

The graphic features the text 'ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS' in red at the top, followed by 'INNOVATION LIST' in large, light blue, 3D-style letters. The text is set against a bright yellow sunburst background with many sharp rays radiating outwards.

ASIAN LEGAL BUSINESS

INNOVATION LIST

IN ITS INAUGURAL INNOVATION LIST, ALB NAMES 10 FIRMS ACROSS THE ASIAN REGION THAT ARE USING INNOVATION TO WORK MORE EFFICIENTLY, ASSIST CLIENTS BETTER AND REMAIN AHEAD OF THEIR COMPETITORS. THE LIST BELOW IS IN ALPHABETICAL ORDER.

AdventBalance

ASIA LOCATIONS: SINGAPORE, HONG KONG

Leading the charge of the NewLaw firms in Asia is the Australia-headquartered AdventBalance, one of the early pioneers in the contract lawyer space in the region, and it is going from strength to strength, with more than 100 lawyers in Asia at present. Following its stated aim for “putting our clients and lawyers in control,” AdventBalance’s lawyer/consultant team works onsite and directly with clients, giving them direct, flexible access to legal expertise. The firm has also done away with the billable hour - work is completed on a fixed fee basis. Given its success, it’s no surprise more competitors want to get into the space, with Eversheds (see more below) and Rajah & Tann also launching Asia-based contract lawyer services. But AdventBalance continues to innovate as it looks to stay ahead of the curve: it recently launched AdventBalance On Call, a new service providing clients with access to partner and general counsel-level lawyers on a completely ad-hoc and as-needed basis, but at a lower cost compared to traditional law firms. The new service goes beyond secondments and as the firm

takes “traditional law firms head-on in their core space.” As Asia’s legal market undergoes a shakeup, the rise of NewLaw is being seen as one of the key factors, with AdventBalance one of the more visible players.

AWA Asia

ASIA LOCATIONS: BEIJING, HONG KONG

For AWA Asia, part of the Scandinavia-headquartered Awapatent Group, innovation has meant doing simple things to run the firm better. For instance, the firm, led by principal and CEO Ai-Leen Lim in Asia, recognised that Greater China was a very different market from its homebase, and thus engaged a consultancy to assist in external communications and business development support. Other examples have been the optimising resources, and outsourcing when it is more efficient than hiring; and using IT as a tool to improve practice efficiency. “We have an electronic filing system for all our case correspondence, as well as an efficient electronic docketing system for deadline management that is integrated with our European offices’ systems,” says Lim. “Our billing, time entry and finance systems

are also electronic based and are integrated with that in our offices in Europe." Finally, the firm, which currently has nine fee-earners, has implemented tailored services and alternative fee arrangements to fit clients' IP budgets. "Alternative pricing models, as well as a customised approach to service delivery and charge-out is a key feature of our practice," she says. This overall approach, points out Lim, means AWA Asia is able to pass on practice efficiencies that flow through innovative practice management to benefit its clients. "This results in an optimal level of service within their IP budget levels that they are thoroughly happy with," she concludes.

Baker & McKenzie

ASIA LOCATIONS: 17 IN THE APAC REGION

Among Baker & McKenzie's highlights last year was becoming the first (and till date, only) international law firm to enter into a joint operation (JO) in the Shanghai Free Trade Zone, after it signed an agreement with local outfit FenXun Partners. The JO provides clients with integrated international and PRC law advice through the Shanghai FTZ initiative, and is being seen as a possible prototype for international firms wanting to grow in China. So far the JO has won mandates from at least 15 clients, including Osram, which sold a 13.5 percent stake in Foshan Electrical and Lighting for \$350 million. The team that handled this deal was jointly led by partners from both Bakers and FenXun.

Another area of focus for the firm has been the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), which has been working on launching the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC). The vision of the AEC is to ensure a competitive economic region, with a single market and production base, with equitable economic development which is fully integrated into the global economy. "All companies that operate in Asia-Pacific cannot ignore the growing importance of Southeast Asia, both as a trade and manufacturing hub," the firm says. To tap into this, Bakers has invested in various projects across the region involving all its Asia-Pacific offices and more than 44 partners; these include an integrated plan of client conversations, ASEAN-focused events across offices, and a communications campaign.

Drew & Napier

LOCATION: SINGAPORE

For a firm that's more than a 125 years old, Drew & Napier utilised innovative approaches in a number of complex deals and disputes in the past year. These included acting as co-lead counsel for JCET in its \$1.03 billion takeover offer for SGX-listed semiconductor company STATS ChipPAC, one of the largest M&A deals in Singapore in 2015. Drew also acted on the general corporate issues, financing aspects and debt capital markets issues of the highly complex structured deal. The firm was also involved in the worldwide debt restructuring of PT Berlian Laju Tanker, the largest debt restructuring exercise in Indonesia in recent years. Drew acted as lead counsel for the company, advising on Singapore law and coordinating the functions of counsel in other jurisdictions.

In litigation, it represented the Attorney-General's Chambers

of Brunei in the prosecution of eight ex-employees of Brunei Shell Petroleum over multiple corruption charges amounting to more than B\$800,000 (\$636,875). This is also one of the biggest corruption prosecutions in Brunei's history, and involved a company considered the backbone of Brunei's economy. Finally, it was involved in the first case heard in the Singapore International Commercial Court, where it represented the defendants, PT Bayan Resources Tbk, in a dispute over a \$800 million joint venture agreement against BCBC Singapore. Apart from being heard before a distinguished panel of three judges on the SICC Bench, the cross-border dispute involves Australian, Indonesian and Singapore business interests.

Eversheds

ASIA LOCATIONS: HONG KONG, BEIJING, SHANGHAI, SINGAPORE

Eversheds prides itself on going beyond "black letter" legal advice and its focus on "changing the business of law." Among the innovative deals it was involved in last year was advising Fitch Ratings on the establishment of a \$10 billion global covered bonds programme by DBS Bank, the first-ever covered bonds to be issued out of Singapore.

In Asia, Eversheds has pioneered a new approach to advising clients on employment and HR-related legal and commercial issues. For example, the team has co-authored a report that examines the future of the HR function and stresses the need for the HR profession to redefine its role at a more strategic level. In this way, says the firm, the employment teams could "analyse the 'business critical' issues facing organisations and provide guidance and support on how to address these commercial challenges."

Finally the firm launched two key products and services in Asia last year. The first was Eversheds Consulting, which provides legal and business advisory consulting solutions to clients across Asia, helping general counsel and in-house teams to develop their business plans and strategy. Eversheds Consulting in turn launched Eversheds Agile in Asia, which provides contract lawyers to in-house legal teams.

Kim & Chang

ASIA LOCATIONS: SEOUL, HONG KONG

South Korea's largest firm had a good year in 2015 when it came to innovative deals. For one, it represented the KT Consortium in receiving preliminary approval for Korea's first Internet-only bank. It was the first banking license issued by the regulators in 23 years. Then, it was involved in the first-ever issuance of covered bonds under the Korean Covered Bond Act of 2014, serving as legal counsel for Kookmin Bank in both the issuance as well as the setting up the first covered-bond programme. Prior to the law taking effect in 2014, the firm was also actively involved throughout the legislation process.

Additionally, Kim & Chang advised Samsung C&T in its merger with a major affiliate, Cheil Industries. The transaction involved a merger between two large, listed companies at the top of the corporate governance hierarchy of Korea's biggest conglomerate, and was a landmark case with precedential value, as it will serve as a reference point for future Korean

conglomerate corporate restructuring transactions and potential campaigns by activist shareholders.

Apart from the deals though, the firm is known in South Korea for pioneering a task-force approach to each engagement. In addition to lawyers, its team includes subject matter and industry experts.

King & Wood Mallesons

ASIA LOCATIONS: HONG KONG, SINGAPORE, TOKYO, PLUS 10 OFFICES IN CHINA

As the only firm in the world able to practise Chinese, Hong Kong, Australian, English and U.S. laws, King & Wood Mallesons was involved in deals such as the first sovereign "panda bond" offerings, or RMB-denominated bonds issued by a non-PRC issuer in mainland China. After advising on the successful issuance of 3 billion yuan sovereign bonds by the South Korean government, it also assisted the Canadian province of British Columbia on its issue of 3 billion yuan bonds.

Also in December, KWM advised Bank of Qingdao on its \$607 million listing on the Main Board of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, becoming the first law firm to act as US, PRC and Hong Kong counsel to the issuer in a transaction of this type. Other key deals the firm has been involved in include a spate of innovative DCM deals; the first dedicated trading platform for authorised RMB trading outside China; and the launch of the China-UAE Investment Cooperation Fund.

Additionally, the KWM China office underwent an extensive restructure to change its practice direction from a "deal-centric" to a "client-centric and industry-focused" approach. "Those changes required all the fee earners to align by sector focus resulting in five pillar groups focused on clients," the firm says.

Latham & Watkins

ASIA LOCATIONS: BEIJING, HONG KONG, SHANGHAI, SINGAPORE, TOKYO

Latham & Watkins was involved in a variety of innovative deals last year, including advising Thai Oil Public Company Limited on the establishment of a \$1 billion Global MTN programme; as well as advising underwriters on the Hong Kong Broadband Network's IPO. The firm represented GF Securities Co. Ltd., China's fourth-largest brokerage, on its \$4.1 billion IPO on the Main Board of the Hong Kong Stock Exchange, and also acted for energy and infrastructure company PT Dian Swastatika Sentosa Tbk on the sale of its 67 percent stake in PT Golden Energy Mines Tbk to United Fiber System Limited (UFS) for \$5.188 billion (\$1.45 billion).

But it was in the project finance space where Latham really excelled. Closed deals included representing the sponsors in the \$1.2 billion financing of the San Buenaventura power project in the Philippines, and advising the sponsors and the project company in the development and \$191 million financing of the Semangka Hydroelectric Power Project in Lampung, Indonesia. It also handled the privatisation of Myanmar's state-owned state-owned Myanma Petroleum Products Enterprise, and the corporatisation of the same government's jet fuel distribution business.

Pinsent Masons

ASIA LOCATIONS: BEIJING, HONG KONG, SINGAPORE, SHANGHAI

Notable innovative work from Pinsent Masons last year included advising the International Finance Corp. on the development of a \$600 million Light Rail Transit system in Manila, a key component of the Philippines government's ambitious PPP programme. The project is also expected to set the blueprint for the delivery of PPP projects in the wider Philippine market.

In China, it has made some innovative moves in the recent past. It worked with its strategic ally Hesem Law Firm to successfully develop an approach that not only allows them to collaborate in a way that is compliant with Bureau of Justice rules, but also allows the partners of each firm to co-attend client meetings and provide a comprehensive service. Pinsent Masons has also developed close links with top Chinese schools like Tsinghua, Peking, Renmin and Tianjin universities to ensure a steady flow of talented graduates, and to forge close relationships with academics who are often key referrers of work.

In 2015, Pinsent Masons acquired a majority stake in Cerico, an online compliance solutions business that it had incubated. With the aim of providing a more efficient, technology-driven platform to help businesses respond to the challenge of ever-increasing regulation, Cerico comprises management consultants, qualified lawyers and technology experts who work with clients on the nature and scale of regulatory exposure facing each client, then builds a technology-driven solution to address these issues. Cerico has been used by a global consumer goods company and is currently being rolled out across Asia.

Ropes & Gray

ASIA LOCATIONS: HONG KONG, SEOUL, SHANGHAI, TOKYO

In 2015, Ropes & Gray was involved in several transactions that used novel strategies, such as the PT Berlian Laju Tanker restructuring (see Drew entry above), which required the implementation of dozens of arrangements across Asia and the U.S.. It representing Baring Private Equity Asia in its acquisition of a 40 percent stake in Weetabix Food Company, a deal that involved a private equity firm working with a PRC state-owned enterprise to operate a business whose traditional market has not been in China. The firm also acted for two separate clients as members of a consortium, led by MBK Partners, to acquire Homeplus, Tesco's South Korean business, for a total value of \$6 billion.

In addition, Ropes & Gray introduced a new practice called "special situations." Special situations teams combine private equity, M&A, finance, capital markets, and other corporate transactional skills with the knowledge of formal bankruptcy and insolvency processes. "We have seen the formation of this type of group at many of our clients," says the firm. "These groups seek unique investment opportunities that exist at the cross-section of transactions and restructurings with an aim to capitalize on a variety of bespoke situations. Our clients include the special situations groups at top-tier financial institutions, the private debt arms of global private equity funds, and global and regional hedge funds." 