

SEA- NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages
and Cultures of Southeast Asia



Vietnam Between History and Myths: Prof. Engelbert's 2026 Academic Tour



During March of 2026, the Vietnamese academic community had a timely opportunity to revisit the roots of national identity alongside Prof. Dr. Thomas Engelbert from the University of Hamburg, Germany. These discussions felt particularly meaningful as they coincided with the transition to a new leadership in Vietnam, offering a moment to discuss in fresh perspective the historical narratives that continue to shape the nation's sense of self.

In crowded auditoriums of Saigon and historic lecture halls of Hanoi, Prof. Engelbert joined scholars, students, and historians to look at the intricate intersection where Vietnamese myth meets official history.

During his tour, Prof. Engelbert visited leading universities and research institutes throughout Vietnam to promote international scholarly dialogue. In Saigon, he had delivered lectures at the Faculty of Literature at Vietnam National University and the Van Hien University's School of Humanities. His tour continued in Hanoi at the Institute of Literature and the Institute of History (VASS), several faculties within Hanoi National University and the National University of Education, as well as the Han Nôm Institute and Thang Long University.

In his presentations, Prof. Engelbert shared a perspective on pre-modern Vietnam that was at once recognizable yet distinct. By revisiting cultural sediments through a dual outside lens—that of a foreign scholar looking in, and that of regional texts from beyond modern Vietnam's borders—the discussions highlighted how the nation's foundational myths were not merely stories, but intentional political tools used to forge a shared national past.



Focusing on 'The Tale of the Golden Turtle' (*Truyện Thần Kim Quy*) from the indispensable, composite, and semi-historical *Lĩnh Nam chích quái*, Prof. Engelbert argued that these legends are far more than simple folklore. Instead, they represent a sophisticated process of "Vietnamization"—blending local memory with regional motifs to shape the historical constructions of the country's early dynasties. He demonstrated how early Vietnamese authors utilised creative appropriation, adapting elements from Chinese records—such as the accounts of Chengdu's construction—to refine the depiction of the Cổ Loa Citadel. This was a deliberate effort in identity building; by transforming figures like General Cao Thông into the indigenous hero Cao Lỗ, these texts asserted that the Vietnamese had mastered their own advanced technology and established distinct moral values independent of northern influence.

► A recurring question in the talks was why the fifteenth century historian Ngô Sĩ Liên chose to include myths in the official Complete Annals of Đại Việt (Đại Việt Sử ký toàn thư). Prof. Engelbert decoded this as a political masterstroke, arguing that it served two primary purposes. First, by incorporating legends like the Hồng Bàng clan, the historian provided proof of antiquity, establishing the existence of a Vietnamese state that predated Chinese domination. Second, this inclusion served to assert equality; it demonstrated that while Đại Việt may have been smaller than its northern neighbour, its cultural and historical roots were just as deep and divine.

To conclude his sessions, Prof. Engelbert drew parallels between Vietnam's historiography and other global traditions, noting striking similarities in how nations utilise myth to construct identity. He pointed to Korea's Samguk Yusa and the legend of Dangun as a comparable Asian example, while also referencing Germanic mythological folktales used to forge a shared national past in Europe. These comparisons illustrated that the strategic use of legend to define a nation is a universal human endeavor, transcending geographic and cultural boundaries.



The lectures sparked vibrant debates among Vietnam's prominent scholars and researchers regarding the nature and evolution of these historical myths. Assoc. Prof. Phạm Xuân Thạch (VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities) emphasised that every text is a construction, framing "The Tale of the Golden Turtle" specifically as a cultural counterweight to northern influence. Prof. Nguyễn Nam (Fulbright University Vietnam) further underscored this need for analytical rigor, suggesting that these stories must be explained more clearly to reveal their underlying logic. Extending this comparative lens, Prof. Trần Nho Thìn (VNU University of Social Sciences and Humanities) proposed placing Vietnam in a broader international context by drawing parallels between the "hundred eggs" legend and the Indian epic *Mahabharata*. The discussion also touched upon the modern reception of these stories; Dr. Đỗ Hải Ninh (Institute of Literature, VASS) noted that contemporary writers have shifted from utilising myths for lessons in national defence toward exploring the personal tragedies of characters like Mị Châu. Furthermore, Dr. Trần Thị Phương Hoa (Institute of History, VASS) introduced the Tày legend of "Nine Lords Competing for Kingship," highlighting how diverse ethnic memories are woven into the broader national narrative. Finally, Associate Professor Võ Xuân Vinh (Director of the Institute of History) noted, these exchanges do more than just recap the past; they open new doors for international collaboration in the humanities, ensuring that Vietnamese studies continue to flourish on the global stage.



Ultimately, Prof. Engelbert's tour offered a powerful reminder that history is not a static collection of facts, but a living, breathing dialogue. By examining the multi-layered past of Vietnamese folklore through a global lens, the academic community has gained fresh tools to interpret the nation's foundational stories. As Vietnam moves forward into a new chapter of leadership, these scholarly reflections reinforce the idea that understanding the heritage is the surest way to navigate an increasingly interconnected future. We look forward to seeing how these newly opened doors for international collaboration will continue to enrich the field of Vietnamese studies in the years to come. •



Contributor: **Tran Trong Hai Minh**

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Students and Alumni of the Southeast Asian Studies Department



Online Talk**German-Vietnamese
Development
Cooperation: Impressions
from Economic Policies****Abstract**

This lecture offers an insider's perspective on German-Vietnamese development cooperation through the experiences of Prof. Dr. Andreas Stoffers, who served as Country Director of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom in Vietnam from 2019 to 2024. Based in Hanoi during a period of remarkable economic dynamism and geopolitical change, he reflects on development cooperation not as an abstract policy concept, but as a living process of dialogue, partnership, and institutional exchange.

The presentation introduces the work of the Friedrich Naumann Foundation as a liberal German political foundation funded by the Federal Republic of Germany and embedded in the broader architecture of German development cooperation. It highlights the Foundation's collaboration with Vietnamese universities, academic institutions, business-oriented organisations, and other local partners, creating platforms for discussion on reform, entrepreneurship, governance, and international economic integration.

A central focus of the lecture is the economic dimension of this work. Against the backdrop of Vietnam's impressive transformation, the talk explores efforts to promote economic freedom, market-oriented reform, and liberal ideas. It also argues that Vietnam's economic rise has been driven in no small part by its openness to free trade, its comparatively market-friendly policy setting, and a state footprint that in several respects remains lighter than that of several European countries – a development that resonates strongly with the liberal principles championed by the Friedrich Naumann Foundation.

The lecture also reflects the speaker's personal emphasis on public communication and public relations as tools for shaping policy debates and building trust across institutions and societies. •



Prof. Dr. Andreas Stoffers
University of Applied Sciences
Essen, Germany

Prof. Dr. Andreas Stoffers studied social sciences and economics with a focus on International Relations and completed his PhD on German – Thai relations. Andreas has 18 years of practical management experience in banking in the areas of sales, leadership of strategic projects and business development in Southeast Asia and Germany. As a long-time member of Deutsche Bank AG Vietnam Executive Board, he was responsible for successful market research and opening up of new markets. In 2014, Andreas became Professor of International Management at the International University / SDI Munich. Moreover, he was Visiting Professor at Vietnamese-German University VGU in Binh Duong and at University of Economics and Business UEB/VNU Hanoi. Between 2019 and 2024, Andreas was country director of Friedrich Naumann Foundation for Freedom, a German NGO in Hanoi/Vietnam. Since 2024, he is Professor of Southeast Asian Business Relations at FOM University of Applied Sciences in Essen/Germany and Academic Director in Taiyuan/China. Andreas is in particular working on international relations in the age of digitalization and globalisation between the EU and ASEAN in general and between Germany and Vietnam, Thailand, Malaysia in specific.

Lecture details:

Friday, May 22nd, 2026

14:30 – 16:00 (CEST)

19:30 – 21:00 (Vietnam)

Speaker: **Prof. Dr. Andreas Stoffers**

Host: **Prof. Thomas Engelbert**

Zoom-ID: **696 7510 1996**

Password: **11550563**

Zoom link: https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/69675101996?pwd=E9p9N_YhwvM5mLfnQT69p_hEPj9v99vVc.8Y8mDRQDt7LegxcC

Anna Mazur's report from Surabaya: A semester abroad, living locally

Anna has just returned from her *Auslandssemester* at Universitas Airlangga Surabaya, and she has been generous enough to share her experience with us. She is majoring in Austronesian Studies and has been learning Bahasa since enrolling. During her time in Surabaya, Anna created a large number of short video content documenting her daily life and sharing them with a wider audience. The content varies, but is mostly centred on student life in Indonesia. It includes mini vlogs of going to university, shopping at Indonesian convenience stores such as Indomaret, taste-testing different foods, and her favourite, ordering Grab (ride-hailing and delivery app) for short commute or food deliveries. Although primarily speaking in German in these videos, Anna also demonstrates her proficiency in Bahasa through conversations with sellers or taxi drivers. Anna has clearly found her audience, and they love her content. At the time of writing, her TikTok account (@picob4ll4) has gained 15.800 followers, with many of her videos going viral.

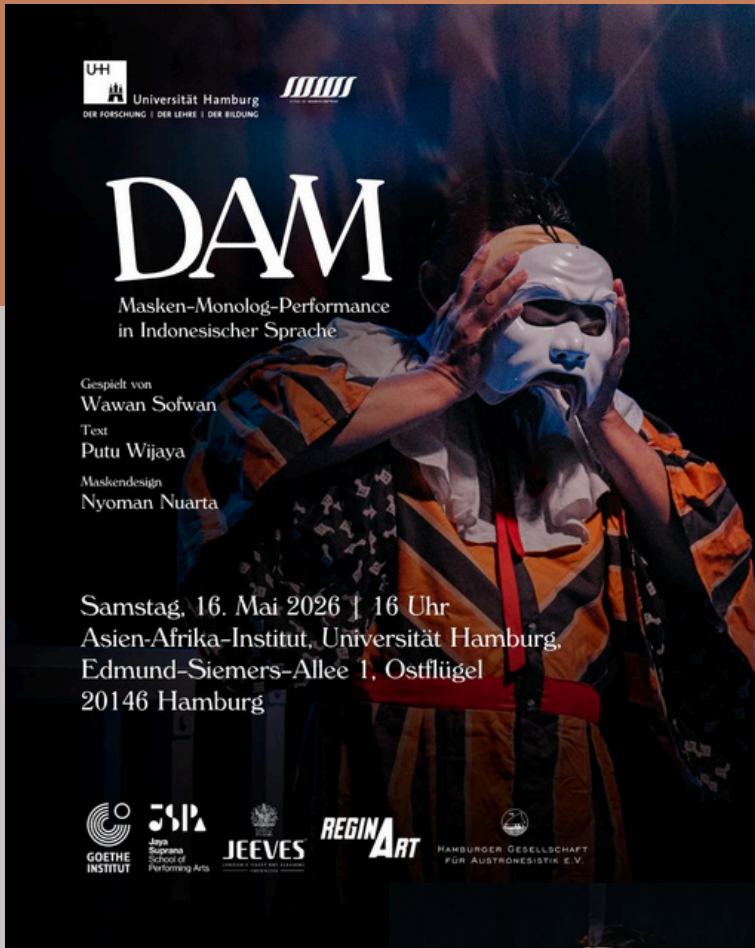


Outside of her studies, Anna spends her free time skateboarding. So, within a week of her arrival in Surabaya, she actively sought out the local skateboarding community and joined them immediately. This group soon became the comrades who showed her around Surabaya and nearby places like Madura and Mojokerto. She observed that skateboarding communities, both in Germany and Indonesia, share similar traits of open-mindedness. They also formed a close-knit social circle, something she finds closely related to Indonesian culture of *nongkrong* (hanging out with friends). Whether it was a skater's intuition or good timing and fortune, she was warmly received by the community, and this connection turned into friendship.



Contributors: **Anna Mazur, Tiara Ulfah**
Photo credits: **Anna Mazur**

When asked how her experience compared to her visit to Manila, she preferred Surabaya by far. She highlighted the more relaxed pace of life, the politeness of the people, and the safety she felt among the locals. She also approved of the transportation system in Indonesia, especially Kereta Api Indonesia (Indonesian train) for long-distance travel, which she found reliable and efficient, even comparing it favourably to German trains. She also noted that her experience on the ground differed from what she learned in class. The Indonesian culture presented in her coursework did not always match what she observed in Surabaya, especially in everyday practices and language use. So in creating her contents, she is careful not to reproduce the common ways Western visitors portray Indonesia, which she finds often shallow and superficial. Instead, she emphasises that difficult situations can often be turned around with a positive attitude, rather than immediately complaining or drawing comparisons from a position of privilege. She also reflected on how some visitors, particularly in places like Bali, tend to produce content centred on viral locations or shopping malls. In contrast, she suggests that there are many more ways to experience the culture, not by staying within tourist enclaves, but by engaging with everyday life, drinking *jamu*, eating *putu*, or ordering *rawon* from a small *warung* near campus, and living, even briefly, as a local Surabayan. •



Monolog Topeng “DAM” is coming to Hamburg!

Mask Monologue (*Monolog Topeng*) DAM is coming to Hamburg on 16 May 2026. It is a one-man show performed by the extraordinary Wawan Sofyan, based on a short story of the same title by Putu Wijaya. In this performance, the actor transforms into multiple characters using masks, voice, and movement, bringing to life a courtroom story that explores identity and power. DAM was first performed in 1998 in Melbourne and has been performed more than 80 times in various cities across the globe, and now on our campus. Don't miss out!

Event details:

Monolog Topeng “DAM”

Performer: **Wawan Sofyan**

Text: **Putu Wijaya**

Mask designer: **Nyoman Nuarta**

Date & Time:

16th May 2026, 16.00

Place:

Asien-Afrika-Institut

Edmund-Siemers-Allee, 1 (East Wing)

Room 121

About Wawan Sofyan:

Kang Wawan is an Indonesian theater actor and director well known for his solo performance and experimental theater. He graduated from UPI Bandung and trained at Studiklub Teater Bandung, Indonesia's oldest theater group. Since the mid-1990s, he has played and directed many Indonesian international theater productions, such as DAM, Tan Malaka, and *Besok atau Tidak Sama Sekali!* He has trained and performed in Germany and Australia, receiving support from the Goethe-Institut and participating in global theater festivals. He was awarded the Melbourne Fringe Theater Award and nominated for the Green Room Award in Australia. Alongside his performance career, he is active as a theater educator, teaching acting and voice training in Indonesia. More of his theater productions: IG-stageofwawansofyan

Photo credit:

Stageofwawansofyan

Thai Tag 2026 Returns to Hamburg: Call for Papers on Current Thai Studies

Following the successful year in 2025, Thai Tag is returning to the University of Hamburg on **30 May 2026**. This year, the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin and the Asia-Africa Institute (AAI) are focusing on academic exchange through a dedicated session: "Current Research on Thailand."

We are looking for contributions that reflect the wide scope of Thai Studies today—including history, politics, and environment. Beyond sharing research, the gathering is a great opportunity for Germany-based scholars to connect and build a stronger academic network.

Joining the Session

The organisers invite researchers, staff, and students affiliated with German institutions to submit their ongoing or recently completed work.

- **Submission Requirements:** An abstract (max. 500 words) and a short bio (max. 100 words).
- **Deadline:** Please send all materials to thaitag2026@gmail.com by 30 April 2026.

Up to six presenters will be selected to share their findings in 15-minute sessions. To support participants, the Royal Thai Embassy will reimburse train travel expenses within Germany for the selected speakers.

Photo Competition: "Thailand through the Eyes of Students"

Students in Thai or Southeast Asian Studies at German universities are invited to showcase "Thainess" through original photography.

- **Requirements:** A digital photo taken in Thailand with a bilingual description (German and Thai).
- **Prizes:** Awards range from 150 to 300 Euros.
- **Exhibition:** Entries will be displayed for public voting during the event.

Event Details

The forum will take place at the Asia-Africa Institute (Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Ost-Flügel). Attendance is free of charge for all who are interested, and a complimentary Thai lunch will be provided for participants during the event.

This focus on academic dialogue builds on the legacy of Thai Tag 2025, which explored heritage under the theme "Threads of Time: Preserving and Creating Thai Fashion." While the official theme for 2026 is still under wraps, further details will be announced very soon. •

Contributor:
Kornkanok Khetnongbua



Samstag, 14. Juni 2025
09:00 - 17:00 Uhr

Asien-Afrika-Institut
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1
Ost-Flügel, Raum 221

THAI-TAG 2025

Threads of Time: Preserving and Creating Thai Fashion

OPENED BY
Miss Chompoonute Chompoonam, Minister, Royal Thai Embassy, Berlin
Mr. Stefan Krohn, Honorary Consul, Royal Thai Honorary Consulate, Hamburg
Prof. Dr. Volker Grabowsky, Asien-Afrika-Institut (AAI), Universität Hamburg

ORGANIZER
Abteilung für Sprachen und Kulturen Südostasiens, Arbeitsbereich Thaiistik in Zusammenarbeit mit der Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik e.V. (HGT)

PROGRAM
Lectures by scholars from Thailand and Germany
Fashion Show
Traditional Thai Music & Dance Performance
Thai Students' Competition: 25 Questions on Thailand
Thai Food
Lucky Draw
Research Posters & Book Launch



Universität Hamburg
Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Ost-Flügel
www.aai.uni-hamburg.de



30. Mai.
13:30- 15.00 hrs

THAI TAG 2026

Call for papers: Current Research on Thailand

30 May 2026
13:30-15:00 hrs.
Asia-Africa Institute, University of Hamburg (Side event of Thai-Tag 2026)

The Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin and the Asia-Africa Institute invite scholars and students in Germany to present ongoing or recent research on Thailand.

Who can apply?
Researchers, staff, or students affiliated with institutions in Germany working on Thailand-related topics of all disciplines (e.g., history, politics, economics, culture, society, environment, and more)

How to apply?
• Please submit an abstract (max. 500 words) and a short bio (max. 100 words)
• Deadline for submission: **30 April 2026**
• Submission via email: thaitag2026@gmail.com, with Subject: Application for presentations

Selection:
• Up to 6 presenters will be selected.
• Each selected presenter will be allocated a total of 15 minutes, including an 8-10 minute presentation and 5 minutes for discussion and feedback.
• Accepted presenters are requested to submit their presentation slide or short paper by **15 May 2026**.

Support:
The Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin will reimburse train travel expenses within Germany for the selected presenters.



Universität Hamburg
Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1, Ost-Flügel
www.aai.uni-hamburg.de

Connecting Scholars: Recent Highlights from the HGT Lecture Series

We are delighted to bring you the most recent information regarding our activities at the **Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik (HGT)**. Our online lecture series remains a platform for scholars and enthusiasts to discover the diverse historical, religious, and social landscapes of Thailand and the broader region.

Recap: Recent Highlights. In our recent sessions, we have explored fascinating intersections of history, politics, and religion.

- Dec 3, 2025 | Dr. Iselin Frydenlund: A Professor at MF Norwegian School of Theology, she offered an insightful examination of the intricate interplay between Buddhism, nationalism, and politics in the region.
- Feb 6, 2026 | Kornkanok Khetnongbua: A PhD Candidate (Universität Hamburg) and HmbNFG scholarship recipient, examined the influence of Dr. Friedrich Schäfer on the development of public health and medical education in Siam in the early 20th century.
- Feb 27, 2026 | Bancharat Polpila: A PhD Candidate and Lecturer (University of Passau), she explored how Gen Z activists revitalize the memory of the October 6 massacre to articulate modern democratic aspirations.
- Mar 13, 2026 | Dr. Roger Casas: a well-known scholar at Yunnan University, shared insights from his book "Worldly Engagements," offering a rare look at how Tai Lue communities in China navigate the intersection of Buddhist monasticism and masculinity.



Die Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik e.V. in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Arbeitsbereich Thaiistik der Abteilung Sprachen und Kulturen Südostasiens des AAI lädt Sie zu folgendem Online-Vortrag ein:

Dr. Friedrich Schäfer and the Creation of a Public Health Service in Early Twentieth-Century Siam

This study examines the role of German medical experts during the reigns of Rama V (1868–1910) and Rama VI (1910–1925), with a particular focus on the German surgeon, Dr. med. Friedrich Schäfer, who served in the Siamese army between 1909 and 1914. By exploring western influence on the Siamese administration between 1868 and 1911, this study analyses Schäfer's role in the Siamese military and as a consultant for the construction of King Chulalongkorn Memorial Hospital and the development of the country's medical education. Dr. Schäfer helped lay the foundation for modern surgery in Thailand. He made significant contributions to the advancement of medical and surgical training and assisted in the construction of advanced military hospitals in Bangkok and surrounding areas. As a sharp observer, he documented natural phenomena in Bangkok and other cities, as well as the rapid urban expansion at the end of King Chulalongkorn's reign.

Online Lecture via Zoom & in English

Kornkanok Khetnongbua is a PhD Candidate in Southeast Asian History at the Faculty of Humanities, University of Hamburg. She is a recipient of the State Graduate Funding Program scholarship (Hamburger Nachwuchsförderung, Stipendium der Landesgraduiertenförderung HmbNFG), which supports her dissertation on the geopolitical dynamics of the region. Her project specifically examines German – English rivalry in Semi-colonial Siam (1860–1917). Further contributing to the field, her Master's thesis has been accepted for an upcoming volume in the HGT series.

Friday, 6 February 2026
14:00–16:00 (CET)
20:00–22:00 (Thai time)

Click or Copy:
<https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/64563521222>
pwd=5G6HFNCOUZYn5UL5N6N5m5n1p65U09
Meeting-ID: 645 6352 1222 | Passcode: hgtlecture

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The Role of Gen Z in the October 6 Commemoration between 2018–2025

From 2020 to 2021, Thailand witnessed a youth-led political uprising that reshaped public engagement with democracy and renewed interest in long-suppressed historical narratives. Central to this shift is Gen Z's growing political awareness, grounded in Thailand's past, including long-silenced events such as the 6 October 1976 massacre. This lecture examines how young Thais today interpret this event and employ commemorative practices as countermemory to challenge state narratives and articulate democratic aspirations. The study focuses on commemorations at Thammasat University from 2018 to 2025, spanning the period before and after the 2020 uprising. Drawing on interviews with organizers and participants, alongside an analysis of online discourse, it explores how the memory of 6 October is mobilized and understood. Observations show that these commemorations have become larger, more participatory, and more explicitly political since 2020. A once modest memorial has developed into a broader remembrance of state violence, linking 1976 to incidents such as Tak Bai in 2004 and recent repression. The analysis demonstrates how youth transform remembrance into political action, challenging official silence and envisioning a more democratic future.

Online Lecture via Zoom & in English

Bancharat Polpila completed her Master's degree at Leuphana University in Lüneburg in early 2025. She is currently a PhD candidate and a lecturer at the University of Passau and a research associate at the Chair of Development Politics. Her research focuses on social movements, democratization, and authoritarianism.

Friday, 27 February 2026
14:00–16:00 (CET)
20:00–22:00 (Thai time)

Click or Copy:
<https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/64563521222>
pwd=5G6HFNCOUZYn5UL5N6N5m5n1p65U09
Meeting-ID: 645 6352 1222 | Passcode: hgtlecture

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Join the HGT Community The Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik (HGT), in collaboration with the Department of Thai Studies at the University of Hamburg, is committed to promoting Thai Studies and encouraging academic exchange. We welcome you to become a member of our association and join our expanding community of scholars and researchers.



Die Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik e.V. in Zusammenarbeit mit dem Arbeitsbereich Thaiistik der Abteilung Sprachen und Kulturen Südostasiens des AAI und dem Numata Zentrum lädt Sie zu folgendem Online-Vortrag ein:

BUDDHIST RESPONSES TO THE 2021 MILITARY COUP IN MYANMAR

The military coup in Myanmar on 1 February 2021 ended a period of semi-civilian rule (2011–2021), bringing the country once again under direct military rule. Recent research into the religious responses to the coup in its early phases indicates that the mass protests were characterised by global internet culture, inter-religious solidarity, and new visions for a plural and democratic Myanmar: The Buddhist Sangha, it is often claimed, remained silent and was mainly supportive of the military. In this talk I argue that this narrative is too simplistic, ignoring both changes in attitudes over time, as well as internal divisions within the Sangha. Rather, what we see is both monastic justification of the military's action and resistance to it. Moreover, I will also make the case that Buddhist support for the coup must be understood not only within an instrumentalist framework or within what we can refer to as the "Military-monastic complex", but also through a specific "Buddhist Ideology of Order". In opposition to this, a Buddhist revolutionary movement is identified. It envisions radical societal transformations, including of institutional Buddhism itself. Finally, I will discuss the ways in which pro-revolutionary activities go well beyond established monastic revolutionary networks, indicating broader Sangha engagement in the Myanmar Spring Revolution than has often been assumed.

Online Lecture via Zoom & in English

Dr. Iselin Frydenlund is professor of the Study of Religions at MF Norwegian School of Theology, Religion and Society and a Fellow of the MF Centre for the Advanced Study of Religion (MF CAS). She specialises in questions relating to Buddhism and its societal impact, focusing on Buddhism, politics, nationalism and violence in Sri Lanka and Myanmar. She also works on Buddhist-Muslim relations in Buddhist-majority states in Asia and was the first in the Research Council of Norway-funded research project INTERRELIG (Intersecting Flows of Islamophobia). Since 2018 she has also been leading an academic exchange program between MF and Myanmar Institute of Theology. Frydenlund regularly appears in national and international media on questions related to Buddhism and politics, and she frequently provides analysis for policy-makers home and abroad. Her latest book is *Buddhist-Muslim Relations in a Theocratic World* (Pargrave Macmillan, 2020), co-edited with Michael Szymon. Her monograph on Buddhism as a political force in Asia will soon appear for the Scandinavian University Press.

The lecture is available also in situ: Raum 120
Asien-Afrika-Institut, Universität Hamburg, Edmund-Siemens-Allee 1, Ostflügel

Wednesday, 3 December 2025
16:15–17:45 (CET)
22:15–23:45 (Thai time)

For online participation, please register!
<https://www.eventbrite.de/e/buddhist-responses-to-the-2021-military-coup-in-myanmar-tickets-1564377096776?aff=oddticketcreator>

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Numata Zentrum für Buddhismuskunde
AAI



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Worldly Engagements: Buddhist Monasticism and Masculinity among the Tai Lue of Southwest China

Following years of repression during the Maoist period, Buddhism among the Tai Lue of Sipping Panna, the largest community of Theravada Buddhists in China, recovered and even thrived in the 1980s. In recent decades, however, ever-growing global connectivity and online visibility have brought increased scrutiny. The participation of Tai Lue monks and nuns in practices such as eating in the afternoon, drinking alcohol, having girlfriends, or competing in sports—behaviours considered unfitting for Buddhist monastics—has been cited as evidence of this minority community's supposed inadequacy and backwardness. Based on long-term ethnographic research in Sipping Panna and earlier work conducted on mainland Southeast Asia, *Worldly Engagements*, the subject matter of this presentation places such alleged shortcomings at the center of its enquiry. It argues that these practices do not mark a degraded Buddhism but reflect a monasticism traditionally prevalent in the region, an amphibious technology of self-mastery inextricably embedded in the mundane and the non-religious—that is, a vernacular discipline concerned mainly with making boys into men. The result is a rich, intimate and unjudged portrait of the temple experience as a site where Tai Lue youths negotiate competing demands from families, religious superiors, peer pressure, national ideals of masculinity, and the strong presence of the Tai Buddhist.

Online Lecture via Zoom & in English

Roger Casas earned his PhD in Anthropology from the Australian National University with a thesis on male monastic discipline among the Tai Lue of Sipping Panna, a region where he has lived and conducted extensive research since 2004. After obtaining his PhD, his work in this region has expanded beyond Buddhist monasticism to include social memory, language politics, economic transformation, and gender relations. He has held researcher and lecturer posts in academic institutions in Austria, China, Thailand, and Japan. His PhD-based book *Worldly Engagements: Buddhist Monasticism and Masculinity among the Tai Lue of Southwest China*, was published in November 2025 by the University of Hawaii Press. He is currently a Distinguished Researcher at Yunnan University's National Center for Studies of Borderland Ethnic Minorities in Kunming.

Friday, 13 March 2026
14:00–16:00 (CET)
20:00–22:00 (Thai time)

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<https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/64563521222>
pwd=5G6HFNCOUZYn5UL5N6N5m5n1p65U09
Meeting-ID: 645 6352 1222 | Passcode: hgtlecture

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Contributor:
Kornkanok Khetnongbua