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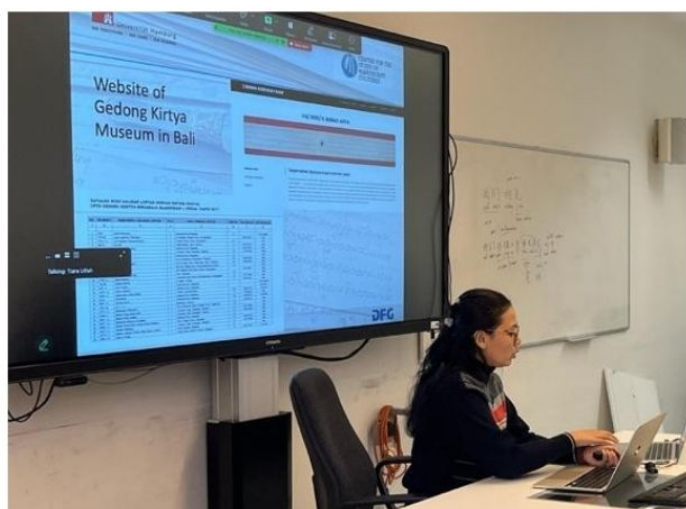
NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages
and Cultures of Southeast Asia

Some takeaways and impressions from Austronesian PhD Workshop, 13-14 February 2025

Editor: Tiara Ulfah, co -editor: workshop participants

Photo credits: Carma Citrawati



On February 13-14, 2024, the Austronesian department organized a workshop focusing on communicating academic research to an informed public audience. Led by Prof. Jan van der Putten, Prof. Elsa Clavé, and Dr. Will Derks, the two-day workshop allowed eight PhD candidates (Rangga Eka Saputra, Roberta Zollo, Tiara Ulfah, Hazim, Kris Williamson, Syukri Rizki, Carma Citrawati, and Zakariya Aminullah) and postdoctoral researcher Alan Darmawan to present their research, discuss challenges and receive constructive feedback. The workshop was structured as a simulation of a doctoral dissertation disputation. Participants were required to submit a concise overview of their research in advance, including research questions and potential contributions to the field, along with a set of defensible thesis statements. During the workshop, each presenter delivered a 20-minute presentation, followed by a 40-minute period for open discussion, debate, and question-and-answer. The workshop concluded on the second day with a lovely homemade dinner provided by Ibu Delisma.

This workshop provided a welcoming and supportive environment for students to share their findings, breaking away from the solitude of writing. The participants' diverse research topics, from historical research and manuscripts studies to contemporary ethnography, surprisingly, resulted in a unified and insightful experience. As Rangga noted, this diversity exposed the students to varied perspectives, promoted interdisciplinary respect, and provided valuable insight into their own research's strengths and limitations. The workshop also promoted rigorous analysis, urging students to ground their interpretation in evidence and respond to critical inquiry, to avoid unfounded claims. As Syukri recalled the board's advice after his presentation 'Do not jump into the swamp you cannot escape from, or you will end up drowned'. The students were also reminded of the importance of rhetoric, that a dissertation requires compelling, convincing, and artfully constructed arguments, not merely raw data. Effective research, like a well-prepared rendang, demands time to mature, allowing the rich seasonings of analysis >>>

and argument to fully infuse the findings. Overall, the board was pleased with the students' progress and encouraged them to maintain their current trajectory.

A definite improvement upon its 2023 debut, the 2025 workshop was notably better organized and structured. Across two days, participants shared stories, insights, lessons, and funny anecdotes from their respective fieldwork. As writing is an undeniably lonely business, this workshop provided much-needed camaraderie and support, a crucial antidote to the isolation of research life. It also offered a rare opportunity for students, including those based outside Hamburg, to gather in a shared space, both in person and virtually via Zoom. Given its significance, the workshop deserves to become a recurring tradition. Future iterations could benefit from an even more refined structure, prioritizing in-depth discussion and disputation over lengthy presentations. ●



Stories about Malay Food Culture from Singapore

Content contributors: Syukri Rizki
Photo credits: Syukri Rizki

Khair Johari, a Singaporean food historian, visited the Austronesian Studies Department, University of Hamburg, to present some discoveries from his newly launched book, *The Food of Singapore Malays*— the fruit of an 11-year gastronomic travel to explore the living food culture in various Malay regions of the Nusantara archipelago. Khair shared with us the challenges he faced while gathering information for his book.

Choosing Singapore as the starting point to observe the wide variety of Malay food, he then traversed across the archipelago to witness the Malays preparing meals for daily consumption and special occasions. He looked at the people's methods of procuring raw materials and their creative cuisines.

Khair not merely described how tasty the food was but also the lessons still untapped today. For example, Singaporean Malays would only harvest clams for consumption once they had grown sufficiently. Once the clams are taken for consumption, the whole flesh should be eaten. >>>



The young clams should be spared for sustainability reasons. This also explains why when the people look for crops growing naturally in a jungle, they will only take what they need.

Furthermore, Khir presented some other facts. There are the same foods given different names, such as a cake known as *dadar gulung* in Indonesia, but called *kue ketayap* in Penang. There is a long list of unique names to identify different species of *durian*. Also, he mentioned a sweet drink containing slices of *kuini manggo* in Riau. A myth said that there was once an admiral who rampaged through a *kuini manggo* plantation, chopping the fruits from their trees, due to anger after his wife was taken away forcefully by the plantation owner, hence the name of the drink - *laksmana mengamuk* (or rampaging admiral which for Malays would refer to as the tale of *Hang Tuah*). Closing the presentation, Khir kindly let us try some traditional food he brought from Singapore, namely, *kue lapis* (layer cake), *keripik belinjo pedas* (spicy belinjo chips), and *keripik tempe* (tempe chips). •



Online Lecture on Northern Thai Manuscripts' Survey

Content contributors: Volker Grabowsky, Silpsupa Jaengsawang
Photo credits: Direk Injan

Scheduled for the afternoon on the Valentine's Day, an online lecture titled "The State of Northern Thai Manuscripts (1970–2025)" was delivered by Dr Direk Injan, a senior researcher at the Office of Art and Culture, Chiang Mai Rajabhat University, on 14 February 2025 at 14:00–16:00. Dr Direk is a highly experienced expert in the field of surveying, documenting, and studying Northern Thai (Lan Na) manuscripts. The lecture was hosted by the Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik (HGT). The Upper North of Thailand was once the core of the Lan Na Kingdom, which used the Dhamma script – also Lan Na script – for writing literary texts. Long-sized palm-leaf manuscripts were commonly used to record Buddhist teachings, copied for the purposes of study, preaching, and extending the life of Buddhism, and were then offered and preserved in monastic repositories. >>>



Shorter-sized palm-leaf manuscripts and mulberry paper folded books (*papsa*) were commonly used to record non-religious texts, such as chants for rituals, astrological treatises, white magic, medicinal recipes, and other bodies of knowledge. As they were considered private property, they were found in both monasteries and private households.

Various individuals and organizations have recognized the cultural significance of Northern Thai manuscripts, as demonstrated by the surveys carried out by Dr Harald Hundius and Achan Singkha Wannasai (1971–1974), Sommai Premjit (1975), The Siam Society under Royal Patronage (1975–1978), and the Thai National Library (1976–1978). Later, the Social Research Institute, Chiang Mai University (1979–1990), and the Office of Arts and Culture Promotion, Chiang Mai University (1987–1991), supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Federal Republic of Germany, conducted detailed surveys and registries of temple manuscripts throughout the northern region, selecting some for microfilming (later organized into an online database). Currently, many other organizations continue the survey, documentation, preservation, and digitization of Lan Na manuscripts. •



Talk on Dating in Thai-Lao Manuscripts at CSMC Workshop

Content contributors: Volker Grabowsky, Silpsupa Jaengsaawang
Photo credits: Silpsupa Jaengsaawang

Hosted by the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), a workshop titled “Filling the Time Gaps: Traditional and Current Methods for Dating the Manuscripts of Highland and Southeast Asia” was organized by Professor Dr Agnieszka Helman-Ważny, the spokesperson of the CSMC’s Asian Highland Manuscripts Working Group on 19–20 March 2025. Professor Dr Volker Grabowsky, Head of the Thai Studies Sections, Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, and Dr Silpsupa Jaengsaawang, Principal Investigator (PI) at the CSMC, delivered a talk titled “Dating in Thai-Lao Manuscripts reflected in Colophons.”

As a documenting paratext that provides rich information on production settings, colophons in Thai, Lao, and other Tai manuscripts often include dates indicating when a particular manuscript was completed. This dating information is rich in details and often comprises the years of the era (such as the Chula or the Buddhist eras), lunar months, moon phases, days of the week, and times of the day. In many cases, this is accompanied by the year of a 60-year cycle and the day of a 60-day cycle. Such unique dating information even allows for cross-checking of dates. These are regarded as useful spatial clues that historians and philologists can use to trace back to the manuscripts' historical contexts, with or without conversion to the Gregorian calendar. Indications of years, months, days, and day times in the manuscripts were culturally influenced by neighboring countries. The lecture discussed the dating system reflected in the colophons found in Thai-Lao manuscripts, identifying common shared features but also features typical of certain regions and ethnic groups within the Thai-Lao world. •



This event is a fundraiser for the people affected by the earthquake in Myanmar.

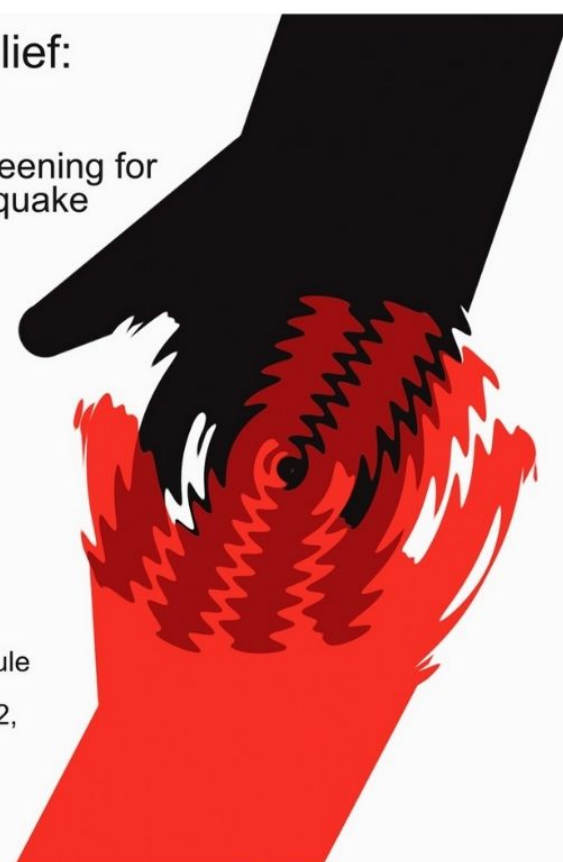
The Student Council of the Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia Studies of the Asia-Africa Institute at Universität Hamburg in cooperation with the AStA of the Hochschule für bildende Künste (HfbK) invites you to join a solidarity film screening with food and drinks. As part of the international Reels for Relief campaign, we will show four movies by filmmakers from Myanmar.

Reels for Relief: Hamburg

Fundraising Screening for Myanmar Earthquake Relief

27.04.

5 to 10pm, Hochschule für bildende Künste (HfbK), Lerchenfeld 2, 22081 Hamburg, Room Le 23



The SEA-Newsletter Team:

Board:

Prof.Dr. Jörg Thomas Engelbert
Prof.Dr. Volker Grabowsky
Prof.Dr. Jan van der Putten
Prof.Dr. Elsa Clavè
Dr. Silpsupa Jaengsawang

Vietnam studies:

Quang Minh To

Thai studies:

Kornkanok
Khetnongbua

Austronesian studies:

Tiara Ulfa
Syukri Rizki
M. Dian Saputra
Layout:
E. Hellen Kustanti

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suedostasien.unihh@outlook.de

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