



Weatherhead  
East Asian Institute

# SOUNDINGS

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**SOUTH-  
EAST  
ASIA**

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## On Singapore

With almost mechanical precision, the sun rises over the tiny island nation of Singapore each morning at 7 AM. Humidity is palpably high, over 90%, and within an hour, the temperature will rise to match. The sun, diffused and concentrated by the tropical dampness, renders a foreigner like me nearly immobile, but even the sauna-like weather, like most everything, seems to assert some definite purpose in Singapore, or if not, has served as an impetus for the kind of innovation that has driven the island from its origins as an insignificant Malay fishing village to a hi-tech financial stronghold and the world's busiest port.

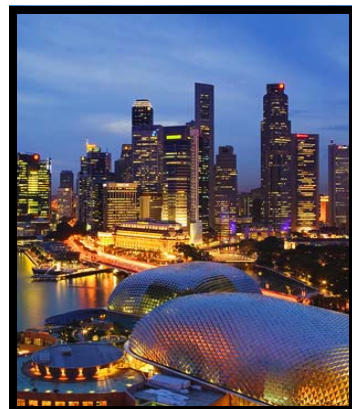
The heat, while serving as the limiting factor on my personal enjoyment, does not faze Singaporeans, and while the island is a mere 620 km<sup>2</sup> in size, with a population 4.2 million

strong, it is brimming with energy, bustling with business and bursting with a dynamic blend of culture and cuisine, arts and architecture, tradition and innovation. It is a Pacific oasis in the midst of one of the poorest regions in the world, small enough to be easily navigable, but plenty rich in sights and sounds.

Singapore is *the* food capital of Asia, and with just a few bucks out of your pocket, you can take a veritable culinary world tour in a single day, sample fare from Little India to Chinatown to the Malaysian neighborhood of Geylang, or for the less daring, from the quality food courts in the ubiquitous and aggressively air-conditioned mega-malls that line the famous Orchard Road.

For the first-time visitor to Asia, Singapore is the perfect

place to start. Singapore is famous for its cleanliness and order, but rather than reading a clinical sterility into the efficiency, it is more important to recognize the resulting peace and safety that pervades throughout the city's streets. It is ridiculously easy to get around, greatly facilitating your ability to explore and make the island your own.



**By Christine E. Kwon  
(CC'10)**

### OSCAR LEE SYMPOSIUM OF UNDERGRADUATE EAST ASIAN STUDIES

Friday April 18, 1-4 PM, 403 Kent

The Oscar Lee Symposium is a half-day conference of undergraduate research organized for and by undergraduates interested in East Asia. This year's symposium will feature panels and presentations on sexuality, development, and minority issues in East Asia. The panels are designed to facilitate conversation among both the panelists and audience. Please visit our website for information on our presenters: [www.eastasiasymposium.org](http://www.eastasiasymposium.org)

RSVP to [eastasiasymposium@gmail.com](mailto:eastasiasymposium@gmail.com) by Wednesday April 16. Refreshments will be served.

# Venture to Queens for a Taste of Southeast Asia

Sick of all the restaurants around Columbia? Don't mind traveling a little farther to have a good meal? Got a craving for some chicken rice or Vietnamese beef noodle soup? Then hop on the R train and take a trip to Elmhurst, Queens to get an authentic taste of Southeast Asian cuisine at two great restaurants – *Penang* and *Pho Banc*. Both are nestled within a small complex of restaurants around a parking lot and right across the street from the Elmhurst Avenue subway stop on the R, G, V lines.

*Penang* serves Malaysian cuisine, which is a cultural and gastronomic blend of Chinese, Malay, and Indian ethnic cooking. Everything from noodle and rice dishes, to seafood, Indian-style breads, and curries are typical of the cuisine. Do not be mistaken – *Penang* is not part of the Manhattan franchise that many people are probably familiar with. At this restaurant, the flavors, as well as the atmosphere, are much more authentic. The waitresses, upon taking your orders, call them out to the kitchen staff from wherever they are standing, then proceed to chatter away with each other while they wait for your food to be ready. Service is fast – food comes within 5 to 10 minutes, whenever it's ready. This is very typical, because in Malaysia, people subsist on "hawker food", or food sold and eaten at street-side, open-air restaurants run by hawkers.

*Penang* offers many of the popular Malaysian dishes such as *satay*, or grilled chicken or beef skewers served with a peanut dipping sauce; *Penang laksa*, which is rice noodles served in a sour (due to tamarind added for flavor) and spicy, fish-based broth with various other toppings added. There is also *roti cenai*, a flaky, crispy, thin, Indian-style bread, served with a small bowl of chicken curry for dipping. Other

popular dishes are *char kway teow*, or flat rice noodles stir-fried with seafood, egg, bean sprouts and dark soy sauce, as well *mee goreng* which is yellow noodles fried with onions, fried tofu, tomatoes and egg. And of course, what Malaysian restaurant can be complete without the dish that is considered to be "comfort food" for many in Malaysia and Singapore – Hainanese chicken rice, a dish that originated in Hainan, China that consists of steamed chicken served with dark soy sauce, chopped ginger, chili sauce and rice steamed with chicken broth and ginger to add flavor. If you still have room for dessert, there is *ice kacang* (pronounced ka-chang), or shaved ice drizzled with colorful syrups on top of various fruits, red beans, colorful jellies, among many other treats. Another typical dessert is *cendol* (chendol), which is shaved ice, red bean, green jelly noodles, coconut milk, and palm sugar.



If Vietnamese fare is what you're craving then simply walk a few feet across the parking lot from *Penang* to *Pho Banc*. *Pho Banc* has many locations around New York City. The restaurant is always bustling with families, couples, or groups of friends looking for a quick, cheap, and delicious meal. As its name suggests, the restaurant specializes in *pho*, or thin white rice noodles served in clear beef broth. Slices of beef are added into the soup, as well as cilantro, mint, bean sprouts, Thai basil, lemon or lime and on-

ions, which are served on the side. Other combinations of beef cuts, such as the tendons, tripe, or meatballs can be added to the noodles, as well as pork, chicken or seafood. As appetizers, *Pho Banc* offers *cha gio* and *goi cuon* – spring and summer rolls, with various meat or vegetable fillings. If you're not in the mood for something soupy, they offer various other dishes, such as the popular pork chop rice, which is a healthy portion of grilled marinated pork chop served over rice with cucumbers and tomatoes, or *bo* or *tom nuong vi*, which is beef or shrimp grilled at the table served with thin rice wraps, lettuce, mint leaves, and an assortment of vegetables with a sweet and sour dipping sauce.

Although the restaurant doesn't have a large dessert menu, be sure to treat yourself to one of the many beverages, especially the Vietnamese coffee – espresso-strength, drip-filtered coffee with sweet condensed milk which can be served hot or iced, or if you're staying off the caffeine, the *soda chanh*, or cold sparkling lemonade made with fresh lemon juice and sugar, is a refreshing alternative.



*Penang*  
82-84 Broadway, Queens  
(718) 672-7380

*Pho Banc*  
82-90 Broadway, Queens  
(718) 205-1500

**By Meghan Wu (BC'08)**

# About the Vietnamese Students Association

The Vietnamese Students Association strives to serve the Vietnamese American and broader Asian American community at Columbia University. We work together with various organizations on campus to craft programming, hold joint events, and promote issues that are relevant to our mission. Our events vary from cultural exhibits to political discussions to social gatherings for our general body. Recently, we have reached out to various Vietnamese American organizations in New York City, among them the Vietnamese Community Health Initiative. Our membership includes students from all the schools at Columbia, including graduate programs.

This past semester VSA, along with the Asian American Alliance, screened *Journey from the Fall*, a film about the plight of refugees who fled Vietnam after the fall of Saigon on April 30,

1975. Following the movie, we hosted a question and answer session with the director, Ham Tran. The film is unique in that it explores the paths of those who fled Vietnam and of those who stayed behind. The transnational aspect of the film reflects VSA's mission to remain mindful that many of our members feel as though they have two homes—one in Vietnam and one here, in the United States. Aware of this, we have sought to address issues in Vietnam, among them refugee resettlement and human trafficking, while tackling issues that Vietnamese Americans face in the United States.

Beyond the Columbia community, we have worked with national organizations and Vietnamese student organizations at other schools. Recently, we hosted the first-ever New England Leadership Summit for Vietnamese American college students. Co-

sponsored by the Union of North American Vietnamese Student Associations, the conference drew in students from over five different campuses throughout the east coast. Our theme, *Connecting Campus and Community*, reflected our collective desire to have more meaningful programming.

This semester, we will be sending a contingent to the fourth annual Vietnamese American Student Conference (VASCON) in Washington, D.C. VSA will also hold a Fall of Saigon commemorative event in late April.

We are always open to suggestions and we welcome new members. If you would like to contact us or become more involved, please email us at [vsa@columbia.edu](mailto:vsa@columbia.edu).

**By Nhu-Y Ngo (CC '09)**  
President of VSA

# Bangkok Center Grocery in Chinatown

Cooking a Thai meal? Worried about finding fresh Thai lemongrass for your dish? No need to worry! Head over to Bangkok Center Grocery, a small and neat Thai grocery store in Chinatown that offers a wonderful selection of fresh ingredients necessary to cook Thai food, whether prepared by a first-timer or a professional chef.

As the only grocery store specializing in Thai products around the area, this grocery store gets very busy, especially during holiday seasons. Normally, the grocery store is busiest from Thursdays through Sundays but someone will always be there ready to recommend something that will either add extra zest or tone down the flavor of your Thai recipe.

When I visited the Bangkok Center Grocery I met Tom, who has been working there for seven of the eight

years the grocery store has been in business. With a pleasant and helpful attitude, Tom pointed out that the grocery prides itself in stocking only the best Thai brands—the grocery store does not carry many kinds of the same thing. Many of the products are guaranteed fresh because they are either shipped or flown in from Thailand. Every month, the grocery store receives a new delivery of its items.

According to Tom, one of the most popular items in the store is the fresh, homemade curry paste, which is available in four flavors. Other fresh products include lemongrass, basil, Thai chili and kaffir lime leaves, which are very difficult to find in the city. The grocery store also offers a wide selection of popular pastes, oils and sauces, such as oyster sauce, fish sauce, spring rolls sauce, chili paste, satay peanut sauce, sesame oil and chili oil.

Some other products unique to the store are Thai Fanta soda (which Tom claims tastes different than American Fanta, although it comes in the same bottle) and Thai Pocky sticks (Japanese chocolate-covered breadsticks). The grocery store also carries many of the latest Thai magazines and cookbooks.

For those less adept in cooking, there are many frozen Thai dinners available, ready to be microwaved and consumed. Thai fried rice with basil and shrimp ready in a few minutes? Sounds like a delicious study break!

Bangkok Center Grocery  
104 Mosco Street (Chinatown)  
6, N, R, Q, W, J, M, Z to Canal St.  
(212) 732-8916  
[www.thai-grocery.com](http://www.thai-grocery.com)

**By Amy Chen (BC '10)**

# Southeast Asia In New York City

## On-Campus Events

- **Brownbag Discussion: "Navigating the Unknown: Malaysian Elections and Beyond"**  
Bridget Welsh, Assistant Professor Southeast Asia Studies Program, Johns Hopkins University  
Friday, April 4th, 1:00-2:30pm (IAB, room 918)
- "Human trafficking and slavery in contemporary Southeast Asia: Realities from field experience with local informants, prostitutes, pimps, policemen, investigators, and experts."  
Screening of the documentary film *Mekong Butterflies* followed by a discussion with Social Anthropologist Dr. Pierre Le Roux and Christina Arnold, Founder of Prevent Human Trafficking  
Friday, April 11th, 5:00-7:00pm (IAB, room 411)

## Off-Campus Current Events

- **Vietnamese film screening: Trai Tim Be Bong or "The Little Heart,"** directed by Nguyen Thanh Van  
Winner of the Global Film Initiative Award, 2007, and the Viet Nam Cinematography Association Silver Kite 2007 for best film, best director, best actress, and best music.  
A discussion with director Mr. Nguyen Thanh Van, cinematographer Mr. Nguyen Huu Tuan and star actress Ms. Hong Anh will follow the screening.  
Saturday April 5th, 7:00pm – 9:00pm (Cantor Film Center, 36 East 8th Street & 5th Ave, room 200)
- **Free Guided Tour of "Hindu and Buddhist Vision in Indian and Southeast Asian Art"**  
A wide-ranging survey of South and Southeast Asian art, featuring archaeological material, sculpture, painting, and decorative art.  
Every Tuesday through Friday at 11:30 am (Great Hall, Metropolitan Museum of Art, 1000 Fifth Avenue)



## Weatherhead East Asian Institute

### About SOUNDINGS: East Asia Monthly

Published monthly by the Weatherhead Undergraduate Council, SOUNDINGS aims to help better incorporate undergraduates into the broader East Asian Studies community at Columbia by providing increased access to information about East Asia-related groups, activities, and events. Incorporating academic as well as non-academic news and listings, it seeks to help interested undergraduates further pursue their interest in East Asia, whatever form it may take.

SOUNDINGS is edited by Rachele Meyer (rdm2110@columbia.edu).

### About the Weatherhead East Asian Institute

Since its establishment in 1949, Columbia University's Weatherhead East Asian Institute has been a major center for research, teaching, and publishing on modern and contemporary Asia. The Institute's mission is to train new generations of Asian experts in the humanities, social sciences, and the professions and to enhance understanding of East Asia in the wider community.

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<http://www.columbia.edu/cu/weai/soundings.html>