

SEA- NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages
and Cultures of Southeast Asia



Thai Cultural Day 2026



The Thai Studies section of our Department, in collaboration with the Hamburger Gesellschaft für Thaiistik e.V. (HGT), organised the annual Thai Cultural Day (Thai-Tag) at the Asia-Africa Institute of the University of Hamburg on 30 May 2026. Under the theme “Thailand through the Lens of Photography,” the event brought together students, scholars, artists, and friends of Thailand from Germany and abroad.

The event was opened by representatives of the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin and the Royal Thai Honorary Consulate in Hamburg, followed by a traditional Thai dance. In the morning session, the academic programme focused on photography as a medium of history, culture, and identity. The three keynote lectures, “Lan Na History and Culture through Photography,” “Photography and Conservation in Northern Thailand,” and “Thai Society through the Eyes of a Photographer,” offered different but complementary perspectives on the role of visual media in understanding Thailand past and present.

A highlight for students was the Photographic Students' Competition, “Thailand in the Eyes of Students.” More than 26 submissions were presented in an exhibition in Room 122, where visitors were invited to vote for their favourite photograph and thus serve as the jury. The prize winners were announced later in the programme, together with short presentations on the stories behind their images and how they reflect aspects of Thai cultural identity.

Thai Cultural Day 2026

► Parallel sessions provided further opportunities for exchange and orientation. In Room 221, a career forum presented by the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin and the Royal Thai Honorary Consulate in Hamburg featured six students from Heidelberg and Hamburg, who reported on their internships and practical experiences in Thailand. In Room 232, five young scholars from Hamburg, Mainz, and Berlin presented current research topics ranging from historical source studies to entrepreneurship, gender, and visual approaches in contemporary Thai studies.

The afternoon programme also included a presentation by Karandeep Singh on gender, memory, and funerary culture in Thailand. Throughout the day, a classical Thai music ensemble led by Ms. Amphan Schmidt performed several pieces after the opening in the morning, again in the afternoon, and at the close of the event, lending Thai-Tag a distinctive musical thread. Supported by the Royal Thai Embassy in Berlin, the Royal Thai Honorary Consulate in Hamburg, and the Krohn Foundation, Thai-Tag 2026 successfully combined scholarship, student engagement, and cultural performance in a celebration of Thailand through images, sounds, and shared perspectives.

Contributor: **Volker Grabowsky**

Photo credit: **Katharina Fehrenkamp**



Academic Exchange and Reflections on the Visual Heritage of Lan Na

We were delighted to host Assistant Professor Dr. Pakdeekul Ratana from the Lan Na Studies Center, Chiang Mai University, for a productive scholarly visit this spring. As part of a collaborative program under the Memorandum of Understanding between our universities, Dr. Ratana spent six weeks in Hamburg, from 1 May to 20 June 2026.

Throughout her stay, Dr. Ratana became an integral part of our academic life, offering insightful contributions to our Thai II and Thai III courses. She also spearheaded a specialized lecture series on Religion and Politics in Theravada Southeast Asia, which sparked engaging discussions among our faculty and students. Notably, her guest lecture on "The Role of Women in Theravada Buddhism" provided a refreshing perspective on traditional monastic landscapes.

A centerpiece of her residency was her keynote address at THAI-TAG 2026 on 30 May, titled "Khruba Siwichai: The charismatic saintly monk of Lan Na in the light of photography". Dr. Ratana's research compellingly argued that photographs of Khruba Siwichai were not mere historical records, but active agents that helped shape regional identity and charisma during a time of intense political change. By framing these images as heritage objects, she illustrated how visual culture has long been a vessel for cultural memory and moral resistance in the Lan Na region.

We are truly grateful for the perspectives Dr. Ratana shared with our community. Her visit has further strengthened the bonds between our two institutions, and we look forward to future collaborations. •



Contributor: **Kornkanok Khetnongbua**
Photo credit: **Pakdeekul Ratana**

The SEA-Newsletter Team:

Board:

Prof.Dr. Elsa Clavé
Prof.Dr. Jörg Thomas Engelbert
Prof.Dr. Volker Grabowsky
Prof.Dr. Jan van der Putten

Vietnamese studies:

Quang Minh To

Thai studies:

Kornkanok Khetnongbua

Austronesian studies:

Tiara Ulfah
M. Dian Saputra

Subscribe:

suedostasien.unihh@outlook.de

Follow us:

 [@seastudies_hamburg](https://www.instagram.com/seastudies_hamburg)



Students and Alumni of the Southeast Asian Studies Department



The Journey Far to the East: Discovering Hamburg's Connections with Batavia

"Another surprise! I had just learned that the Batavia coat of arms is displayed in the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, and I had never even heard of the Hygieia Fountain."

Comments like these were common among students enrolled in the Bahasa Indonesia I and Bahasa Indonesia II courses during the excursion The Journey Far to the East: Between Hamburg and Batavia, held in the first week of June. On this walking tour, students explored the historical connections between Southeast Asia and Hamburg by visiting a number of hidden-in-plain-sight landmarks in the city centre, including the Hapag-Lloyd AG office, Hanseviertel, the Hygieia Fountain, the Helmut-Schmidt-Haus (formerly the Hamburger Tageblatt building), Asia-Haus, and the Kaffeemuseum Burg.

Before the excursion began, students were introduced to the historical context of Hamburg-Batavia trade through a 1713 edition of the *Hamburgischer Currier*, which documented maritime routes linking Hamburg, Amsterdam, and Batavia. Between 1850 and 1919, approximately 35 million emigrants passed through Hamburg, facilitated by advances in steamship technology and the opening of the Suez Canal. During the same period, Batavia modernized its port infrastructure by shifting maritime activities from Sunda Kelapa to the Port of Tanjung Priok. By the early twentieth century, shipping companies HAPAG-Lloyd AG and the Deutsch-Australische Dampfschiffs-Gesellschaft (DADG) had established routes, stations, and offices throughout the Dutch East Indies to support the expanding Europe-Asia trade network. Commercial ties continued during the First World War, as Dutch neutrality enabled trade between Germany, the Netherlands, and the Dutch East Indies.



The group then visited the Hygieia Fountain behind Hamburg City Hall and the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce, where Batavia's coat of arms is still displayed today. These sites illustrate Batavia's growing commercial importance following the establishment of the German-Dutch Chamber of Commerce in Batavia in 1919. They also demonstrate the city's prominent role in Hamburg's overseas trade. Major exports from the Dutch East Indies included nutmeg, pepper, cloves, cinnamon, sugar, coffee, and other tropical commodities. By 1938, German demand had shifted increasingly towards industrial raw materials such as rubber, copra, and fibres in preparation for the Second World War.



The excursion concluded at the former Hamburger Tageblatt building, now known as the Helmut-Schmidt-Haus on Buceriusstraße and home to ZEIT Online. Originally constructed in 1938 for the Hamburger Tageblatt, the building features an exterior sculpture of a ship that once bore a swastika during the Nazi period, a symbol that has since been removed. Students also examined how newspapers such as the Hamburger Tageblatt and the Hamburger Fremdenblatt reported on events in Batavia, including the city's fall to Japanese forces during the Second World War.



The Coat of Arms of Batavia in the Hamburg Chamber of Commerce's building.
Source: Photographer Team Paarl Hamburg



The coat of Arms of Batavia, the Dutch East Indies
Source: Leiden University Libraries

As a final assignment, participants wrote short essays summarizing the excursion and reflecting on their impressions. Because the colonial history linking Hamburg and Batavia remains relatively little known, the excursion not only introduced students to the historical connections between the two cities but also encouraged them to critically reflect on the enduring legacies of colonialism, trade, migration, and global exchange that continue to shape both Hamburg and present-day Jakarta. •

Contributor: **D Wira Atmaja**
Photo credit: **D Wira Atmaja**

Lecture series: Vietnamese Culture Forum

Online talk

Vietnam: A Scientific and Technological History

(Việt Nam: Một lịch sử khoa học kỹ thuật)

“A Brief History of Science and Technology in Pre-modern Vietnam” (*Lược sử Khoa học và Kỹ thuật Việt Nam Tiền hiện đại*, 2026) is a research work compiled by a team of authors. The authors are: Assoc. Prof. Dr. Trần Trọng Dương (School of Foreign Languages and Tourism, Hanoi University of Industry), Mr. Phạm Vũ Lộc, MSc (Vietnam National Space Center, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology) and Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Phương Đông, MSc (author of the books “Lôi Động Tinh Phi – A History of Vietnamese Firearms and Ammunition” and “Thần Long Kích Thủy – A History of Vietnamese Warships”).

This above-mentioned work offers a series of snapshots regarding the development of science and technology in pre-modern Vietnam, reflecting the numerous scientific and technological achievements attained by the Vietnamese people across generations, and their application of these advancements in the tasks of nation-building, national defense, and country development. Through key fields such as astronomy and calendrical science, geography and cartography, mathematics, dyke construction, weaponry, mechanics, transportation, and architecture, the book demonstrates that the Vietnamese people demonstrated an early capacity to absorb, adapt, and innovate scientific and technical knowledge. This enabled them to adapt to the natural environment, safeguard the nation, and build their socio-cultural life. Furthermore, the work helps challenge biased views found in certain historical interpretations and affirms the tradition of creative labor, the proactive spirit of learning, and the capacity for innovation possessed by Vietnam’s diverse ethnic communities throughout the process of cultural exchange and acculturation.

The book guides readers through the innovations and achievements of our ancestors across four chapters:

Speakers



Assoc. Prof. Dr. Trần Trọng Dương
School of Foreign Languages and Tourism,
Hanoi University of Industry



Mr. Phạm Vũ Lộc, MSc
Vietnam National Space Center, Vietnam Academy of Science and Technology



Mr. Nguyễn Ngọc Phương Đông, MSc

Host: **Prof. Dr. Thomas Engelbert**
Language: **Vietnamese**

Friday, June 27, 2026
14:30 – 16:00 (CEST)
19:30 – 21:00 (Vietnam)

Zoom-ID: **663 9376 3127**
Password: **78309132**

Zoom link: <https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/66393763127?pwd=l8juTqDFvau8LbsDwQ8kpD4bZcfvWJXT.WAT6qffS57-tJbKw>

Chapter 1: “Gazing at Celestial Phenomena” outlines how the Vietnamese people, across various eras and dynasties, observed, measured, and interpreted the heavens, and applied celestial phenomena and astronomical-calendar systems to their daily lives.

Chapter 2: “Surveying the Land” deciphers the monumental achievements of our forebears in harnessing and conquering nature, as well as in utilizing geographical and cartographic knowledge for national defense, civilization-building, and the administration of the country and its territory.

Chapter 3: “Hands and Minds” highlights specific scientific and technical achievements of the Vietnamese people, ranging from mathematics and mechanics to weaponry and boat-building techniques.

Chapter 4: “Adorning the Landscape” vividly illustrates Vietnamese creativity through various structures—spanning from military fortifications to civil architecture, such as the Lý Dynasty’s One Pillar Pagoda and ancient bridges.