMedia**

Is seeking interns for its online publication based out of UCLA. For more information, contact Angilee Shah, the Managing Editor at [angshah@international.ucla.edu](mailto:angshah@international.ucla.edu)

#### **Working Group for Weapons Reduction (WGWR)**

Is seeking interns to spend two months in Phnom Penh working on a variety of tasks related to the eradication of “small arms and light weapons as an option for problem solving.” Visit: [www.wgwr.org](http://www.wgwr.org) for more information. Interested applicants should send their CV to [wgwroffice@wgwr.org](mailto:wgwroffice@wgwr.org) and [cdhendry@gmail.com](mailto:cdhendry@gmail.com)

Please send APAC News submissions and comments to [jme2106@columbia.edu](mailto:jme2106@columbia.edu).  
To join the APAC listserv, write to [apaclist@gmail.com](mailto:apaclist@gmail.com)