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NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages
and Cultures of Southeast Asia

Pride of Hamburg Alumni:

The first Thai native speaker as Assistant Professor for Thai Studies in Italy

Dr. Silpsupa Jaengsaawang, formerly a Principal Investigator (PI) at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), has been appointed Assistant Professor for Thai Studies at the Department of Asian and North African Studies, Università Ca' Foscari Venezia, Italy. Università Ca' Foscari Venezia is the only university in Italy that currently offers Thai language courses and has created this new position to further develop teaching and research in Thai and Southeast Asian Studies. We are most delighted that Dr. Silpsupa has been selected for this role, becoming the first Thai native-speaking Assistant Professor in the history of Thai Studies in Italy.

Over the course of almost ten years at Universität Hamburg—as a PhD student (2016–2019) and then in postdoctoral research projects (2020–2025)—she has focused her work on Thai and Lao manuscript cultures. She has published her research findings in numerous articles, monographs, and public lectures, and has been actively involved in various activities organized by the Southeast Asian Department. Her PhD dissertation, “Relationship between Anisong Manuscripts and Rituals: A Comparative Study of the Lan Na and Lao Traditions,” was awarded the highest honour with the grade *summa cum laude* (excellent) and, in 2022, received financial support from the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin for the publication of a revised edition. She has also helped lead several MA courses on manuscript cultures, the Dhamma script, Thai folk culture and ceremonies, and Buddhist literature. In addition, she is a board member of the Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik, e.V. (HGT), where she is primarily involved in organizing and hosting the HGT Lecture Series, contributing significantly to the visibility of Thai Studies in Hamburg and beyond.



Her dedicated work has contributed significantly to the growth of Thai Studies in Hamburg and to international academic networks linking universities in Asia, Europe, and the US. The Department, and I personally, warmly congratulate Dr. Silpsupa Jaengsaawang (also known as Achan Look-wa) on her appointment and wish her much success with her new responsibilities in Venice. •



Content contributor: Volker Grabowsky

Photo credits: (1) Silpsupa Jaengsaawang, (2) Ho Ching Kam



Sutheera Satayaphan Presents Groundbreaking Research on Thai Manuscripts

Sutheera Satayaphan, a PhD candidate in the Thai Studies Section at the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia and a specialist at the Office of Literature and History, Fine Arts Department in Thailand, recently delivered a well-received public talk titled “Reading Bot Lakhòn, Viewing Samut Thai: Editing the Old Version of Nang Manora Bot Lakhòn.” The talk was part of the national conference “Tai Manuscripts: Connections of Human Beings and Others,” held in honour of National Thai Language Day at the Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre in Bangkok, Thailand, on August 4–5, 2025.

In her lecture, Sutheera shared fresh research approaches to exploring historical Bot Lakhòn manuscripts, focusing on the story of Manora—a legendary figure who is part human and part bird, and whose tale of romance with a prince is cherished in Thai literature. She discussed the importance of comparing various manuscript versions, analyzing differences in spelling, calligraphy, and rhetorical style, and identifying inconsistencies or missing episodes—steps that are essential when preparing a new edition of literary works. Sutheera highlighted how this in-depth approach to textual editing not only sheds new light on endangered literature but also deepens our understanding of literary transmission in Thai culture.

Her engaging presentation sparked lively discussions, with attendees eagerly exchanging insights and opinions throughout the event. Shortly after the conference, Sutheera published her latest book, which includes new critical editions of several ancient Thai literary works: Phra Rot, Nang Manora, Maniphichai, and Chaiyathat.

We, at the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, warmly congratulate Sutheera Satayaphan on her achievements. Her new publication will undoubtedly become a valuable resource for scholars and students interested in Thai literature and the practice of textual editing.●



Content contributor: Volker Grabowsky

Photo credits: Princess Maha Chakri Sirindhorn Anthropology Centre

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Students and Alumni of the Southeast Asian Studies Department





Pasar Hamburg: Indonesia through the lens of Hamburg

Within the framework of Pasar Hamburg, the largest Indonesian cultural festival in Germany, organized by a consortium of Indonesian communities on 19–21 August 2025, the Austronesian Studies Department of the University of Hamburg (UHH) hosted an information desk to welcome visitors interested in learning about the department's activities. Highlighting the topics of Indonesian creative business, investment opportunities, and sustainability, the festival's concern intersects to some degree with that of the Austronesian Studies Department, which has been offering Malay language subject at the earliest since 1922, when it was still known as the Seminar for African and South Sea Languages, which was a part of the Hamburg Colonial Institute established in 1908.

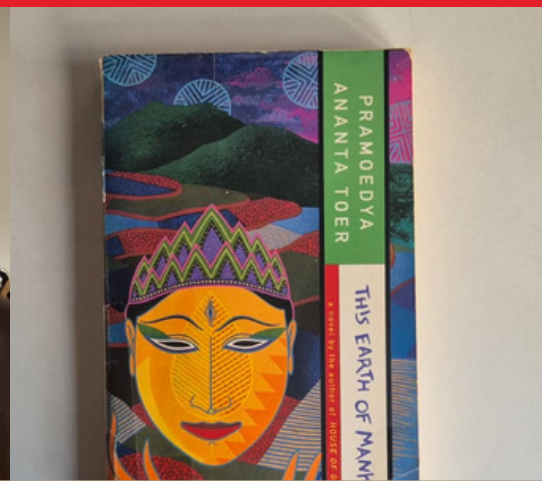
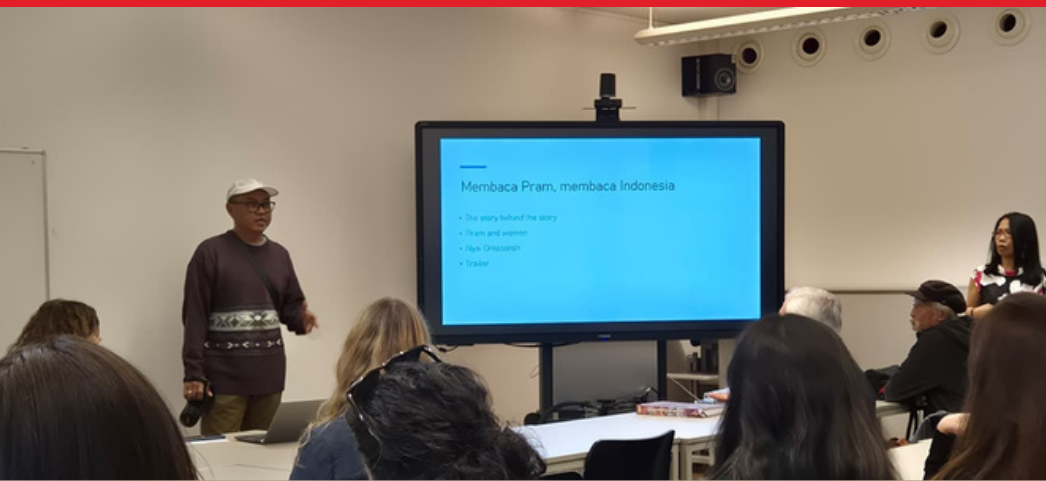
Several visitors shared their personal connections to Indonesia. Some recounted brief stays in the country, others spoke of their Indonesian descent or shared their future plans to visit Indonesia. They responded warmly as our casual conversations turned to the diverse composition of students in our department, their research interests, areas of expertise, and professional paths after graduation. We also welcomed a number of children who were eager to try playing congklak, a traditional game displayed at our desk.

Around our booth, visitors could see posters created by our students that depict the relevance of Hamburg within the context of Indonesian studies. The posters showing historical accounts about Hamburg-originated beers liberally consumed in Batavia and Malay manuscripts acquired by the UHH raised awareness about the long-established ties between the Hanseatic city and the Nusantara. A poster about the fragrant, tasty Sumatran coffee nowadays available in some Hamburg roasteries informed the visitors not merely about the colonial agricultural project but also about the present-day attempt of Gayonese farmers to balance economic profits and natural preservation.

Amid the long-living cosmopolitan ambience of Hamburg—a harbor city studded with memories about Europeans' past exploratory travels to the 'East', Pasar Hamburg showcased Indonesian business innovations oriented towards worldwide sustainability goals. The Austronesian Studies Department of UHH has been facilitating well-suited academic support to help students explore this potential and other aspects of the country, in line with the latest research trends. •



Content contributor: Syukri Rizki
Photo credits: Yanti Mirdayanti



Reading Pram, Reading Indonesia

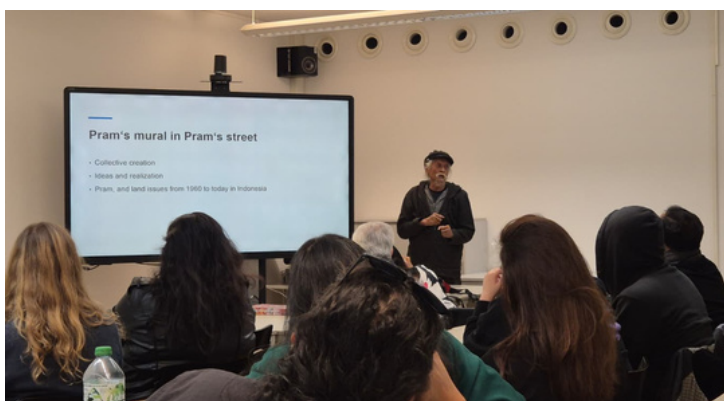
Content contributor: Tiara Ulfah
Photo credits: Tiara Ulfah

In the spirit of this semester's course series on the Cold War in Southeast Asia as well as History and Memory of Violence in Indonesia, a commemoration lecture was held coinciding with sixty years since the 1965 Indonesian mass massacre. The Austronesistik department welcomed three Indonesian activists and artists: Bambang Adya Yarmaka, Yayan Wiludiharto, and Isrol Triono, who work across various media, including short movies, graffiti, murals, and comics. They have been active in the centenary celebration of the birth of Pramoedya Ananta Toer (henceforth Pram), the Indonesian literary legend whose works have once again gained attention amid the country's political turmoil.

The "1965 mass massacre" refers to the wave of extrajudicial killings that erupted across Indonesia after the September 30th, 1965, attempted coup. In the immediate aftermath, six senior generals were murdered, and the military, under Suharto, mobilized a campaign that targeted members of the Indonesian Communist Party (PKI) and anyone perceived as left-leaning. Over five months, mass executions, torture, and imprisonments without trial claimed hundreds of thousands of lives and left a legacy of trauma, repression, and contested memory.

Among cultural figures who contributed to the discourse was Pram, one of Indonesia's most celebrated novelists and a prominent figure in the post-1998 "1965" discourse. His works were repeatedly banned by the New Order government because they were deemed subversive; each prohibition reinforced the "ET" (ex-political-prisoner) stigma applied to those linked to the Indonesian Communist Party. After the fall of Suharto, his long-banned memoir *Nyanyi Sunyi Seorang Bisu* (The Mute's Soliloquy, available in AAI bibliothek) was finally published in 1999, becoming a benchmark for acknowledging the suffering of 1965 survivors. Leveraging his literary stature, Pram co-founded the YPKP (*Yayasan Penelitian Korban Pembunuhan 1965-66*), an organization that collects testimonies, archives documentation, and advocates for restitution for victims of the 1965.

Today, Pramoedya's works are once again being revisited; perhaps because understanding the past has never felt more urgent, or because the present resembles it too closely. Artists and activists such as Bambang, Yayan, and Isrol are striving to convey this to Indonesia's younger generation through various media, inviting them to once again read Pram in order to read Indonesia. •



Vietnamese Culture Forum

The Formation of Saigon – the “Pearl of the Far East” and the Promotion of Its Values from Past to Present

Friday, November 28, 2025

1:00 PM - 3:00 PM (CET)

7:00 PM - 9:00 PM (Vietnam Time Zone)

Webinar-ID: 64630498490

Passcode: 85104098

[https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/64630498490?](https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/64630498490?pwd=BOZ4bpDFd1bcnBVUEhXsNNBsIChjPf.1)[pwd=BOZ4bpDFd1bcnBVUEhXsNNBsIChjPf.1](https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/64630498490?pwd=BOZ4bpDFd1bcnBVUEhXsNNBsIChjPf.1)

The Department of Vietnamese Studies, University of Hamburg, and the Vietnam Studies Center, Fulbright University Ho Chi Minh City, cordially invite to a talk by Trần Hữu Phúc Tiến, a journalist and researcher based in Ho Chi Minh City.

Trần Hữu Phúc Tiến has published two books in 2025. One of them is *Kiến trúc Pháp – Đông Dương: Dấu tích “Sài Gòn - Hòn Ngọc Viễn Đông”* (French-Indochinese Architecture: Traces of the “Saigon – the Pearl of the Far East”), published by Tổng Hợp Publishing House, which is the winner of the Gold Award from the Vietnam Urban Planning and Development Association.

“The Pearl of the Far East” is an epithet that emerged in the late 19th century to highlight the economic significance of Saigon. Gradually, especially from the 1920s onward, this expression became associated with the promotion of tourism and trade in Indochina in general and Vietnam in particular.

In his book, Phúc Tiến traces the origin of the term “Pearl of the Far East” while outlining Saigon’s modernization process under French administration from 1859 to 1945. Through this narrative, the author explores the city’s unique and precious beauty – not only in its landscapes, architecture, and economy but also in its culture, science, and education – in comparison with other urban centers of Indochina and Asia at that time.

He also examines how the values embodied in the “Pearl of the Far East” have been inherited and developed in subsequent periods. In particular, in recent years, this epithet has been invoked by Vietnamese leaders who hope the city will reclaim this illustrious title in the new phase of 21st-century development.

The key question – what challenges Ho Chi Minh City must overcome to once again shine as the “Pearl of the Far East” – is what the author wishes to share and discuss with the audience. ●

About the Speaker:



Trần Hữu Phúc Tiến
Journalist
Ho Chi Minh City

Trần Hữu Phúc Tiến (pen name: Phúc Tiến) is a veteran journalist specializing in culture and education, as well as a researcher in urban history. He was born in Saigon in 1962, graduated with a Bachelor’s degree in History, and has worked for several major media outlets such as *Tuổi Trẻ*, *Saigon Times*, *Thế Giới Mới*, and *FBNC Television*. In 1993, he received a Reuters Foundation Scholarship to study journalism at Oxford University. Over the past forty years, he has had the opportunity to travel extensively within and outside Vietnam, conducting field research on social and cultural issues and collecting materials on Vietnamese history.

To date, he has published five books about Saigon. His first, *Sài Gòn không phải ngày hôm qua* (Saigon not yesterday), published in 2016, is a journalistic chronicle of the city’s history. In 2017, he released *Sài Gòn hai đầu thế kỷ* (Saigon at the Early 20th Century and 21st Century), a research work on Saigon’s changing urban landscape and architecture.

Most recently, in 2025, he published two new books: *Kiến trúc Pháp – Đông Dương: Dấu tích “Sài Gòn - Hòn Ngọc Viễn Đông”* (French-Indochinese Architecture: Traces of the “Saigon – the Pearl of the Far East”), which won the VUPA Gold Award for Publication, and *Sài Gòn kinh đô sông nước* (Saigon: Capital of Waterways). In addition, he has authored *Kiến trúc Pháp-Đông Dương: Những viên ngọc quý tại Hà Nội* (French-Indochinese Architecture: Precious Pearls of Hanoi) in 2022 and *Du lịch Đông Dương xưa* (French Indochina Tourism) in 2024.

He is currently an Executive Member of both the Vietnam Urban Planning and Development Association (VUPA) and the Ho Chi Minh City Urban Planning and Development Association. Besides working on journalism and writing books, he is also the CEO of *Hợp Điểm* (Centrepoint), an English training and overseas education consulting firm.