



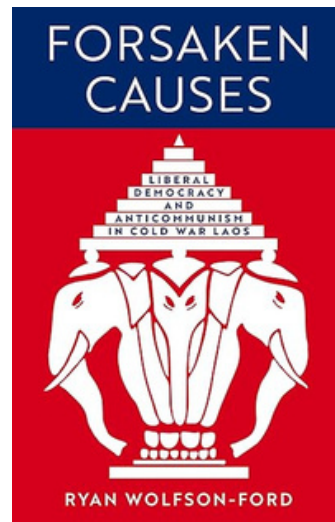
Two new publications on Lao Studies

Contributor: Kornkanok Khetnongbua

To conclude the year 2025, two new contributions to Lao Studies were published in December in volume 9, issue 1 of the *Journal of Lao Studies*. Professor Dr Volker Grabowsky, Head of the Thai Studies Section, reviews Ryan Wolfson-Ford's *Forsaken Causes: Liberal Democracy and Anti-Communism in Cold War Laos* (University of Wisconsin Press, 2024). He identifies the book as a significant reassessment of Lao political history during a turbulent era. Although some conceptual ambiguities remain, the study offers valuable new perspectives on Lao agency in Cold War geopolitics. It underscores the complexity of local political dynamics and situates the Lao experience within broader regional debates on liberal democracy and anti-communism. *Forsaken Causes* represents a notable contribution to scholarship on both modern Lao history and Cold War Southeast Asia.

The same journal issue also features "A Monastery's Treasure Account: Collecting Payment Proofs" by Assistant Professor Dr Silpsupa Jaengsaewang, a former Principal Investigator at the Centre for the Study of Manuscript Cultures (CSMC). The article analyses a notebook manuscript containing financial records, payment slips, and related documents compiled by an abbot of Vat Maha That, one of the major monasteries in Luang Prabang. The study demonstrates that the Lao Buddhist sangha relied heavily on lay support, as lay communities provided essential financial assistance during a period of economic instability. Their donations, motivated by faith despite personal hardship, reveal the monastery's dependence on lay patronage. •

Photo credits: Journal of Lao Studies;
Amazon.com; Silpsupa Jaengsaewang



New publications:



- Grabowsky, Volker. Review of *Forsaken Causes: Liberal Democracy and Anticommunism in Cold War Laos*, by Ryan Wolfson-Ford. *Journal of Lao Studies* 9, no. 1 (2025): 81-84.
<https://www.laostudies.org/sites/default/files/public/4%20Book%20Review-Grabowsky.pdf>
- Jaengsaewang, Silpsupa. "A Monastery's Treasure Account: Collecting Payment Proofs." *Journal of Lao Studies* 9, no. 1 (2025): 1-23.
<https://www.laostudies.org/sites/default/files/public/1%20Jaengsaewang.pdf>



25th ANNIVERSARY SYMPOSIUM
**“SOUTHEAST ASIAN INDIGENOUS CULTURE AND TRADITIONS:
 INTERACTION, INCLUSION AND INTEGRATION”**

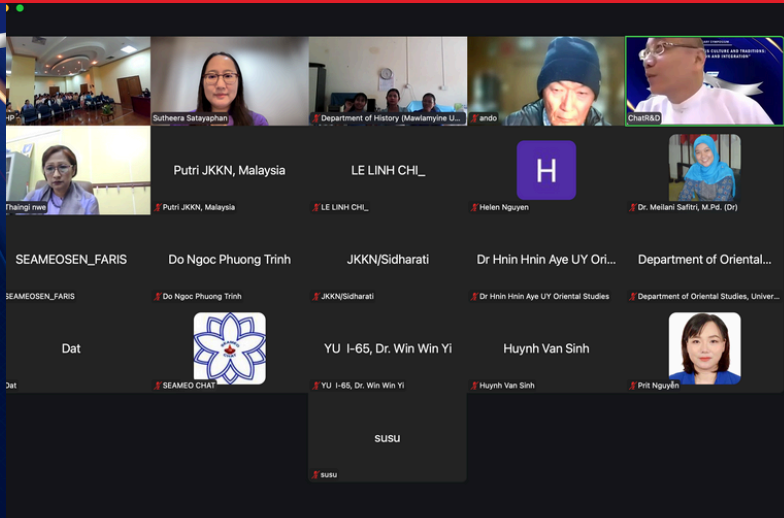
Program Highlights

The Symposium aims to show the beauty of the region where there are many differences and cultural complexities that exist, recognize the importance of preserving cultural diversity and encourage intercultural communication throughout the region.

[Call for Registration](#)



4 - 5 December 2025
 9:00 to 12:00 (GMT+ 6:30) Myanmar Time
 SEAMEO CHAT, Yangon , Myanmar



SEAMEO CHAT 25th Anniversary Symposium Spotlights Archaic Siamese Culture

SEAMEO CHAT successfully convened a hybrid symposium to mark its 25th anniversary of its inauguration. Held from 4 - 5 December 2025 in Yangon, Myanmar, the event focused on the theme “Southeast Asian Indigenous Culture and Traditions: Interaction, Inclusion, and Integration.”

The symposium opened with a ceremony that included congratulatory messages from H.E. Dr. Chaw Chaw Sein, Union Minister of Education, followed by an opening address delivered by Dr. Than Zaw Oo, Director General of the Department of Higher Education. Attendees viewed a 25th Anniversary Video before proceeding to academic sessions moderated by distinguished scholars.

A key highlight of the event was the presentation by Ms. Sutteera Satayaphan, an Arts Official at Thailand’s Fine Arts Department and a PhD candidate in the Thai Studies section of the Department of Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia.

Her project, “The Beliefs and Culture in the Archaic Siamese Play ‘Nang Manora,’” offered a critical analysis of classical performance arts. By exploring the intersections of belief and storytelling in Nang Manora, Satayaphan’s research shed light on the enduring power of archaic traditions. Her dual perspective as both a government cultural preserver and an academic researcher provided unique insights into how ancient Siamese narratives continue to shape contemporary cultural identity.

The symposium also featured a wide range of research topics, from biodiversity in Myanmar villages to the expansion of Bengal civilization. These discussions underscored the importance of preserving cultural heritage while adapting to modern challenges. •

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

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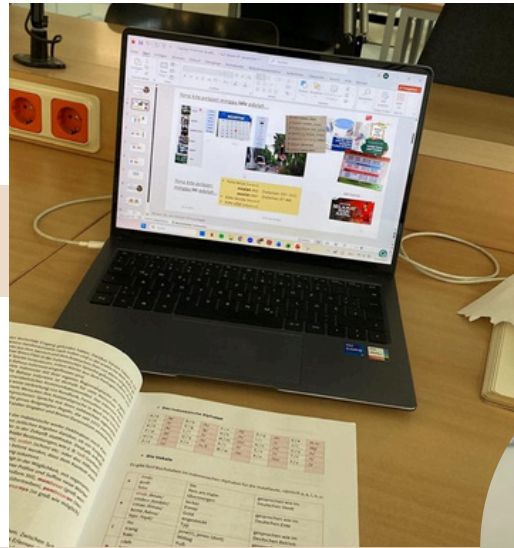
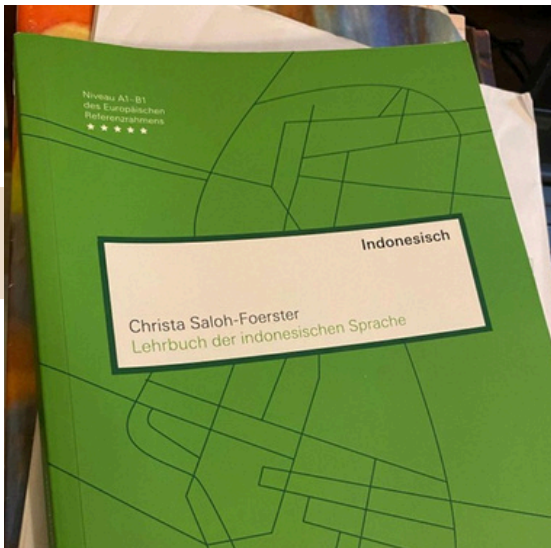
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Students and Alumni of the Southeast Asian Studies Department





Contributor: Syukri Rizki
Photo credits: Gertrudis Ambon



Gertrudis' Insights on Indonesian Language Teaching

Gertrudis Ambon – from Kupang, East Nusa Tenggara – has been a foreign language enthusiast since she was a senior high school student. Pursuing an interest in foreign language education, she undertook a bachelor program in the German Language Education Department at the State University of Yogyakarta (UNY). Now, while doing her master's in the SEA Department at UHH, she was trusted with an opportunity to hold an Indonesian tutoring session, the complementary lessons to an Indonesian class taught by Ms. Yanti Mirdayanti.

Gertrudis' class focuses primarily on guiding the students to develop productive skills: speaking and writing. Her current students are all beginner learners with different knowledge about Indonesia and Indonesian. So far, they seem to still work very diligently to grasp the logic of Indonesian syntax and basic pronunciation, which requires a modest yet effective approach from the tutor.

Moreover, having dealt with many learners of Indonesian as a foreign language during her teaching career – especially since joining the Indonesian for Foreign Speaker (BIPA) teachers' association – Gertrudis observes a persistent problem that needs approaching aptly. Indonesian is not like German, which is learned by many migrants and foreign workers in the pursuit of better welfare in Germany. Indonesian subjects at foreign universities still must be served in marketable wrapping. A pure adaptation of approaches usually used to teach European languages such as English, Dutch, and German may not be fully compatible.

Realizing that the trend of learners' interest in Indonesian has been fluctuating, Gertrudis is certain that an Indonesian teacher should not merely entertain instructional objectives to meet but also the learners' pragmatic motivations, which determine the level of language proficiency obtainable to them. Of no less importance is the teacher's up-to-date knowledge about Indonesia's position in global politics and economics, which very much correlates with the extent to which foreign learners will embrace the language. •



Open Registration: Taiwanese languages courses - the austronesian languages 2026

Registration is now open for a series of online Taiwanese Austronesian language courses. The project is co-organized with the Council of Indigenous Peoples of Taiwan and the Centre for Indigenous Languages Learning at National Taiwan Normal University, and is initiated and directed by the Taiwan Studies Chair at Inalco (Institut National des Langues et Civilisations Orientales). They are offering courses in 17 Austronesian languages officially recognised by the Taiwanese government. In addition to language learning, the courses also include cultural background, allowing participants to gain a broader understanding of the languages and the communities behind them. The courses are taught live by teachers from Taiwan and are completely free of charge.

Registration link:

https://docs.google.com/forms/d/e/1FAIpQLSdhQ-iztm96_lyLdHj_DE1HC9T6RWp1o7_TPKAhOzO_uR8V5g/viewform

Lecture series: Vietnamese Culture Forum

Interpreting Dong Son Bronze Drum Motifs through Semiotics and Artificial Intelligence Models

Time & Date:

Friday, February 6th, 2026

13:30 - 15:00 (CET)

19:30 - 21:00 (Vietnam Time)

Online (on Zoom)

Webinar-ID: 662 5386 8114

Passcode: 51557827

Zoom link: <https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/66253868114?pwd=7scGP7Pxf41GFFe6e4MWkFbPiu3GuPw.PZUNVIGUwHite3->

Abstract

Bronze drums, particularly the Ngoc Lu drum, represent not only quintessential archaeological artifacts of the Dong Son civilization but also complex semiotic texts. On these artifacts, motifs, spatial layouts, and visual rhythms constitute a multi-layered expressive system concerning the cosmology and social structures of ancient Vietnamese inhabitants. However, extant interpretations of these motifs often rely on speculative hermeneutics and lack empirical substantiation. This study proposes a novel interdisciplinary methodology: on one hand, it employs a semiotic framework to analyze the functionality of motifs, specifically addressing the Visual Paradox and Interpretation Paradox within the nexus of expressive function and semiotic context. On the other hand, the research implements Artificial Intelligence (AI) through a “non-bias/naive” approach. By utilizing ubiquitous AI models - which inherently lack specific datasets on Dong Son civilization - the study simulates an objective perception of “alien” symbols, thereby deconstructing original expressive layers when detached from pre-existing cultural biases or localized contexts in Vietnam.

In terms of application, this research executes intercultural comparative analyses and precise measurements to elucidate the empirical functions of various decorative bands: (i) benchmarking against the Nebra Sky Disk (Germany) to decode astronomical and calendrical functions and the functional evolution of motifs; (ii) cross-referencing geometric patterns with the Viking Sun Compass to verify maritime navigational capabilities; (iii) utilizing AI to analyze deer-bird motifs to decipher correlations with tidal cycles and lunar calendars ; and (iv) leveraging AI- assisted image enhancement to consolidate the status of the Lac bird icon and the utilitarian roles of associated avian symbols. The findings aim to offer transformative perspectives on the actual progenitors of the Dong Son culture while establishing a foundational precursor for interdisciplinary empirical research involving high-tech applications, archaeology, and cultural anthropology in Vietnam. •

About the speaker:



Dr. Đinh Hồng Hải

Department of Anthropology and Religious Studies, Hanoi Vietnam National University

Dr. Đinh Hồng Hải was appointed to the executive committee of the International Association for Semiotic Studies and to the position of Deputy General Secretary of the Asian Semiotics International Association in 2019. He has been a member of the scientific committee of the Vietnamese National Foundation for Science and Technology (NAFOSTED) since 2022. Since 2024, he has been an editorial board member at the Journal of Daesoon Thought and the Religions of East Asia, The Daesoon Academy of Sciences, Daejin University, Republic of Korea.

Dr. Hải has published over 30 books and 100 articles on related topics in both Vietnamese and English. He earned his MA at the Institute of Cultural Studies, Vietnamese Academy of Social Sciences (VASS), in 2001, and studied for an M.Phil. at the University of Delhi, India, from 2005 to 2006. He studied at Harvard University from 2008 to 2010 and defended his Ph.D. dissertation at VASS in 2011.

About the discussant:



Nguyễn Thái Anh

Xin chào! My name is Nguyễn Thế Anh, an independent researcher with a strong interest in integrating modern technologies into cultural heritage preservation. With a technical background from the Karlsruhe Institute of Technology (KIT), where I completed my thesis on the analysis of applications of digital presentation methods conducted in Adam Opel AG (Germany), a decisive turning point in my academic and professional journey occurred in 2018. That year, my participation in the exhibition “Explorians Chât Việt” sparked a profound appreciation for traditional Vietnamese decorative patterns.

Since 2022, I have focused my research on semiotics and the application of artificial intelligence in cultural preservation. I have been fortunate to contribute, in a modest capacity, to projects in collaboration with institutions such as FPT Polytechnic and the Hanoi Youth Union, involving the restoration of portraits of fallen soldiers and historical visual materials for the A50th and A80th National Celebration Vietnam. I have also had the honour of participating in the MACHINA proposal project on the digital preservation of intangible cultural heritage, working alongside research teams from TU Darmstadt, the University of Regensburg, the Deutsches Museum, and other institutions across the European Union. Currently, through the founding of the COMEMO.VN platform, I am striving to optimize AI technologies for the extraction of traditional motifs, the restoration of historical photographic archives, and the digitization of Dong Ho folk paintings. For me, each project represents not only a convergence of technology and art, but also a personal commitment to safeguarding the cultural essence of the nation through the language of a new era.