Welcome to Our Incoming MA, MIPP and PhD Students!

Dear Colleagues and Friends:

SAIS Asia students and faculty had a busy summer. Our students interned for a range of organizations in Washington and Asia, including U.S. Embassies and government agencies, multilateral organizations, and NGOs. Our faculty spent the summer conducting research, participating in policy fora, and writing articles and monographs. In August, South Asia Studies Professor Walter Andersen published his second book on the RSS, the Hindu nationalist organization in India.

In September, we welcomed incoming students concentrating in Japan, Korea, South Asia and Southeast Asia studies. Our newest SAISers bring distinguished education and professional backgrounds and arrived from across the globe to study policy and pursue research and scholarship. During the first week of school, our faculty members discussed their fall classes and mingled with students at our concentrator meeting and reception. At the end of the week, first year concentrators participated in our second annual Getaway Day to the U.S. Congress, where they joined a roundtable discussion with Congressman Joaquin Castro, who serves on the House Foreign Affairs and Intelligence Committees.

This year, we are offering new courses in Asian Studies and South Asia Studies and hosting experts and practitioners at our monthly policy luncheons and program discussions. Our September luncheon featured Susan Thornton, a senior State Department official and career diplomat, who discussed challenges facing the Trump Administration in the Indo-Pacific. In October, we hosted Ambassador Ashok Mirpuri of Singapore, who discussed the emerging geopolitical structure in Asia. Our November policy luncheon will feature Changyong Rhee, the Director for Asia and Pacific at the International Monetary Fund. We also supported events and activities in our individual programs.

We hope you enjoy reading about our research and activities as we look forward to a productive year for our students and program.

Sincerely,

Devesh Kapur, Asia Program Director and Starr Foundation Professor of Asian Studies
Sharon Yanagi, Asia Program Associate Director
On September 7, first-year Asia Programs concentrators visited Capitol Hill, hosted by Rep. Joaquin Castro (D-TX). We started the morning with a Capitol tour before settling in for a discussion. Having come to SAIS from the Hill, I knew we were in for a treat. As a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee and co-chair of the Japan and ASEAN Caucuses, Rep. Castro is one of the most actively engaged Members of Congress on U.S. relations with Asia, and that depth of knowledge was apparent as he fielded questions from SAIS students. As this was one of the first events to bring together all of the Asia studies concentrators, the session really underscored the diversity of backgrounds, views, and policy interests in Asia Programs. Castro was pressed on a host of issues, including the U.S.-India relationship, the long-term implications of amending Article IX of the Japanese Constitution, and the outlook for the approaching midterm elections.

After our discussion with Rep. Castro, we had lunch with Mark Manyin, Specialist in Asian Affairs for the Congressional Research Service (CRS). CRS is the nonpartisan research arm of the Library of Congress, and they play a tremendously important role in informing the debates in Congress. Mark opened with a discussion of the North Korean nuclear program and then also took questions from students.

The two discussions--with a policymaker who could speak to the political dynamics around U.S.-Asia relations, and with an expert who provided wider context--underscored the relevance of regional studies to some of the most pressing policy problems facing the United States, and how closely tied study and practice are at SAIS.
Asia Programs:
September Policy Luncheon: Susan Thornton, Acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs

On September 25, Johns Hopkins SAIS Asia Programs hosted Susan Thornton at our first policy luncheon discussion of the year. As Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary and acting Assistant Secretary of State for East Asian and Pacific Affairs from 2014-2018, she was the senior U.S. diplomat for Asia under the Obama and Trump Administrations and played a significant role in advancing U.S. policies in critical negotiations across Asia. Ms. Thornton, a career diplomat and SAIS alumnus, retired in September after 27 years in the Foreign Service.

Ms. Thornton gave a comprehensive overview of U.S. diplomacy in the Asia region, and discussed the challenges and opportunities facing the Trump Administration’s Indo-Pacific strategy. Students asked for her views on a number of flashpoint issues in U.S.-Asia relations, including the U.S. Alliance system, the Administration’s evolving North Korea policy, and cross-Strait relations. She discussed the importance of diplomacy and encouraged SAIS students to consider careers in the Foreign Service.
On Wednesday 31, SAIS Asia Programs hosted Ashok Mirpuri, Singapore’s Ambassador to the United States. Ambassador Mirpuri gave an informative lecture on the emerging political and economic dynamics in East Asia and the challenges facing ASEAN. He started with an overview of economic development and evolving security relationships in Asia over the last half-century and then discussed the emerging geopolitical landscape in the region and ASEAN’s role in it. Ambassador Mirpuri emphasized the role of technology, changes in U.S. – China relations, the backlash against globalization and discussed how these aspects are fundamentally linked. He highlighted attempts on the part of different Asian governments to provide connectivity through efforts such as the Belt and Road Initiative and Act East as well as regional trade agreements such as RCEP and CPTPP. Students asked a range of questions about cyber technology, extremism and non-traditional security threats, soft power, and the impact of Chinese diaspora in the Southeast Asian region.
On October 4, SAIS Asia Programs welcomed Professor Zhihua Shen from East China Normal University and Professor Yafeng Xia from Long Island University. They recently co-wrote a book entitled *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino–North Korean Relations, 1949–1976*. Professor Shen compared Chinese perceptions of North Korea under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. He touched on five key factors that influenced a change in relations between China and North Korea: attitudes among Chinese leadership, ideology, diplomacy, economy, and geopolitical factors as well as the shifting dynamics between China, the United States, the Soviet Union, and South Korea.

South Asia Studies:
**Roundtable Discussion with Rajeev Gowda, Indian National Congress Member of Parliament and National Spokesperson**

On September 18, SAIS Asia Programs held our first fall South Asia Studies roundtable discussion with Rajeev Gowda, a member of the Indian parliament since July 2014, currently serves as the national spokesperson for the Indian National Congress. From 2011 to 2014, he was a member of the Central Board of Directors of the Reserve Bank of India.

Students and faculty engaged Mr. Gowda in a discussion about the future of the Indian National Congress Party and the most pressing issues the party faces regarding the 2019 Indian national elections.

Korea Studies:
**Lecture with Zhihua Shen**
*Professor of History, East China Normal University*

On October 4, SAIS Asia Programs welcomed Professor Zhihua Shen from East China Normal University and Professor Yafeng Xia from Long Island University. They recently co-wrote a book entitled *A Misunderstood Friendship: Mao Zedong, Kim Il-sung, and Sino–North Korean Relations, 1949–1976*. Professor Shen compared Chinese perceptions of North Korea under the leadership of Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping. He touched on five key factors that influenced a change in relations between China and North Korea: attitudes among Chinese leadership, ideology, diplomacy, economy, and geopolitical factors as well as the shifting dynamics between China, the United States, the Soviet Union, and South Korea.
Dr. Devesh Kapur, Starr Foundation South Asia Studies Professor and Director of Asia Programs, contributed a timely article, “Public Institutions: What India and US can learn from each other,” which was featured in the Indian publication, The Print. Professor Kapur compared the Supreme Court systems in the United States and India, analyzing strengths and weaknesses in the institutional design in each country, and identifying areas where each country can learn from the other’s institutional design. The main lesson however, is that no matter what the institutional design, hyper-polarization will inevitably weaken and ultimately destroy the institutional foundations of any democracy. He concluded that it is better to reduce the stakes in politics than to simply hope that the institutions will hold no matter how high the stakes.

Professor Kapur also contributed an Op Ed to the Financial Times, The Battle between India’s Central Bank and the Government has Deep Roots, on November 4th.

Dr. Kent Calder, Vice Dean for Faculty Affairs, Director of the Edwin O. Reischauer Center for East Asian Studies and Professor of Japan Studies, published a monograph entitled, “The Bay of Bengal: Political-Economic Transition and Strategic Implications,” in July 2018 (Sasakawa Peace Foundation, Tokyo, Japan). He discussed the deepening relationship among the countries of South Asia and Southeast Asia that border the Bay of Bengal, and how China, Japan, and the United States are affecting that equation. He also considered the broader implications for world affairs of geo-economic changes in the Bay of Bengal, a region lying along the sea lanes to the Persian Gulf and of increasing strategic importance.

Dr. James Person, Professor of Korea Studies, contributed an article, “North Korea in 1956: Reconsidering the August Plenum and the Sino-Soviet joint intervention,” in Cold War History. Professor Person utilized newly available Soviet and Chinese records to challenge the standard narratives of two critical events: the August Plenum of the Korean Workers’ Party and the joint Sino-Soviet party intervention in September 1956. He argued that although there was discontent and desire for reform among some officials, there was no real challenge to Kim Il Sung’s official position, either from domestic opposition or from intervening Soviet and Chinese officials. These two events did however spark a major turning point in North Korean domestic politics and its relations with patron allies. After the events of August and September 1956, Kim isolated malcontent officials by labelling them as factionalists and cracked down on those with ties to Moscow and Beijing.
Faculty Research Spotlight:
Walter Andersen

Nearly thirty years after his landmark book on the Rashtriya Seva Sangh (RSS), Professor Walter Andersen, Senior Adjunct Professor of South Asia Studies, has released a new book on the same politically controversial Hindu nationalist organization in India. The RSS: A View to the Inside co-written with Shridhar Damle provides deep insight into the evolution of the RSS in response to India’s fast-changing socio-political environment. The book relies on nine case studies to further understand the internal structure of the organization, its relationship to the ruling party and its affiliates, and its wider influence on Indian politics and policy.

Sanam Shetty, China Studies, SAIS MA 2019 interviewed Professor Andersen about his book and his perspective on the organization.

How did you first become interested in studying the RSS?

Two professors at U. Chicago, Susanne and Lloyd Rudolph, first introduced me to the RSS. They supervised my doctoral dissertation which included a section on the RSS. They later encouraged me to leverage the experiences and relationships I had in India to expand the dissertation into a book on the RSS. My book Brotherhood in Saffron was published both in the US and in India in the late 1980s.

What made you want to revisit the RSS in your new book?

Times have changed in India over the last thirty years and thus it was time to write a new book. The RSS has evolved in a way that reflects those changes but major misconceptions remain—1) the organization has not changed 2) the process of operation and the demographics of its membership have not changed. I made use of the access established earlier to do this new book and to argue that both presumptions are wrong.

What is one major way in which the RSS has evolved?

The RSS is much bigger now and represents a much wider and more socially diverse membership. It has gone from being a “training institute” to thinking of itself as a lobby group that represents the interests of its several dozen affiliates that penetrate all areas and aspects of India. These affiliates have differing interests (foreign direct investment, family values, inequality, politics, labor etc.) and thus the RSS’s role has increasingly turned into that of a mediator of disputes among the affiliates and to present the interests of its various affiliates in the larger polity. For instance, because the Bharatiya Kasan Sangh is an affiliate representing the interests of farmers, the RSS has taken an interest in such things as prices of farm products and inputs like electricity and water. About 20-30 years ago, the RSS would not have been speaking out on these types of issues, but they are now doing so since it is the interest of a major affiliate.

What role will the RSS play in the 2019 elections and beyond?

The RSS is not a political party as such, though it takes an interest in politics and policy issues. It will not be as active as it was in the 2014 parliamentary elections when it feared a resurgence of anti-RSS sentiment if Congress came back to power and thus placed the organization solidly behind the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the political affiliate of the RSS that is now India’s ruling party. Although RSS leaders do not feel a comparable threat to the functioning of the organization now, they still want to represent the interests of their affiliates through lobbying. In the last years for example, the RSS has actually been quite critical of Modi for not doing enough to help farmers and small business, to name two groups. The RSS has also been vocal in speaking out against what they see as Modi’s overreliance on FDI and western ideology. I think they will continue to place an emphasis on nationalism and economic populism.
Has anything surprised you about the reaction to your book, especially given the strong and often emotional response that these kinds of controversial topics can evoke in India?

There has been a lot of media reaction to the book and that was perhaps my biggest surprise. Perhaps a reflection of that high interest is that it is selling so well in India. The reaction has been mostly positive. There are of course some across the political spectrum who are not satisfied unless I call them a fascist organization, but many from both right and left have been complimentary.

The book is going to reach a wide audience. There is a Chinese version coming out later this year that will be in many libraries and stores across China. There was demand for a Mandarin edition because the Chinese want to better understand the organization that is very influential to the Indian government right now.

What do you think is the next book waiting to be written on India?

The development of private enterprise. Someone from the world of business should be the one to look at this. There is a lot of work on macroeconomics and government but few serious works on private enterprise in India. A role for business is built into the class social system of India, but the view that those involved in business are engaged in a “dirty, greedy” activity has persisted in the decades since Independence. “Officially” India is a democracy in a largely poor country and conflicting strains of thought prevent the emergence of the idea that wealth is paramount. On the other hand, post-liberalization Indians are increasingly consumerist and place growing value on affluence. The business sector is increasing in importance relative to the government sector. There needs to be further work done on the enlargement of private enterprise within society and its relationship to the government.

What is your advice to students on how best to enter into study of an area or region of the world that is completely new to them? What helps in building expertise and authority in one’s chosen field?

Start at an enjoyable level, i.e movies, TV, the internet. Then learn the language. Knowing the language of a region or country conveys so much. It can enrich understanding of history, sociology, and politics.

Gautam Mehta
South Asia Studies, MA 2017

As a Research Assistant to Dr. Walter Andersen, I helped in the research and writing of his book on the RSS. The most important and the most enjoyable part of my job were the two trips I made to Delhi where I interviewed senior RSS and BJP leaders, as well as journalists, for the book. As a young researcher, and as someone with a lifelong interest in the Indian political economy, it was a fascinating experience to be able to interview senior leaders to get their perspectives on Indian political dynamics. I also helped write many of the chapters in the book based on my primary and secondary research. Besides helping with the research and writing of the book, I also had the opportunity to write academic articles.
This summer I interned at a political risk consulting firm, Control Risks in Singapore, where I was able to put my regional and language skills to good use. In working for the Global Risk Analysis unit, I conducted research for high-value projects in Vietnamese, providing my team and our clients with information from local sources and media. This included researching Vietnam’s auto, energy, pharmaceutical and healthcare, and defense industries as well as legal sectors. Additionally, I provided analysis and data on Vietnamese internal politics in preparing predictions for the next National Party Congress elections. I also provided research for other subject markets such as researching corruption and security risks in various countries and industries, as well as the telecom industry in Thailand, and the business process outsourcing industry in the Philippines.

After returning to DC, I have continued with Control Risks Singapore as a subcontractor researcher, providing the Global Risk Analysis team with research assistance remotely while I finish my last year at SAIS. The experiences I gained during my summer internship were invaluable in sharpening my analytical and research skills as well as building professional relationships. The biggest factor that helped me with my internship was my language skills. The Southeast Asia program’s language requirement is one of the most valuable aspects in preparing students for meaningful work experiences in the region. Being in Singapore also provided me with a huge worldly lens and placed me in one of the most important international hubs.

Jon Danilowicz, South Asia Studies, SAIS MA 2019

This summer I obtained an internship in the Economic Section of the United States Embassy in Colombo, Sri Lanka. My academic and professional careers have been geared towards becoming a Foreign Service Officer, and this internship gave me the opportunity to see what it would be like to be a junior officer at an overseas post. The quantitative and qualitative evaluation skills I learned at SAIS proved invaluable to serving the mission. I wrote and sent out numerous cables on subjects from the Sri Lankan energy sector to multilateral relationships, and defense industries as well as legal sectors. Additionally, I provided analysis and data on Sri Lankan internal politics in preparing predictions for the next National Party Congress elections. I also provided research for other subject markets such as researching corruption and security risks in various countries and industries, as well as the telecom industry in Thailand, and the business process outsourcing industry in the Philippines.

I was particularly blessed with a welcoming environment and an Embassy eager to expose me to all elements of Foreign Service life. Almost everyone from the Ambassador on down gave me their own brand of mentorship, showed me the ropes of their positions, and encouraged me to follow through on my goals. Although I had late nights at representational events, I also enjoyed cricket matches with my coworkers, went toe-to-toe with the brightest minds of the post at the community trivia night, and wore my gaudiest patriotic gear to the Embassy’s 4th of July party. Without a doubt, the highlight of my internship (besides being on a beautiful tropical island) has been the community. While being away from home for ten weeks was challenging, my internship was an invaluable experience.
Matt Kawatani. Japan Studies, SAIS MA 2019

This summer, I was fortunate to intern at the Asian Development Bank Institute (ADBI) in Tokyo, Japan. At ADBI, I assisted the research department in studying the challenges faced by SMEs in the Central Asian Regional Economic Cooperation (CAREC) landlocked economies when seeking access to finance (banks, capital markets, start-up finance and non-traditional micro-lending, risk capital, trade finance). This included identifying cultural, procedural, institutional and regulatory incentives and barriers faced by SMEs as well as opportunities to link SMEs to domestic and global value chains. Potential value chain linkages were analyzed within the context of access to trade finance with a particular focus on agriculture value chains. Future outputs related to the project include a series of working papers and workshops to be presented at an ADBI conference.

In addition to the research work I did at ADBI, I attended to attend a number of ADBI events, which included an OECD presentation on the 2018 OECD Economic Survey of the Republic of Korea and an ADBI workshop on drivers and policy implications of declining labor income shares in Asia.

Overall, my internship at ADBI provided me with insights into the development field, the inner workings of a multilateral institution and the constantly changing nature of Asia. I am grateful to both ADBI and the Johns Hopkins SAIS Japan Studies Program for this valuable opportunity.

Spencer Gross, Korea Studies Minor, SAIS MA 2019

I interned at the International Trade Administration’s Office of Financial and Insurance Industries (OFII) at the Department of Commerce during the spring and summer 2018. OFII is responsible for trade finance, FinTech, and cryptocurrencies, and supports the Commerce Secretary for EXIM and OPIC board meetings.

Coming to SAIS with a background in the tech industry, this internship has provided me with a window into how the U.S. government and the interagency process works in development finance, and financial technology. Korea, Japan, Hong Kong, and Singapore are all at the forefront of the cryptocurrency sector in terms of both research and regulation. The knowledge I gained at SAIS during my first year classes on Korea and Asia helped me add tremendous value to the office, and propelled me in my role.
Ted Osius served from 2014 to 2017 as U.S. ambassador to Vietnam. Ambassador Osius' leadership helped bring about a transformation in U.S.-Vietnam relations. He also served in Vietnam in the 1990s, when he helped open the U.S. Consulate General in Ho Chi Minh City and was one of the first U.S. diplomats at the U.S. Embassy in Hanoi.

Ambassador Osius was a career diplomat and a seasoned Asia hand at the Department of State; in addition to Vietnam, his overseas assignments included posts in India, Thailand, the Vatican, and the Philippines, as well as the United Nations. From 2004 to 2006, he was the Deputy Director of the Office of Korean Affairs in the Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs.

He also was as an associate professor at the National War College and a Senior Fellow at the Center for International and Strategic Studies as well as Vice President of the Fulbright University in Vietnam.

Most recently, Ambassador Osius has joined Albright Stonebridge Group as a Senior Advisor.

Before attending SAIS, I worked on Capitol Hill for the then-junior Senator from Tennessee, Al Gore. While I knew I wanted to pursue a career in international affairs, the economics questions on the Foreign Service exam had tripped me up not once, but twice. After Dr. Riedel’s trade class at SAIS, I passed the exam, and spent nearly thirty years as a diplomat, most of it in Asia. Frustrated with the Trump Administration’s policies, I resigned from government service in November 2017. I’m now writing a book drawing on 23 years of experience with Vietnam, ‘Nothing Is Impossible: An Ambassador Reflects on America’s Reconciliation with Vietnam.’
Where Are They Now?

Benjamin Katzeff Silberstein, Korea Studies, MA 2015

I came to SAIS straight from a job at the Swedish Foreign Ministry, where I worked as a special advisor to the Minister for International Development Cooperation. Prior to this, I had worked as a freelance journalist and editorial writer for various Swedish publications, and I wrote mostly about North Korea, particularly while I lived in South Korea (2010–2012) as a Korean language student. My job at the Swedish MFA was really an exception: I had known for some years that I wanted my professional focus to be on Korean affairs, and domestic developments in North Korea in particular. I went back and forth throughout my time at SAIS about whether or not to pursue a PhD after the program, and both coursework and personal connections with faculty were immensely helpful factors for me in making my decision. I’m currently working on a dissertation in history at the University of Pennsylvania, focusing on the historical roots of North Korea’s system for domestic surveillance and political control. I’ll spend the coming year doing field research in Seoul, while continuing to work on side projects with think tanks and publications more focused on contemporary North Korean affairs.

The best way SAIS prepared me for this was the opportunity to get to know faculty that both took my ideas seriously, and constantly challenged me to develop my thinking. Much of the coursework really was intellectually transformative. I particularly appreciated the fine balance between professional focus and academic rigor. Many of the courses I took gave me wholly new research ideas that I’ve brought with me into my current work, and will continue to develop hopefully throughout my career. I especially appreciate how SAIS makes you go outside your comfort zone: studying Chinese politics and history, for me, was just as rewarding as delving deeper into the Korean studies field; I still draw upon syllabi and notes from many of these courses in my current research, and I’ll always regard SAIS as a crucial intellectual home.

Club Activities

The Thai Club organized a welcome dinner on September 19, bringing together students from many concentrations and backgrounds who are interested in Thai food and culture.

The Korea Club held a CHUSEOK event, the traditional Korean harvest festival in September. In October, the Korea Club hosted a Halloween screening of the zombie apocalypse movie, Train to Busan (2016).


SAIS Southeast Asia Studies Luncheon: Ambassador Derek Mitchell, National Democratic Institute, October 10.


SAIS Southeast Asia Studies luncheon: Meredith Miller, Albright Stonebridge Group, October 24.


South Asia Policy Roundtable: Dr. Amit Ahuja, Professor of Political Science, UC-Santa Barbara, *Kin Targeting in Counterinsurgencies*, November 14, 2018

SAIS Asia November Policy Luncheon: Changyong Rhee, Director for Asia, International Monetary Fund, *Asia at the Forefront: Growth Challenges for the Next Decade and Beyond*, November 28.

For more information about our academic programs and activities, contact us at:
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https://www.sais-jhu.edu/content/asia-programs#overview