

SEA- NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages
and Cultures of Southeast Asia

Special Talk on Thai Literature and Thai Manuscripts

Content contributors: Sutheera Satayaphan, Silpsupa Jaengsaawang

Photo credit: Office of Literature and History, Fine Arts Department



Sutheera Satayaphan, a PhD candidate in our Thai Studies Section in Hamburg and a specialist at the Office of Literature and History, Fine Arts Department, Thailand, was invited by the Thai Studies Program at Chulalongkorn University to deliver a special lecture titled "Thai Literature: An Overview of Ayutthaya Literature" in English for Master's students of the Thai Literature for International Students course, led by Associate Professor Dr. Trisilpa Boonkhachorn, on 14 February 2025 at the conference room of the Office of Literature and History, Fine Arts Department. Sirirat Taweessap, Director of the Office of Literature and History, cordially welcomed the audience and opened the event.

In her lecture, Sutheera Satayaphan talked about Thai classical literature to an audience of international students who were interested in and appreciated Thai language and literature. With her philological background in studying Thai manuscript culture, she presented general information on Thai literature, including periods, genres, authors, and textual transmissions.

The Ayutthaya period lasted for more than four centuries (1351–1767), so Thai literature from that period includes various textual genres, both religious and non-religious, and encountered different social situations that inspired the literary creations of authors as well as affected the survival of the literature. The lecture highlighted Ayutthaya literature, particularly works written in the 15th to 17th centuries, and some manuscripts surviving from that period were exhibited to the audience during the talk. Sutheera Satayaphan also applied the approach of Thai manuscript culture study to the selected samples and discussed it with the international audience. Thanks to this event, students also had the opportunity to explore and experience the Office of Literature and History and gained knowledge relevant to their interests and research. •



Explore Thai Language and Culture with “Am Chuenchat” at the Volkshochschule

Content contributor: Pantipa Chuenchat

Photo credit: Pantipa Chuenchat

Would you like to learn Thai or explore the delicious world of Thai cuisine? Pantipa “Am” Chuenchat, a native Thai and cultural expert, now offers Thai language classes for adults and children, along with Thai cooking courses, right here at the Volkshochschule (VHS) in Henstedt-Ulzburg in the Schleswig-Holstein area, Germany.

Am brings deep cultural knowledge and a warm teaching style to every class. With a strong academic background—holding both Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees in Thai Literature with top honors from Kasetsart University—she is currently completing her PhD in Thai Studies at the University of Hamburg. She also has several years of teaching experience at universities in both Thailand and Germany.

In her Thai language classes, Am helps both adults and children build a solid foundation in speaking, listening, writing, and reading Thai. Whether they’re beginners or have a bit of experience, the courses are tailored to their levels, combining practical conversation skills with insights into Thai culture, traditions, history, and everyday life.

The Thai cooking classes offer a hands-on experience where participants learn how to prepare classic dishes like *phat thai*, *phat gaphrao*, *khao sòì*, *bua lòì*, and *sakhu*. More than just recipes, these sessions explore the stories and cultural significance behind the food—turning every class into a journey through Thailand.

The courses are open to the public and held in a friendly, inclusive setting. They’re a great way for families, language enthusiasts, or food lovers to learn something new, connect with others, and celebrate cultural diversity.

Am Chuenchat herself is a shining example of how studying Thai language and culture can open doors. Her knowledge is now a valuable asset in Germany’s multicultural society and globally—especially in the fields of language, linguistics, communication, education, international relations, and the creative sectors of business. •



DREAMSEA: Closure and Start Anew

Contributor: Tiara Ulfah

Photo credit: Tiara Ulfah; Carma Citrawati



Initiated in 2017, the Digital Repository of Endangered and Affected Manuscripts in Southeast Asia (DREAMSEA) has successfully completed its first phase and is preparing for more ambitious goals in its second phase. A tight collaboration between the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC) and the Center for the Study of Islam and Society (PPIM) with Professor Jan van der Putten and Professor Oman Fathurrahman respectively as Principal Investigators, DREAMSEA has produced a vast repository containing thousands of manuscripts from diverse regions across Southeast Asia, all of which are publicly accessible. This digitized collection is vital, considering the inevitable threats manuscripts face from natural disasters and regional socio-political conflicts.

Unlike many other digitization projects, DREAMSEA employs a proactive and sensitive approach. The team reaches out to communities, engaging in personal dialogues with manuscript owners to build mutual trust before beginning digitization. Ethical considerations are paramount, ensuring respect for the living rituals associated with the manuscripts. This approach has proven successful, evidenced by the number of collections added to the database. After running for seven years (extended from the initial five-year plan by two years due to COVID-19), the DREAMSEA team presented assessment and perspective at CSMC on April 11, 2025.

Challenges such as the poor condition of manuscripts, remote access, and inadequate power supply have evidently persisted. However, these technical difficulties are offset by the community's impressive use of the database. According to DREAMSEA team member Abdullah Maulani, the manuscripts are utilized beyond their intended functions. The repository not only supports academic study but also inspires creative outcomes, such as children comics derived from the manuscripts' contents and new motif designs for batik inspired by manuscripts' illuminations.

Most importantly, the Arcadia Fund has agreed to finance DREAMSEA for another five years, launching the project's second phase. This phase will extend the coverage to communities not yet represented in the first phase, including those in Cambodia, the Philippines, Myanmar, and various other ethnic, religious, and linguistic minorities. DREAMSEA will also work to enhance the repository's accessibility and searchability, aiming to foster closer collaboration within the Southeast Asian manuscript ecosystem. It is anticipated that DREAMSEA Phase II will yield more innovative outcomes and research opportunities. •

Revisiting the Process of a Javanese Manuscripts Cataloguing

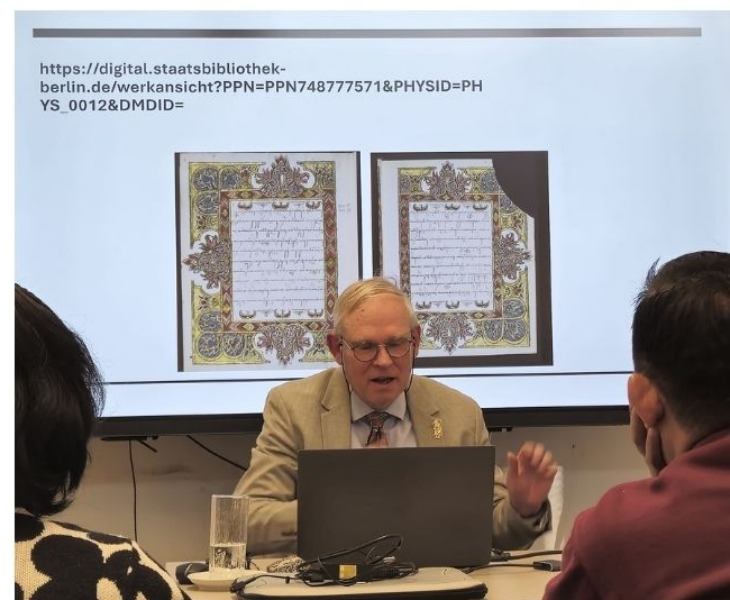
Contributor: Syukri Rizki
Photo credit: Tiara Ulfah



Given the rise of online metadata for Southeast Asian manuscripts, one may argue that metadata and the accurate description of manuscripts in catalogues is even more crucial than before. Regarding Indonesian manuscripts in particular, some of the earliest cataloguing attempts have usually been attributed to European scholarly investigations. To further understand the cataloguing history of Indonesian manuscripts, the Austronesian Studies Department welcomed Prof. Edwin Wieringa, Manuscript researcher as well as cataloguer, to present his analysis on Theodoor Pigeaud's catalogue of Javanese manuscripts.

Prof. Wieringa highlighted the changing dynamics of cataloguers' interaction with manuscripts. In the 1970s, access to the manuscripts was not as restricted as it is today. He told a story about a librarian allowing a library user to borrow a manuscript for perusal at home. This relaxed rule enabled a cataloguer to study individual manuscripts without bothering about the library's opening hours. Today, an increasing awareness about manuscripts' fragile condition has been met with various preservation measures, thereby resulting in limited access to a number of manuscripts. Pigeaud's catalogue is a perfect example of how cataloguing in the past was conducted. The main attention was given to the manuscripts' contents, whereas codicological features were only mentioned in passing. For example, Pigeaud's description of the *Serat Kandha* manuscript (Berlin SB, Ms. or. Quart. 355 § 23. 140) as having 'quadratic and very small' script is particularly puzzling given the absence of manuscript images to illustrate this characterization.

Furthermore, Prof. Wieringa observed that Pigeaud exhibited a typical orientalist prejudice about how a high Javanese culture should be reflected in manuscripts, hence his less appreciative attitude when describing manuscripts produced by individuals from outside the Yogyakarta court. Additionally, in literary manuscripts, what mattered the most to Pigeaud was the story proper, not paratexts appended by copyists. In concluding his presentation, Prof. Wieringa asserted that future manuscript research requires an unbiased and unprejudiced examination of manuscripts, encompassing their codicology, content, and materiality. •





Two Prof. Engelbert's Lectures in Saigon

During his stay in Vietnam, Prof. Thomas Engelbert held two lectures on the topic “Trạng Quỳnh: the Vietnamese Eulenspiegel?”

The first lecture was given on March 21, 2025, at the Department for Vietnamese Language and Literature, Ho Chi Minh City University of Education. More than 100 teachers and students attended, among them were well-known specialists for Chinese literature and Vietnamese folklore, like Dr. Phan Thu Vân und Dr. La Mai Thi Gia. After the lecture, Prof. Engelbert had an interesting exchange of ideas about folklore research with the Vietnamese colleagues.

The second lecture was given at Saigon's Văn Hiến University. The head of both the Department of Vietnamese Language and Literature and the Centre for Vietnamese Studies, Dr. Huỳnh Thị Mai Trinh, is a former guest student at University of Hamburg and a former doctoral student of Prof. Engelbert.

The university, which has its own professional football team, is located in a newly constructed, ultramodern building complex in the Third District, Saigon. Here, one can clearly see the progress that Vietnamese education has made in recent years. The teachers and students prepared an enthusiastic reception with a rich, diverse and astonishingly professional cultural program and a banquet for the ‘delegation’ from the University of Hamburg. In addition to Prof. Engelbert, the ‘delegation’ included our former DAAD guest lecturers Prof. Hoàng Dũng, Prof. Nguyễn Nam and Dr. Trần Tịnh Vy as well as our former MA students Nguyễn Trọng Hải Minh and Julian Huesmann. The reception was grand, warm and overwhelming. It was a wonderful day that all participants will never forget. •



Exploring Faith and Society in the Philippines



Kakabakaba Ka Ba?

[Will Your Heart Beat Faster?]



Himala

[Miracle]



Join us as we explore two iconic films that examine the role of religion, belief, and external forces in shaping Philippine society.

These thought-provoking works highlight how systems of power — whether spiritual, social, or geopolitical — influence personal choices and collective identities. They offer contrasting perspectives: one through stark realism, the other through satire and absurdity.

Each film is freely available online with Tagalog audio and English subtitles.

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