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Asien-Afrika-Institut

SEA-
NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

Lecture series: Vietnamese Culture Forum

Xuyên Qua Mọi Chiến Tuyến (Across All Frontlines) – A Different Perspective on History and Human Kindness

Introducing a collection of historical reportage by Nguyễn Xuân Thọ

About the speaker:

Nguyễn Xuân Thọ

Born in 1951 in Gò Bồi, Bình Định, Nguyễn Xuân Thọ moved with his family to North Vietnam in 1955. He spent his childhood living with his parents within the premises of the Vietnam News Agency, exposed him early on to newspapers, radio, and international news sources, fostering a multi-dimensional perspective from a young age.

In 1967, he went to the German Democratic Republic to train in television engineering at the Postal Technical School in Königs Wusterhausen. During four years there, he witnessed the construction of socialism in the GDR as well as the tragedies of the Cold War and the STASI regime. After graduation, he returned to Vietnam and began working at Vietnam Television (VTV) in 1972, while continuing his studies and earning a degree in Electronic Engineering from Hanoi University of Science and Technology. He held several technical management positions at VTV before relocating with his family to the Federal Republic of Germany in 1991. In 1996, he founded his own media technology company in Cologne, Germany.

Since 2001, he has written essays and commentaries for various newspapers and online forums, including Vietnamnet, Dân Trí, Văn Việt, Talawas, X-CafeVN, and Bauxite. He is the author of *Hai Quê Hương* (2021) and *Xuyên Qua Mọi Chiến Tuyến* (2025).

Abstract

War is not defined solely by weapons and hatred. It sets the highest measure for human benevolence. Even in the deepest reaches of opposing frontlines, human kindness quietly persists, giving rise to moments of wonder that reason alone struggles to comprehend.

Throughout the narratives in *Xuyên Qua Mọi Chiến Tuyến* (Across All Frontlines), a single truth resonates consistently: the enemy is, first and foremost, human. The work does not seek to recount history as a series of victories and defeats, but rather to trace the journeys of courageous hearts, pursuing historical truth through a lens both scientific and humane, overcoming prejudice to heal the collective wounds of a nation.

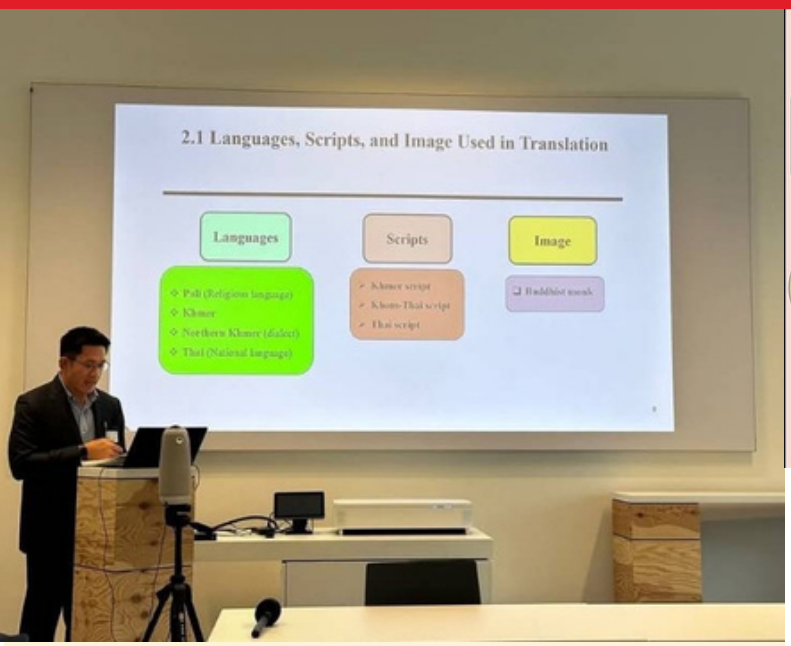
Lecture Details

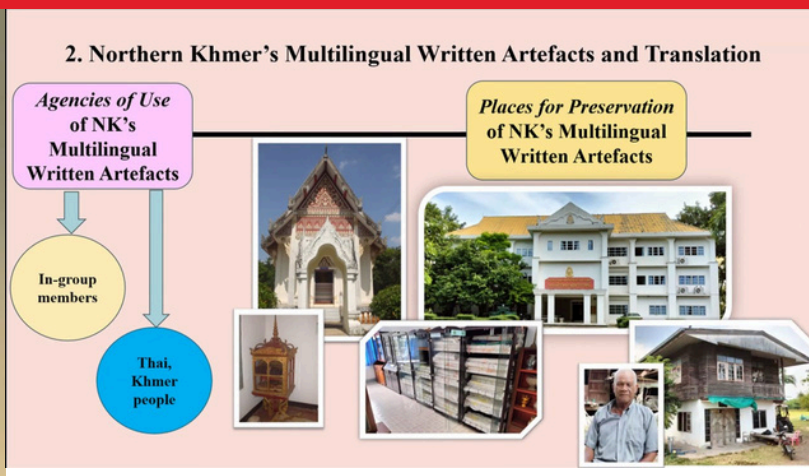
Speaker: Nguyễn Xuân Thọ, Cologne
Discussant: Cao Quang Nghiệp (M.A.), University of Hamburg
Host: Prof. Dr. Thomas Engelbert, University of Hamburg

Time & Date:
Friday, 23 January 2026
13:00 - 16:00 (CET)
19:00 - 22:00 (Vietnam Time)

Place:
Universität Hamburg
Asien-Afrika-Institut
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1 , Flügel Ost; Raum 223
20146 Hamburg

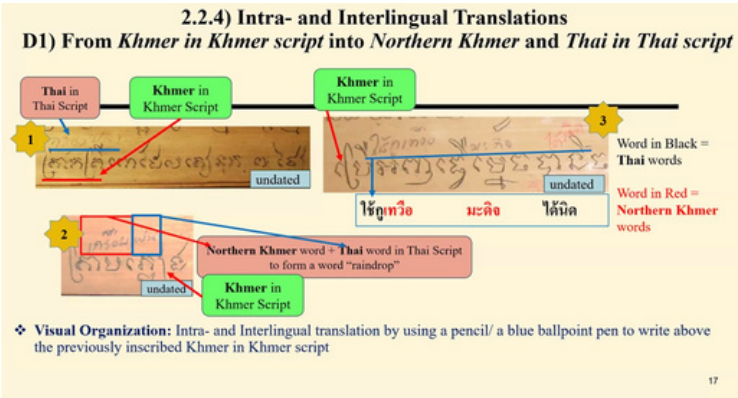
Online (on Zoom)
Webinar-ID: 625 1707 7613
Passcode: 79191977
Zoom link: https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/62517077613?pwd=mB3bE1O8Gg-3mdpVVwmvMuyJD4TH8miF.RHDdGPIAUgiK8Dc





Thai Scholar invited to CSMC Workshop

On 24–25 October 2025 the workshop "Translation Choices in Multilingual Written Artefacts: Navigating Visual and Cultural Layers" was organized by Silpsupa Jaengsawang, Jannis Kostelnik, and Szilvia Sövegjártó at the the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC), affiliated with the Cluster of Excellence Understanding Written Artefacts. Assistant Professor Direk Hongthong (PhD) from the Faculty of Humanities, Kasetsart University, Thailand, was invited to deliver a talk "Translation Choices in Ethnic Khmer in Thailand's Multilingual Written Artefacts: Exploring Visual and Politico-Cultural Aspects."



Contributor: Silpsupa Jaengsawang
Photo credits: Philip Bockholt; Silpsupa Jaengsawang

Ethnic Khmer in Thailand, or Northern Khmers, are approximately 2.8% of the whole population in Thailand. Most of them live in the southern part of Northeastern Thailand bordering Cambodia to the south. Their ancestors had lived there since 7th–8th centuries CE and related to Khmer written culture since 10th–11th centuries CE, according to archeological sites and inscriptions, respectively. Later, Northern Khmers were governed by Thai state and officially became Thai citizens since the reign of King Rama V (1868–1910). Consequently, they had been educated in Thai public schools by learning Thai language since 1900 along with learning in their Khmer traditional education in Buddhist monasteries. However, their traditional education and Khmer documents had been later considerably affected and decreased their importance due to major international conflicts such as the conflicts in 1940 between Thailand and France in Indochina and in 1962 between Thailand and Cambodia on Preah Vihear temple. These conflicts significantly led to Khmer document destruction and the prohibition of preaching in Khmer. Nevertheless, Khmer culture in Thailand was later reconsidered in the better light from the late 1970s onwards due to localism. Thus, it could exist as local culture in Thai society. These factors inevitably impacted on many aspects of Northern Khmers' lives including the cultural aspect in (re)production of their written artefacts. •

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Students and Alumni of the Southeast Asian Studies Department

Sutheera Satayaphan Delivers Public Lecture at National Conference on Thai Drama Literature

On Friday, 22 August 2025, Sutheera Satayaphan, a PhD candidate in the Thai Studies Section of the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia and a specialist at the Office of Literature and History, delivered a public lecture entitled "Old Dramas, Retold Stories" at the national conference “Thai Drama Literature.” The event took place in the Kingpetch Room at Asia Hotel, Ratchathewi, Bangkok, and was organised by the Language and Literature Group of the Office of Literature and History, Fine Arts Department, in celebration of National Thai Language Day 2025.

The conference opened at 9:00 a.m., with Mr. Jessada Chivawichawankul, Deputy Director-General of the Fine Arts Department, presiding over the ceremony. The seminar brought together numerous scholars and enthusiasts to examine the rich heritage and ongoing relevance of Thai literary traditions. Participants engaged in dynamic discussions that highlighted the enduring cultural significance of traditional narratives in contemporary society.

Contributor: Kornkanok Khetnongbua
Photo credits: Fine Arts Department, Kornkanok Khetnongbua

The programme featured a series of academic lectures, including “Analyzing Drama Scripts (Bot Lakhòn): Perceiving Thai Society” by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Maneepin Phromsuthirak, “From Sanskrit Drama to Thai Drama Literature in the Reign of King Rama VI” by Asst. Prof. Dr. Chanpwich Thatkaew, “Performance Literature and Script Development” by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Saowanit Wingwon, “A Written Study Book with Knowledge about Dance Drama: A Case Study of Unarut, Inao, and Dalang” by Assoc. Prof. Dr. Thanirat Chatuthasri, and “Old Dramas, Retold Stories” by Ms. Sutheera Satayaphan. This series of talks offered valuable insights into the evolution of performance literature and its significance in Thai culture.

The Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia extends its congratulations to Sutheera Satayaphan on her successful participation and scholarly contribution. •

Carving Out a Niche for Indonesian Studies in Leiden

Dika Wira Atmaja, from Jakarta, is approaching the accomplishment of his master's program. His fascination with the history of people migration entangling the histories of Indonesia, the Netherlands, and Germany brought him to undertake a semester abroad at the University of Leiden during the summer semester of 2025. He recently reflected on his experience there.

Wira took courses on the history of the Netherlands, Southeast Asian political economy, and politics of culture, as well as gender. He confirmed that the abundant primary and secondary sources housed by the Dutch institutions, particularly those in Leiden and Den Haag, are highly essential for various historical and contemporary topics of Indonesian studies. As for Wira's research niche, the archives acquired during the colonial period around the turn of the twentieth century will provide reliable data to discuss the complex reality of the Mollucans' migration to the Netherlands over the years after Indonesia had proclaimed independence.

Furthermore, for those interested in experiencing such a short study in Leiden, Wira advises them to familiarize themselves with some administrative procedures. Indonesian nationals staying in Germany, should meet specific requirements, that may differ from applicants coming directly from Indonesia, such as the requirement for a tuberculosis test. Wira assessed that in general, the cost of living in Leiden is relatively high, especially if compared with Hamburg. Finding affordable accommodation was also not an easy task so that broadening the hunt for one suitable apartment in neighboring cities with fast-reaching transportation lines may also be an option. Because of this, Wira encourages the pursuit of financial support, such as Erasmus. Additionally, he observed that Indonesian nationals pay a higher tuition fee than do those of EU countries or former Dutch colonies like Suriname.

Wira is now back in Hamburg again, crystallizing his ideas as he moves forward with his thesis writing. He publicizes some memorable moments, insights, and findings during his study journey on his LinkedIn: D Wira Atmaja.

Contributor: Syukri Rizki
Photo credits: Dika Wira Atmaja

Ko Vity

Alumni Column

Contributor: Tiara Ulfah
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An avid user of language learning apps such as Duolingo, Babla, and Busu may have noticed how intuitive these platforms are, especially at the beginner level, where instructions are still given in a language the learner chooses (source language), rather than the target language. That kind of seamless translation may feel instantaneous, but it definitely does not happen in the blink of an eye. It takes a whole village, or rather a dedicated team of translators, working carefully behind the scenes to make every single switch in language feel natural. This is precisely the work of our department's alumna, Vity.

Vity graduated from the MA programme in Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia (Indonesian and Malay Studies) in 2025. Prior to that, she completed her bachelor's degree in Indonesian Literature at Universitas Gadjah Mada in 2018. Very recently, she took up a position as a freelance translator (German to Indonesian) at *Deutsche Welle Akademie* (DW *Akademie*), which is DW's development and education arm focusing on media development and educational programmes worldwide. With a growing audience in Asia (the second-largest reach after sub-Saharan Africa), DW *Akademie* has been expanding its language offerings, including Indonesian. This is where Vity comes in. Alongside two other translators, Vity translates several DW's German learning programmes (*Deutsch Lernen*), such as the most famous one '*Nicos weg*', into Indonesian, making sure that the content is both accurate as well as culturally and linguistically accessible.

Naturally, this is no easy task. It requires a strong command of the German language and a familiarity with German cultural contexts, skills Vity developed during her time in Germany, as well as a deep understanding of Indonesian language use and cultural nuance, which she brings with her. According to Vity, one of the most challenging aspects of the job lies in navigating the rapid evolution of language, particularly Indonesian, while also accounting for the distinct linguistic structures and socio-cultural contexts of both societies. This difficulty becomes especially apparent when translating idiomatic expressions, humor, or culturally embedded references in German that have no direct equivalent in Indonesian and therefore require careful rephrasing rather than literal translation.

Starting later this year, learners using DW's free Online German learning platform will be able to select Indonesian as their source language and see the results of Vity's work firsthand at *Learn German* https://learngerman.dw.com/de/deutsch-lernen/s-9095.

We wish Vity a smooth transition into her new role and every success as she continues her work bridging languages and cultures.