

First EWC International Media Conference: Changing Dynamics in the Asia Pacific



Changing Dynamics in the Asia Pacific
Economic Might, Media Challenge
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Novotel Bangkok Siam Square



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“Journalists as gatekeepers have lost sole control of the information flow,” stated Sheila Coronel, director of the Tony Stabile Center for Investigative Journalism at Columbia University during her keynote address at the East-West Center’s first international media conference. She asserted that the news media at this critical juncture must embrace new technologies, new ways of thinking and changing media regulation regimes, emphasizing the use of citizen journalism, blogging, cell phone reports and pictures as well as other forms of electronic democracy. “Those new forms will not replace, but will take their place alongside the old journalism,” she said.

The conference, “Changing Dynamics in the Asia Pacific: Power Politics, Economic Might, Media Challenges,” held in Bangkok in late January and co-hosted by the National Press Council of Thailand, attracted some 200 journalists and other media professionals from 21 nations seeking frontline perspectives on important news and media issues throughout the Asia Pacific and United States.

“Journalists always have the same instinct; therefore we easily become friends,” remarked Ina Hisayoshi, Tokyo’s *Nikkei Shimbun* editorial editor, at the conference. “If mutual understandings among the journalists have been deepened, it could lead to preventive journalism in international conflict.”

The conference included a look at China’s regional and global impact, New Media in the Asia Pacific, and New Media business models. Featured presenter Li Datong, Senior Editor at China Youth Daily and a longtime advocate of a more open and independent press in China, painted a positive picture of the media climate in China today.



“Even with continued strict control by China’s government,” he stated, “the development of democracy in Chinese media is irreversible.”

During his keynote address on “Eternal Vigilance: The Role of the Media in East Asia Community Building,” Dr. Surin Pitsuwan, ASEAN Secretary General and former Foreign Minister of Thailand, emphasized, “The road to reconciliation between the Muslim and Western world runs through South-east Asia.” He noted that half of the population of the region encompassing ASEAN is Muslim and is generally a moderate, progressive and open population that has much to teach to the rest of the world.

Newsgathering trips supplemented the conference exposing journalists to Mae Sot, a frontier town along the Burma border, and Klong Toey, Bangkok’s largest slum, among other places. In Mae Sot, journalists met with Burmese refugees, factory workers, monks, former political prisoners, health providers, and educators serving the refugee population. While in Klong Toey, journalists interviewed the founders of the Human Development Foundation, a nondenominational, community-based field organization, which now operates kindergartens and orphanages for slum children and a care home for mothers and children with AIDS.

Top Left: Panelist Kavi Chongkittavorn of The Nation, Bangkok discusses China’s regional impact. Bottom Left: ASEAN Secretary General Surin Pitsuwan delivers his keynote speech. Top Right: The conference, organized by EWC Media Programs Coordinator Susan Kreifels (front row, center), drew alumni from past media programs. Bottom Right: Lavender Wang (from i-CABLE, Hong Kong) challenges a panelist.

