

SEA-NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia

MARCH 2024



Ariff's Educational Journey

ALUMNI COLUMN

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LinkedIn: Students and Alumni of the Southeast Asian Studies Department- Hamburg University.

<https://www.linkedin.com/groups/9016077/>

After having introduced Aidul in our “Alumni Column” in the previous issue of February 2024, we continue this column by presenting you the experiences of another student who recently graduated from our Department: **Ariff Hafidzi Radzi** from Terengganu, Malaysia.

After having obtained his bachelor’s degree at the University of Bristol in the United Kingdom, and a first Master’s in Southeast Asian Studies at the University of Malaya (Malaysia), with a thesis focused on the history of Southern Philippines, the eagerness to know more about the rich Southeast Asian writing culture, motivated Ariff to enrol in the Master’s Degree program of the Center for the Study of Manuscript Culture (CSMC), part of the University of Hamburg.

By taking various elective classes from the Department for Languages and Cultures of Southeast Asia, Ariff deepened his knowledge of the region, especially of the nations he was less familiar with, such as Thailand and

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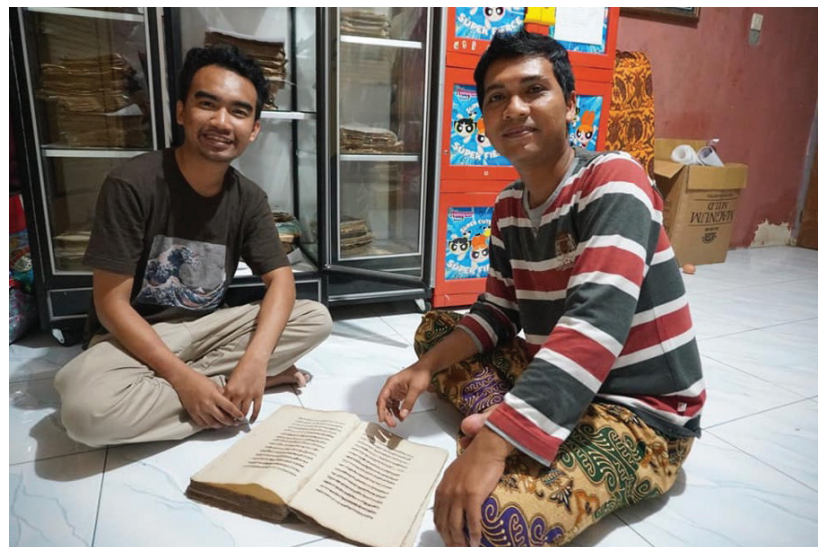
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Indonesia. The Classical Malay class with Prof. Jan van der Putten proved very helpful and inspiring, in that it helped him to further familiarize himself with Malay literature. This class significantly enhanced his proficiency in reading the Jawi script and enabled him to access archival and manuscript materials written in that script, which was extremely important for the main topic of his research. He graduated with a thesis on Malay letters collected by William Farquhar in the early 19th century preserved in the Library of Congress (USA).

Ariff is currently pursuing his PhD at the Department of Transregional Southeast Asian Studies within the Institute of Asian and African Studies, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Humboldt University of Berlin (HU Berlin). He is also a Doctoral Fellow at the Berlin Graduate School of Muslim Cultures and Societies, the Free University of Berlin. His ongoing Ph.D. research deals with the history of international relations, aiming to map and trace trans-regional connections and networks of Islamic activism in Southeast Asia and the Middle East from the 1960s to the 1990s. It aims to contribute to the modern historiography of the Muslim world by exploring the significance of Islam and faith-based solidarity as 'the third way' in response to the division of the international order during and after the 1960s.

He is still in the early phase of his project and is currently doing fieldwork in Indonesia. For him, it has been quite a ride navigating the unfamiliar environment in Indonesia, but the main challenge—similar to what many junior historians experience—revolves around piecing together a highly diverse collection of materials.



His struggle is to weave all these different pieces into a cohesive narrative and extract meaningful info from all sorts of sources, which eventually will take the shape of a solid dissertation.

Ariff's experience in Berlin has been wonderful so far, and he believes that the knowledge he has acquired during his studies in Hamburg has been crucial in preparing him for the start of his PhD research.

We wish Ariff all the best in his future career and we are very proud to have been able to contribute a bit to the creation of what we are certain to be a bright future. ●

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Photo: UHH_von_Wieding

Putra's Freshman Year at the University of Hamburg

Following his fondness for complex cultural phenomena and his profound passion for the study of foreign languages and anthropology, Putra, from Bengkulu, Indonesia, has joined the master's program in the Austronesian department during this winter semester.

After finishing his bachelor program at the Gadjah Mada University in Jogjakarta (Indonesia), Putra was granted the highly competitive LPDP (Educational Fund Management Institution) scholarship, provided by the Indonesian Ministry of Finance, which allowed him to move to Hamburg and finance his two years of study at our University.

Having now almost completed his first semester of study in our department, Putra has expressed his amazement about how his cultural and personal life perspectives have changed after experiencing the academic freedom and nice atmosphere at Hamburg University. For him, such self-development could have been unthinkable if he had decided to remain in his homeland, and not try to pursue a master's degree abroad. In his opinion, the teaching staff at the Austronesian Studies department will help him faster and better understand the complex theories he was partially introduced to during his bachelor program.

After only a few months spent here, he realizes now that his main interest is in endangered languages and understudied cultures in Indonesia, especially the ones in the society where he comes from in Bengkulu. Being aware of the worrisome disappearance of local knowledge caused by the decreasing number of language users and their inability to read the script in which the traditional accounts of the society are penned down, Putra plans to focus his future thesis on these stories and the problems these pose for their understanding as well as the threat for their preservation these are facing.

The general impression Putra has gained so far is that academic life at the University of Hamburg is lively and highly facilitated by the University. Also, he finds staying in Hamburg fairly comfortable, although the German-speaking environment is quite a challenge to deal with, especially because he still has great difficulties speaking German. ●

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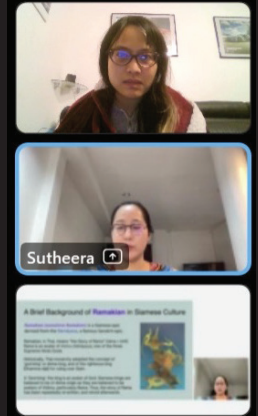
A Brief Background of **Ramakian** in Siamese Culture

Ramakian (sometimes *Ramakien*) is a Siamese epic derived from the *Rāmāyaṇa*, a famous Sanskrit epic.

Ramakian, in Thai, means “the Glory of Rama” (*rāma* + *kīrti*). Rama is an avatar of Vishnu (*Nārāyaṇa*), one of the three Supreme Hindu Gods.

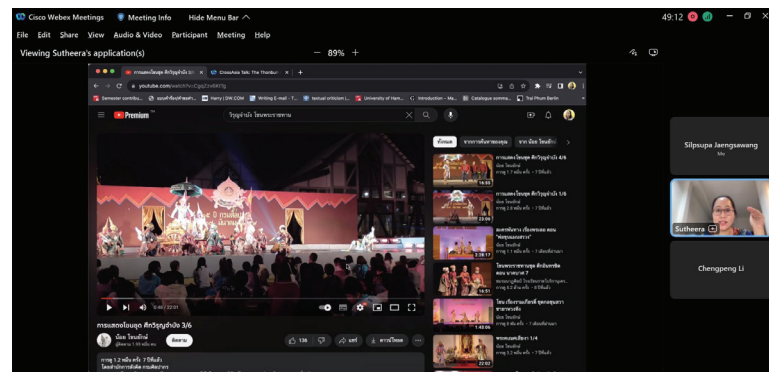
Historically, Thai monarchy adopted the concept of ‘god-king’ or divine king, and of the righteous king (*Dhamma-rājā*) for ruling over Siam.

A ‘God-king’: the king is an avatar of God. Siamese kings are believed to be of divine origin as they are believed to be avatars of Vishnu, particularly Rama. Thus, the story of Rama has been repeatedly re-written, and retold afterwards.



Online Lecture at the Berlin State Library

On 30 November 2023, at the Berlin State Library (Staatsbibliothek) based at Potsdamer Straße, Jan Dreßler and Sutheera Satayaphan, PhD students from the Asia Africa Institute, University of Hamburg, were invited to give an academic presentation on “The Thonburi *Ramakian* – On the Journey of a Royal Siamese Manuscript to Berlin and the Aftermath of its Recovery” in the lecture series “CrossAsia Talks” organized by the Berlin State Library’s East Asia Department. The lecture was held in a hybrid format with Jan Dreßler being on site, whereas Sutheera Satayaphan gave her lecture Online from Bangkok. Both speakers illustrated the *Ramakian*, a masterpiece which is part of the canon of



Siamese literature, which has been transmitted in several versions. The manuscript, which is kept at the Berlin State Library and was commissioned by Siamese King Taksin in 1780, contains a part of the text which has been considered “lost” in Thailand. Sutheera Satayaphan discussed the background of the *Ramakian* and elaborated on its different versions, highlighting the significance of the Berlin manuscript. Jan Dreßler traced in detail the journey of that precious *Ramakian* manuscript from Bangkok to Berlin and the Protestant missionary who brought this manuscript to Berlin. ●

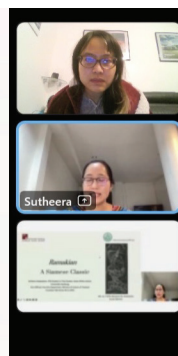
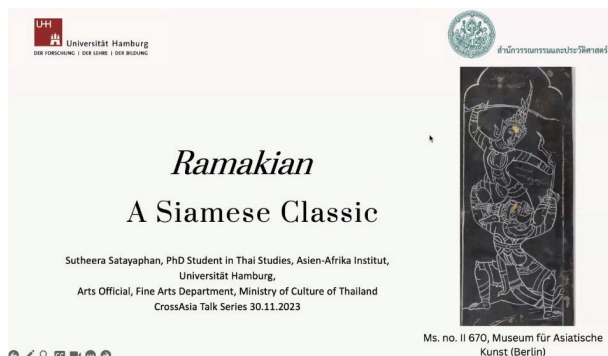


Photo credits: Sutheera Satayaphan

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A New PhD Graduate of Thai Studies



Ho Ching Kam, our PhD student of the Thai Studies Section, had the disputation of her doctoral project on "The Maritime Cultural Landscape between Siam and Guangdong Province, China: New Perspectives through Three Siamese Maps" on 1 February 2024 at the Asia Africa Institute. Her dissertation in the field of Southeast Asian History was supervised and evaluated by Professor Dr. Volker Grabowsky and Professor Dr. Thomas Fröhlich with Professor Dr. Sven Trakulhun as third member of the dissertation committee.

The examination included a short summary of the project: research background, research questions, findings, and conclusions, followed by a discussion on several issues raised by the three evaluators. Ho Ching Kam's research was achieved with a most innovative approach combining the analysis of recently discovered late 18th and 19th century Siamese maps with historical and literary documents in Thai, Chinese and Western languages. Her remarkable research findings offer new venues for the study of Thai and Southeast Asian economic history, in particular of the history of trade relations between mainland Southeast Asia and China. Her thesis was evaluated *Magna cum laude* (very good). Our Thai Studies Section is very proud of her and feels honored to be part of her great achievement. We wish Ho Ching Kam, also known by her name "Joyce," a bright future and academic success. ●