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# **Sydney Southeast Asia Centre**

2021-2022 Yearbook

We acknowledge the tradition  
of custodianship and law of the  
Country on which the University of  
Sydney campuses stand. We pay our  
respects to those who have cared  
and continue to care for Country.

# Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

2021-2022 Yearbook

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# A message from the Director



After months of lockdowns and isolation, it's been heartening to see the university campus filled with students and staff once again, as we continue to chart a path through these pandemic times. Many of our members are now resuming fieldwork in the region, and reconnecting with friends and colleagues they haven't seen in person for the past two years.

Here in Sydney, it has been a jam-packed 12 months, with the Centre running 68 events, 15 workshops and four writing retreats, and releasing 23 new podcasts – a mighty effort. A big challenge has been transitioning back into face-to-face (and sometimes hybrid) events and activities. Our annual Politics in Action forum was held in-person once again in 2022, with an exciting line-up of speakers offering expert analysis on recent developments in Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. Our popular writing retreats also returned in-person, with over 60 students and early- and mid-career academics taking part in the first half of 2022.

As you will read in these pages, working in partnerships – within the university and beyond – has been integral to our activities. In 2021, we launched online international seminar series on Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. These series, which we run in collaboration with university partners in Europe, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Southeast Asia, bring together social science experts from across the globe to showcase new research, issues and ideas, and connect with like-minded scholars.

Across the University of Sydney, we've also continued to find new and innovative ways to work with faculties and schools to cement the study of Southeast Asia in the curriculum.

A recent highlight has been our collaboration with the University of Sydney Business School on two new initiatives that foster students' creative and critical thinking skills in developing solutions to key sustainability challenges in Southeast Asia and the wider region. These include the 'Make a Real Difference' initiative, developed with Dr Abdul Razeed, which gives Master of Commerce students the opportunity to apply their problem-solving skills in the Southeast Asian context. Judging by the level of student interest and the quality of proposals put forward, these initiatives will continue to thrive in the years ahead.

Finally, it is always a personal highlight to see SSEAC-supported early- and mid-career researchers secure external funding for their work. Congratulations to Dr Aim Sinpeng, who was awarded an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) to examine the impact of digital repressive technologies on activism in autocracies, through a case study of online opposition movements in Thailand. Aim participated in SSEAC's Fellowship Hothouse, our program to support the development of high-quality applications to the ARC's DECRA and Future Fellow schemes. You can read about this and other grant success stories in the pages that follow.

The breadth of research, events and initiatives showcased here is a testament to the skill and dedication of our members, colleagues and collaborators – and of course to the efforts of my fabulous team. I hope you'll enjoy reflecting with us on these past 12 months. Stay safe and well.

**Professor Michele Ford**  
Director, Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

# About the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre (SSEAC) is Australia's premier centre of interdisciplinary academic excellence relevant to Southeast Asia.

With more than 9,000 members, our work continues to expand and embrace new collaborators across disciplines. Our community includes:

- student members
- academic members
- affiliate members
- friends of SSEAC

You can find out more on our website:

- [sydney.edu.au/sseac](https://sydney.edu.au/sseac)

Engaging more than 370 academics across all faculties and schools at the University, SSEAC:

- supports research excellence
- builds a new generation of Southeast Asia experts
- brings students from different disciplines together to learn from the region and its people
- partners with government, business and civil society to address real-world issues

Our researchers work in and on all 11 countries in Southeast Asia across five thematic areas:

- economic and social development
- environment and resources
- health
- heritage and the arts
- state and society

We support our members by providing funding opportunities and creating an academic community around engagement in our countries of focus. Through our focus on multidisciplinary, we actively seek to foster new approaches to the pressing issues affecting the region. This approach has proven to be particularly effective, as you can read in our research stories.

In providing a focal point for Southeast Asia-related research, we are connecting researchers across the institution, strengthening existing relationships and forging new ones, to better foster multidisciplinary research, support new learning experiences, actively engage industry, and raise the level of public debate.

SSEAC has been working closely with the Australian Government since 2014 to provide leadership training to activists from Women's Empowerment and Disabled People's Organisations across Indonesia. Through these courses, SSEAC fosters links between Indonesian and Australian activists and contributes to a deeper understanding of the universality of the struggles they face.

Our flagship interdisciplinary field schools have given over 300 students since 2013 the opportunity to engage in real-world learning in Cambodia, Laos, Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. SSEAC has received the Vice-Chancellor's Award for Excellence in the category of Outstanding Education Engagement and Innovation for this initiative.

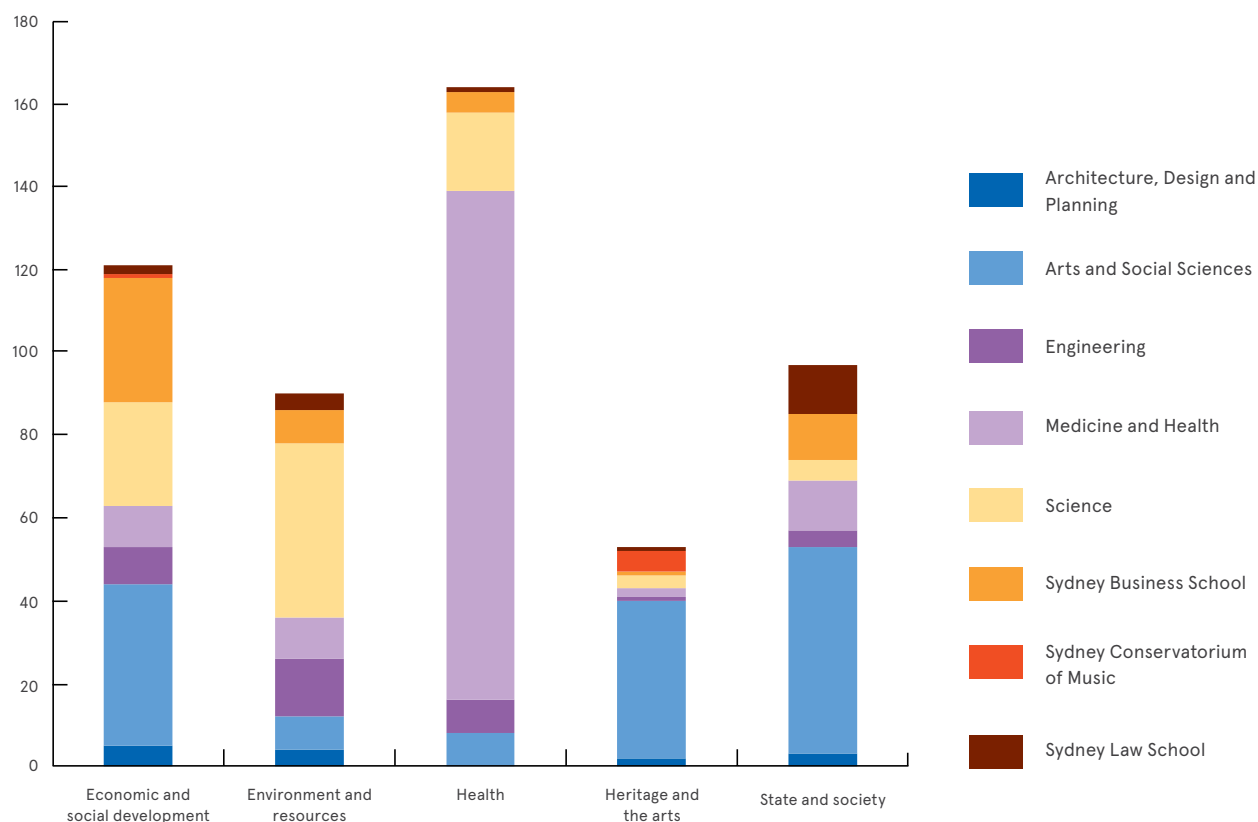
These field schools have drawn together students from disciplines including Architecture, Communications, Economics, Engineering, Heritage Conservation, International Public Health, Occupational Therapy and Political Economy. Students work in multidisciplinary teams to study topics including agrarian change, food security, housing policy, urbanism and health, and women's and disability rights.

Each year, SSEAC hosts a number of events designed to stimulate public engagement with Southeast Asia.

- Our Politics in Action Forum draws on expertise from Australia and around the world to inform a broad audience about recent political developments in the region.
- The ASEAN Forum – which targets policymakers, NGOs and academics – focuses on a different theme each year, from the role of China in ASEAN to the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic in Southeast Asia.

We also champion closer ties with Southeast Asia by receiving visiting government and university delegations from Southeast Asia, as well as cultivating strong relationships with Australia-based embassies and consulates from the region.

## Disciplinary spread of SSEAC members at the University of Sydney



## Related initiatives

The University of Sydney is fostering a deeper and broader understanding of Southeast Asia through the following high-profile initiatives that work closely with regional and global partners.

- **The Angkor Research Program**, a cross-disciplinary collaboration that incorporates the Greater Angkor Project, which is creating new perspectives on urban society in the Angkor region.
- **The Centre for Asian and Pacific Law**, which has particular expertise in Indonesian, Malaysian and Vietnamese legal systems and laws.
- **The Department of Indonesian Studies**, one of the most respected in Australia, with a strong reputation for its research and policy work in Indonesia.
- **The Sydney Infectious Diseases Institute**, which brings together researchers, educators and professionals from across the biological and social sciences to increase understanding about and develop new methods to reduce infectious diseases.
- **The Office for Global Health**, which facilitates international health research and works with our Faculty of Medicine and Health to contribute to health and wellbeing in the Asia-Pacific.
- **The Sydney Vietnam Institute**, a leading multidisciplinary network of researchers and educators, working together to improve the lives of people and communities in Vietnam.

# Governance

SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford is supported by:

- Dr Elisabeth Kramer, Deputy Director
- Dr Natali Pearson, Curriculum Coordinator
- Ms Ariane Defreine, Communications & Events Officer
- Mr Dave Hopkins, Knowledge Translation Officer
- Ms Minh Le, Senior Administration Officer

The team is assisted by our Country Coordinators and Executive Committee as well as by our Postgraduate Coordinator Daniel Howell.

Our team works closely with many of the University of Sydney’s professional service units, including the Office of Global Engagement, the Office for Global Health, Marketing and Communications, the University Library, Sydney Abroad, and Sydney Ideas.

The team also collaborates with other multidisciplinary research centres; Southeast Asia-related initiatives, such as the Sydney Vietnam Institute; the faculties; and the Chau Chak Wing Museum. The Centre’s operations are overseen by the University Executive Committee for Multidisciplinary Initiatives (UE MDI Committee).

## Executive Committee

Position	Name	Department/School
Community Outreach Adviser	Prof Hans Pols	School of History and Philosophy of Science
Community Outreach Adviser	Dr Sandra Seno-Alday	Sydney Business School
Curriculum Adviser	A/Prof Russell Bush	Sydney School of Veterinary Science
Curriculum Adviser	Dr Susan Banki	School of Social and Political Sciences
Regional & Policy Engagement Adviser	Prof David Guest	Sydney Institute of Agriculture
Regional & Policy Engagement Adviser	Ms Danielle Somers	Office for Global Health
Research Adviser	Prof Simon Butt	Sydney Law School
Research Training Adviser	Prof Damien Field	Sydney Institute of Agriculture
Research Training Adviser	A/Prof Petr Matous	School of Civil Engineering

## Country Coordinators

Country	Name	Department/School
Cambodia	Prof Daniel Tan	School of Life and Environmental Sciences
Indonesia	A/Prof Jeff Neilson	School of Geosciences
Laos	Prof Nick Enfield	School of Literature, Art and Media
Malaysia & Brunei	Prof Marina Kennerson	Medicine and Health
Myanmar	Dr Louis Taborda	School of Civil Engineering
The Philippines	Dr Aaron Opdyke	School of Civil Engineering
Singapore	Dr Yeow-Tong Chia	Sydney School of Education and Social Work
Thailand	Dr Aim Sinpeng	School of Social and Political Sciences
Timor-Leste	Dr Lynda-Ann Blanchard	Arts and Social Sciences
Vietnam	A/Prof Tihomir Ancev	School of Economics

# Meet some of our people



## Sandra Seno-Alday

Sandra has been an executive member of SSEAC since 2016.

As a senior lecturer in the University of Sydney Business School, Sandra teaches units on complex problems, risk management, and sustainability. In 2022, she led the inaugural Engage Asia Challenge, an initiative of the Business School that partners students with industry, academic and policy experts to help develop real solutions to complex sustainability challenges in the Asia-Pacific region.

For her work in higher education, Sandra is a recipient of an Australian Learning and Teaching Council Citation for Outstanding Contributions to Student Learning. She was part of a SSEAC-led team that received a three-year research grant from the Investing in Women initiative in 2016, funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, to explore the nature of corporate governance networks and gender diversity in large corporations in Southeast Asia.

Sandra is passionate about how Southeast Asian social enterprises can lead the way in creating models of responsible business. Her current research focuses on gaining insights into risk and exploring pathways to sustainable futures, particularly in emerging markets such as Southeast Asia.



## Leyla Craig

As a disability-inclusive disaster risk reduction (DiDRR) practitioner, Leyla has been involved in local and international projects focusing on Deaf Communities in Australia and Southeast Asia.

Her work involves identifying sustainable solutions that meet the specific needs of different disability groups within the disaster risk space. As a PhD candidate in the School of Geosciences, Leyla is researching the capacity of organisations to support Deaf Communities affected by disasters in the Asia-Pacific region.

Prior to commencing her PhD, Leyla volunteered with a local NGO in Cebu in the Philippines that advocated for Deaf people's communication needs. She was also part of the 'Disability and Disaster: Empowering people and building resilience' project, led by the University of Sydney. Funded by the Global Resilience Partnership, this work focused on research and practice supporting DiDRR activities in Cambodia, Thailand, and the Philippines.

Currently, Leyla is also working as a Disability Inclusion and Engagement Officer with Fire and Rescue New South Wales and was involved in responding to the floods in the state in 2022.



## Dave Hopkins

Dave joined the Centre in February 2022, taking up the position of Knowledge Translation Officer. He has a background in journalism, social policy and social justice advocacy, and a passion for Southeast Asia, particularly Myanmar and Thailand.

Dave lived and worked in Thailand for several years, working alongside human rights defenders from Myanmar for a grassroots NGO, and later for an independent Myanmar news outlet based in Chiang Mai and Yangon. Dave has a long-held interest in Myanmar politics and history, and completed a two-year Burmese language course through the Australian National University in 2020.

Recently, Dave worked on research and policy for a social justice organisation based in Melbourne, supporting people and communities experiencing entrenched disadvantage. Prior to this, he worked as a legislative research officer with the Parliamentary Joint Committee on Human Rights in Canberra.

In his current role, Dave works to promote the work of the Centre and its researchers, supporting academics to communicate their research and insights to a broader audience, including in Southeast Asia-based media.

# ASEAN Forum 2021

In 2021, SSEAC's ninth annual ASEAN Forum focused on human rights in Southeast Asia.



SSEAC's annual ASEAN Forum for 2021 explored key human rights challenges in the region, the approach ASEAN is taking, and how issues of sovereignty, regionalism and geopolitics are impacting human rights protection.

It has been almost a decade since ASEAN promulgated its ASEAN Human Rights Declaration, marking a rhetorical shift in its approach to human rights in the region. But factors such as a scarcity of resources, situations of conflict, climate change and repressive governance all continue to undermine the realisation of human rights. The pandemic has only heightened human rights concerns, in Southeast Asia, but also globally.

Reflecting on these issues, Professor Catherine Renshaw (Western Sydney University) delivered an impassioned keynote address. Professor Renshaw has written widely on the theory, policy and practice of human rights in Southeast Asia, including on the legitimacy and potential of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights.

She noted that prevailing norms of non-interference and respect for sovereignty in ASEAN have equated to inaction on issues such as the treatment of Rohingya in Myanmar, the coup in Thailand, and extrajudicial killings in the Philippines.

Professor Renshaw highlighted some successes of regional institutions in other parts of the world in addressing human rights concerns.

She pointed out that ASEAN's human rights body is hobbled by a lack of independence, and discussed the potential for national human rights institutions in the region to function as a network to protect and promote rights.

Professor Renshaw's speech was followed by an engaging discussion, chaired by Dr Susan Banki, and driven by questions from the online audience, including on 'Asian values' debates, Australia's approach in the region, and responses to human displacement.

The ASEAN Forum continued with a panel discussion that brought together academics and practitioners to address human rights issues in ASEAN in the context of US-China tensions. Chaired by SSEAC Deputy Director Dr Elisabeth Kramer, the panel featured Mr Ben Bland (The Lowy Institute), Ms Elaine Pearson (Human Rights Watch Australia), and Associate Professor Jamie Reilly (The University of Sydney).

The panel discussed certain infrastructure projects related to China's Belt and Road Initiative, the pragmatic response of many ASEAN countries to balancing relations with the US and China, and the complex ways intensifying US-China competition is impacting insecurity, interests and diplomatic relations in the region.

If you missed this event, head to [our website](#) to catch up on the videos.

# Politics in Action 2022

Back in person in 2022, our annual Politics in Action forum focused on the latest political, social and economic developments in six countries of Southeast Asia.



Our annual Politics in Action forum was back in person in 2022, with an exciting line-up of speakers covering recent developments in Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Vietnam. Designed to be concise, speakers' presentations were packed with information and analysis, and prompted engaging questions from the audience.

**Dr Azmil Tayeb** (Universiti Sains Malaysia) covered recent political developments in Malaysia, including the return of ethnoreligious political parties, the future of coalition politics, and what might happen ahead of a looming general election.

**Professor Michael Leach** (Swinburne University) had just returned from Timor-Leste, where Jose Ramos-Horta was recently elected president for a second time. Michael spoke about the implications of the election – including an intriguing snippet about the political influence of martial arts groups – the powers of the president, and major governance challenges.

Polls were also a focus of the Philippines update, presented by **Assistant Professor Maria Elize Mendoza** (University of the Philippines Diliman). Maria previewed the country's election (since won convincingly by Ferdinand Marcos Jr.) and also spoke about the incumbent government's pandemic response, corruption, and human rights issues. She concluded her presentation with a summary of the major issues that will face the incoming administration.

**Dr Andrea Haefner** (Griffith University) covered Laos, with a focus on the economy, including concerns over growing public debt, slowing economic growth, and the influential role of China. Andrea also discussed hydropower dam projects in Laos, and the country's ambition to become the 'battery of Asia'.

The Vietnam update was presented by PhD candidate **Nguyen Khac Giang** (Victoria University), who explored recent changes in political leadership, the "blazing furnace" anti-corruption campaign, Vietnam's "aspiring, yet hesitant" ambition to be a regional middle-power, and relations with China, Russia, and the United States.

The afternoon was rounded off by **Dr Ken Setiawan** (University of Melbourne), who provided the Indonesia update. Ken discussed democratic deficits in Indonesia, human rights issues and increased securitisation in West Papua, curbs on freedom of expression, gender equality, and gender-based violence.

It was great to see a mix of students, staff, researchers and others at the event, as well as a healthy online audience. Thank you to all our speakers and attentive audience members, in person and online, for making this year's Politics in Action forum such a success!

If you missed the event, catch up on the speakers' presentations on the [SSEAC website](#).

# Promoting research collaboration on Indonesia

SSEAC contributed to the Indonesia Council's 11th biennial open conference in July 2021, which focused on building research collaboration among Indonesian and Australian partners.



Held online, the conference brought together academics, students and professionals to share new research on Indonesia, and discuss ideas and opportunities for collaboration.

Convened by University of Queensland academics Dr Greta Nabbs-Keller and Associate Professor Zane Goebel, the conference included a postgraduate workshop, activities to connect researchers, and panel discussions on a range of Indonesia-focused research. Sessions covered women in politics, environmental challenges, improving rural livelihoods, violence prevention, and the palm oil sector, among many other subject areas.

As part of the conference, SSEAC convened a panel discussion to explore the potential for research collaboration between academic and non-academic institutions. Chaired by SSEAC's Deputy Director Dr Elisabeth Kramer, the session featured SSEAC-affiliated researchers from five different disciplines who shared their experiences working with a range of non-academic partners.

The panel discussed the strengths and challenges of such partnerships, and how they can contribute to effective research outcomes, knowledge-sharing and education. The diverse disciplinary backgrounds and interests of the speakers made for an engaging session, with contributions from SSEAC Director Professor Michele Ford, Associate Professor Jeffrey Neilson (School of Geosciences), Associate Professor

Petr Matous (School of Civil Engineering), Ms Maddie Randell (PhD candidate, School of Public Health), and Dr Catherine Price (School of Life and Environmental Sciences).

Working with non-academic partners requires academics to find common ground and tailor research to meet the needs of these organisations. Key messages to emerge from the panel were the need to tailor research for real-world impact, as well as the value of good interpersonal relationships and cultural awareness in building partnerships across Australia and Indonesia. The strong ties fostered by our researchers over the preceding years kept many projects afloat while travel was restricted throughout 2020 and 2021.

The conference overall was a great opportunity for researchers to make connections, learn about new modes and subjects of inquiry, and to consider their own research practices. The strength of many existing research, policy and developmental partnerships between Indonesia and Australia was evident, as well as the possibilities for new and meaningful collaborations in the years ahead.

SSEAC has worked closely with the Indonesia Council – the peak body for Indonesia-focused research in Australia – for a number of years. We're thrilled that Dr Natali Pearson, SSEAC's Curriculum Coordinator, was appointed president of the Council in 2022 and will help continue its great work.

# Indonesia Social Science Seminar Series (IS4)

Launched by SSEAC in collaboration with partners, the online Indonesia Social Science Seminar Series has been a valuable means of bringing new research on Indonesia to a broader audience.

The online seminar series on Indonesia, launched in 2021 alongside series on Thailand and the Philippines, has brought together social science experts from across the globe to discuss new research, issues and ideas. These three webinar streams provide in-depth scholarly analysis, and aim to foster new opportunities for networking among those with interests and connections to each country.

The Indonesia-focused iteration, IS4, is sponsored by SSEAC, the Cornell Southeast Asia Program and the Royal Netherlands Institute of Southeast Asian and Caribbean Studies. Seven IS4 webinars have been held over the past year, drawing on the expertise of academics from varied disciplinary backgrounds and covering a range of timely topics. Webinar highlights over this period included:

- **The Consequences of Child Marriage in Indonesia:** Professor Lisa Cameron (University of Melbourne) and Assistant Professor Margaret Triyana (Wake Forest University) discussed the significant negative impacts of child marriage on women, men, and their children in Indonesia.
- **Is there Indonesian History Before 1945?** Emeritus Professor Henk Schulte Nordholt (KITLV) and Professor Bambang Purwanto (Universitas Gadjah Mada Yogyakarta) explored the compartmentalised nature of Indonesian historiography, and the tensions and blind spots in respective Indonesian and Dutch accounts.
- **Social Media, Politics, and Schismatic Algorithms in Indonesia:** Associate Professor Merlyna Lim (Carleton University) joined Ms Irene Poetranto (Citizen Lab/ University of Toronto) to explore the complex and contradictory relationships between social media and politics, and the ways in which contested state and society relations play out on online platforms.
- **Social Movements and Coastal Reclamation in Indonesia:** Dr Ryan Tans (Northern Arizona University) and Associate Professor Rita Padawangi (Singapore University of Social Sciences) discussed anti-reclamation movements in Indonesia, the forces they encounter, and the process of “climate gentrification” in which adaptation activities benefit the rich and marginalise the poor.

- **Is Democracy Still Relevant to Reduce Nationalist Conflict?** Professor Jacques Bertrand (University of Toronto) discussed his book, *Democracy and Nationalist Struggles in Southeast Asia* (Cambridge University Press, 2021), which offers a comparative-historical analysis of five nationalist conflicts over several decades. His presentation was followed by remarks from Dr Veronika Kusumaryati (Georgetown University), who focused on West Papua.
- **Why Veil? Religious Headscarves and the Public Role of Women:** Assistant Professor Naila Shofia (Yale-NUS College) and Assistant Professor Vasiliki Fouka (Stanford University) led a thought-provoking discussion on the socio-economic factors that compel some Indonesian women to wear religious headscarves.
- **Covid-19 and Health Care in Indonesia:** A timely discussion, led by Professor Laksono Trisnantoro (Universitas Gadjah Mada) and PhD candidate Retna Hanani (University of Amsterdam) on Indonesia’s healthcare system and what lessons can be drawn from public management of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Catch up on these talks, and more, on [YouTube](#).





## Philippines Social Science Seminar Series (PhilS4)

The Philippines' politics was front of mind in the lead-up to the country's election in May 2022, and our PhilS4 webinar series covered all the angles.

The Philippines Social Science Seminar Series launched in September 2021, with Professor Caroline Hau dialling in from Kyoto University in Japan to explore the staying power of 19<sup>th</sup> century literary character María Clara, the heroine in José Rizal's *Noli me tângere* (1887).

The Philippines-focused webinar series features academics drawn from diverse disciplinary backgrounds, and based at tertiary institutions around the world, to share new research on Filipino history, culture and society. In 2021-22, it is sponsored by SSEAC, alongside the University of the Philippines Diliman, Humboldt University of Berlin, and SOAS University of London.

A number of fascinating webinars have been held since the launch, including timely analyses of the Filipino political scene in the lead-up to the country's election in May 2022, which saw Ferdinand Marcos Jr win the presidency. Alongside Professor Hau's discussion of José Rizal's famed novel, webinar highlights included:

- **Island Urbanisms in the Philippines:** Assistant Professor Arnisson Andre Ortega (Syracuse University) explored the transformation of several rural islands into "world-class" destinations in the Philippines, and the spatial dynamics of inclusion and exclusion that result, foregrounding the role of gender and sexuality in narratives of urbanisation.
- **YouTube and Philippine Politics:** Professor Cheryl Soriano (De La Salle University, Manila) explored YouTube's role in shaping the Filipino public's political consciousness, including how the platform acts as a socio-technical broker giving rise to new forms of political intermediation and engagement, and magnifies certain narratives and agendas.
- **Filipino Time: Affective Worlds and Contracted Labor:** Drawing on his new book, Professor Allan Punzalan Isaac (Rutgers University-New Brunswick) discussed how a variety of labour performed by Filipinos in the Philippines and around the world generates vital affects, multiple networks, and other lifeworlds.
- **Pandemic Response and Economic Recovery:** Dr Stella Quimbo (Member of the Philippines' House of Representatives) led an enlightening discussion of the country's economic recovery strategies during COVID-19, the impact of the pandemic, and the path toward recovery.
- **Inequality and Political Dynasties:** Professor Ronald Mendoza (Ateneo de Manila University) discussed how political dynasties and the concentration of power in the Philippines are contributing to the entrenchment of power imbalances, as well as compounding inequality.
- **Electoral Dystopias: From Colonial Democracy to Authoritarian Rule in the Philippines:** Professor Vicente Rafael methodically analysed the historical use of antidemocratic means to bolster electoral democracy in the Philippines, exposing some of the coercive practices at the heart of Rodrigo Duterte's presidency.

Catch up on these talks on our [YouTube channel](#).



## Thailand Social Science Seminar Series (TS4)

New research, insights and expertise on Thailand were showcased through our popular TS4 webinar series.

Sponsored by SSEAC, the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies, and the New York Southeast Asia Network, our virtual seminar series on Thailand has showcased a diversity of research, insights and expertise since launching in September 2021.

The series kicked off with Professor Katherine A. Bowie (University of Wisconsin-Madison), who considered the ways in which the harems of the Theravada Buddhist courts of mainland Southeast Asia differed from those of the Chinese, Mughal and Ottoman empires, touching on the power of court women, the regulation of sexuality, and the rules of succession.

Other highlights from the series include:

- **The United States and the Thai Royal Family:** Associate Professor Pavin Chachavalpongpun (Kyoto University) examined Thailand's ties with the United States in historical context, including the prominence of Thailand's King Bhumibol Adulyadej, drawing on a number of historical documents.
- **Undermining Democracy: The Election Commission of Thailand and the 2019 Election:** Dr Petra Desatová (University of Birmingham) and Assistant Professor Saowanee Alexander (Ubon Ratchathani University) discussed the contentious role of Thailand's election commission in the 2019 election, political polarisation and the role of entrenched elites, and why elections falter.
- **Gender-Based Violence in Thailand's Pro-Democracy Movement:** In the first TS4 webinar of 2022, Associate Professor Verita Sriratana (Chulalongkorn University) examined offline and online gender-based violence perpetrated against female activists in Thailand's pro-democracy movement, and their tactics in response.
- **City-Making and Democracy in Northeastern Thailand:** Dr Eli Elinoff (Victoria University of Wellington) offered a fascinating ethnographic account of the citizenship struggles and political engagements of residents living alongside the main state railway running through the city of Khon Kaen, in northeast Thailand.
- **Language Choice as a Political Tool:** With reference to a methodological problem he encountered during fieldwork, Dr Thanachate Wisaijorn (Ubon Ratchathani University) discussed the powerful role of language and how language choice impacts interpersonal relationships.
- **Re-Examining the Operation of Hate Speech:** In the context of fraught relations between Buddhists and Muslims in southern Thailand, Dr Anwar Koma (Prince of Songkla University) explored Thai nationalism and discrimination, and presented detailed new findings on hate speech.
- **Australia-Thailand Pandemic Responses in Comparative Perspective:** Dr Chavalin Svetanant (Macquarie University) delved into Australia and Thailand's respective COVID-19 responses, highlighting lessons learned for future policy and practice.

For more Thailand-focused webinars, visit our [YouTube channel](#).



## Human rights and human security in Asia during COVID

SSEAC partnered with the University of Jember (Indonesia) to convene the 5th Conference on Human Rights in November 2021, featuring more than 90 papers on a range of rights-related topics.

The COVID-19 outbreak has shone a harsh spotlight on global inequalities, the fragility of health and economic systems, and the precariousness of many forms of work. It has also compounded concerns over human rights in many countries, where strict pandemic-related policies have also curbed fundamental rights, such as freedom of movement.

Focusing on the theme of human rights and human security in Asia during COVID-19, SSEAC partnered with the University of Jember to convene the 5<sup>th</sup> Conference on Human Rights on 23–25 November 2021. The conference has continued to grow in size and reach in recent years, and this iteration featured more than 90 papers on a range of rights-related topics, plenary sessions, and workshops, held in hybrid form in Jember and online.

Session themes included the refugee experience during COVID-19; justice and the rights of Indigenous people; human rights and online technologies; disability, health and human rights; gender and human rights; criminal justice; and the role of the media. Indonesia was a strong focus of researchers, but papers also covered topics in Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Vietnam, and elsewhere.

Professor Simon Butt, Associate Director of the Centre for Asian and Pacific Law at the University of Sydney, was among the plenary speakers. He explored the high-profile criminal trial of a woman found guilty of murder in Indonesia in 2016.

Through a discussion of the case, Professor Butt highlighted ongoing challenges to the right to a fair trial in the country, including flawed or absent legal infrastructure and prejudicial press coverage.

Other keynote speakers included Yuyun Wahyuningrum, Indonesia's representative to the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights; Ahmad Taufan Damanik, chair of Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights; and Titi Anggraini of the Association for Elections and Democracy, an NGO engaged in research and advocacy on elections and democracy in Indonesia.

As conference co-convenor, SSEAC was thrilled with the calibre and diversity of the speakers and papers showcased. These were vital and often challenging subjects, and it is hoped that the conference will continue to play an important role as a space for academics, activists, policymakers and civil society representatives to grapple with human rights issues in Southeast Asia and beyond, share ideas and forge lasting links.

Alongside SSEAC and the Centre for Human Rights, Multiculturalism and Migration at the University of Jember, the 2021 conference was supported by Indonesia's National Commission on Human Rights (Komnas HAM); the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) Indonesia; and the Indonesian Consortium for Human Rights Lecturers (SEPAHAM Indonesia).

# One year on from the military coup in Myanmar

In partnership with the ANU Myanmar Research Centre, SSEAC convened an online panel discussion to reflect on the impact of the coup in Myanmar and possible paths forward.

On 1 February 2021, the military in Myanmar launched a coup that ousted the democratically elected National League for Democracy (NLD) government. The military takeover occurred just hours before a newly elected parliament was scheduled to convene, dashing hopes for democratic progress in the country. Nationwide protests were met with ruthless force by soldiers and paramilitary police, who engaged in killings, torture, abductions and mutilation of bodies.

The violence precipitated an armed uprising, and a government in exile has declared war on the junta, which has shown little willingness to compromise. Confidence has collapsed in the country's formal economy and currency, the health care system is in crisis, and the number of people internally displaced has continued to rise.

One year on from the military seizing power, SSEAC partnered with the Myanmar Research Centre at the Australian National University (ANU) to convene an online panel discussion, chaired by Dr Susan Banki (University of Sydney), to address what happened and what might come next.

Ms Moe Thuzar (ISEAS – Yusof Ishak Institute) began with an overview of the social and political situation of the country, presenting a series of maps that showed the extent of anti-coup protests, incidents of violence and displacement in the past year. She drew attention to the huge toll on civilians and discussed ASEAN's role in pressuring the junta.

Mr David Thang Moe (Asbury Theological Seminary) spoke about the deteriorating humanitarian situation in ethnic minority regions of the country, the prevalence of anti-coup resistance, and the extent to which a shared political vision has crystallised across ethnic lines. Mr Moe offered detailed personal insights about his hometown of Mindat in Chin State, where local civilians have shown staunch resistance to the military.

Next, Dr Nick Cheesman (ANU) observed that civilians were refusing to obey the army's demands, despite its terrorisation of the population. He commented that revolutions succeed unexpectedly, and noted the difficulties related to how researchers discuss revolutionary violence.

Finally, Professor Catherine Renshaw (Western Sydney University) emphasised the importance of not discounting diplomatic efforts, while being cognizant of the failures of the international community to effectively respond. She also discussed the struggles of the National Unity Government (NUG) in exile to be recognised by the international community.

The event concluded with panellists responding to questions from the online audience, including on the legitimacy of the NUG, the prospects for political dialogue, the future of the NLD, and the strategies of ethnic armed groups.

Catch up on this event on our [YouTube channel](#).



# Labour movements in a post COVID-19 world

The International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44) convened its inaugural Asia-Pacific Conference in 2022, with SSEAC's support.



The COVID-19 pandemic has brought labour and workers' rights issues to the fore, with renewed attention on the fragility of global production networks, the risks of insecure work, and the urgent need for stronger social and workplace protections. Labour movements are a key voice at a time of overlapping health and economic crises. For some movements, the pandemic has only further underscored the need for alternative social and economic models and a required transformation to more equitable, low carbon economies.

To explore these themes in detail, the International Sociological Association's Research Committee on Labour Movements (RC44) convened its inaugural Asia-Pacific Conference on 27 June 2022. Held virtually, the conference provided scholars with the opportunity to consider the agency and potential of workers and their labour movements to shape a post COVID-19 world. SSEAC Director Michele Ford, who is also president of RC44, co-convened the conference with Michael Gillan, who is based at the University of Western Australia.

Researchers from across the Asia-Pacific region presented papers under the broad themes of worker representation; gender, citizenship and religion at work; organising in the platform economy; changing labour regimes; and labour movements under authoritarianism. Recorded presentations were uploaded to YouTube.

In the sessions, each chaired by a member of the conference organising committee, speakers gave a concise summary of their paper to allow ample time for discussion and questions from the audience.

These were fascinating sessions, with papers covering labour rights issues in Cambodia, Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Australia, India, South Korea and elsewhere, offering audience members and fellow participants a regional view of evolving issues, trends and experiences. Among several University of Sydney scholars who presented papers was Dr Kristy Ward, who explored the contradictory role of unions in advocating for worker rights in Cambodia while simultaneously sustaining gender inequality.

SSEAC Director Michele Ford chaired a keynote panel on the potential prospects for labour movements, featuring Amarjeet Kaur, an Indian politician and general secretary of the All India Trade Union Congress; Josua Mata, the general secretary of SENTRO (Co-operative and Progressive Workers' Center) in the Philippines; and Ou Tepphallin, president of the Cambodian Food and Service Workers' Federation (CFSWF).

View the full conference program, including abstracts, on the [event website](#).

# Understanding consumer protection laws in the Asia-Pacific

Professor Luke Nottage lent his expertise on consumer redress mechanisms, access to justice, and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, for an online course run by the University of Malaya in 2021.

Consumer protection laws are vital in ensuring the safety and quality of goods and services, corporate accountability, and access to redress. These laws are increasingly important – and complex – in a world of interconnected markets, new technologies and digitisation. Policies and practices in consumer protection are constantly evolving to meet challenges in a globalised economy that often transcend national boundaries.

Consumer protection laws were the focus of an intensive online course in October 2021, run by the University of Malaya's Faculty of Law, and featuring six guest academics, including SSEAC member Professor Luke Nottage.

Open to students, legal professionals, and others, the course program included sessions exploring global perspectives on consumer protection, the legal landscape of consumer protection in Malaysia, challenges to consumer protection in the digital age, and unfair commercial practices.

Professor Nottage, who is Associate Director of the Centre for Asian and Pacific Law at the University of Sydney, presented on consumer redress mechanisms, access to justice and alternative dispute resolution mechanisms, with a focus on Australia, Japan, and Southeast Asia.

He drew on research featured in his co-authored books *ASEAN Consumer Law Harmonisation and Cooperation* (Cambridge University Press, 2019) and *Contract Law in Japan* (Kluwer Law International, 2019), and covered issues including the law and practice of courts and tribunals, the role of Ombudsman and related arbitration-like processes.

For Professor Nottage, who specialises in arbitration, contract law, consumer product safety law and corporate governance, this was a great opportunity to share his expertise with students and professionals in Malaysia, who keenly engaged with his module.

Among a range of research projects, Professor Nottage is currently researching and co-editing a conference volume, supported by the Institute of Asian Studies at Universiti Brunei Darussalam, on corruption and illegality in Asian investment arbitration.

This research will examine Asian approaches and case studies regarding corruption and serious illegality in international investment arbitration, with a focus on corruption-related disputes between private parties and public sector entities, as well as other serious illegal conduct by foreign investors. The project includes a range of contributors based at universities in Australia, Brunei, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, among others.



## A wrap of other events in 2021–22

SSEAC hosts a wide variety of events each year, reflecting the diverse interests of our membership.

Each year, SSEAC hosts a wide variety of events, workshops and initiatives, reflecting the diverse interests and expertise of our members, and the partnerships we foster across the university and beyond. Here are some of the highlights of the past 12 months.

In **July 2021**, our webinar series on state and society in Southeast Asia wrapped up with two thought-provoking presentations. Dr Susan Banki [discussed the dilemmas](#) faced by Myanmar political activists who have fled overseas, while Mr Thomas Power [explored](#) the illiberal tendencies of Indonesian democracy under Joko Widodo's presidency.

Amid ongoing lockdowns in Sydney, in **August**, SSEAC initiated a series of online forums to hear how different communities were grappling with the pandemic. We heard the perspectives of Indonesian, Filipino and Vietnamese community members in Australia, who shared challenges, as well as stories of connection. Guest speakers across three separate online events included Mr Heru Hartanto Subolo (Consul General of the Republic of Indonesia in Sydney), Ms Ma Corina Reyes (First Secretary and Consul at the Embassy of the Philippines in Canberra), and Ms Nga Pham (Minister Counsellor at the Embassy of Vietnam in Canberra), as well as journalist and editor Ms Michelle Baltazar and Fairfield City Councillor (now Member of Parliament) Ms Dai Le.

In **August–September**, we ran a special webinar series focused on heritage and the arts in Southeast Asia. This series featured Dr Jarrah Sastrawan, who explored how the premodern Javanese recorded



history; award-winning writer Dr Beth Yahp, who reflected on the challenges of distance and closeness in storytelling; Dr Yvonne Low, who presented new feminist research on the archives of Womanifesto and Dr Melani Setiawan; and Dr Alex Burchmore, who shared his expertise on the 14<sup>th</sup> century trade of precious blue and white ceramics from Asia. You can watch the series [here](#).

Also in **August**, more than 150 people attended our exclusive online screening of 'Sisters for Sale', an award-winning documentary that spotlights the human trafficking of Hmong women on the border between Vietnam and China. An enlightening discussion followed with the film's director, Ben Randall, and anti-human trafficking activist Kim Miller from the Blue Dragon Children's Foundation.

To mark Malaysia Day on **16 September**, we partnered with the Malaysia and Singapore Society of Australia (MASSA) to host a webinar reflecting on Malaysian politics, the pandemic and the economy, with an insightful panel discussion featuring Professor James Chin (University of Tasmania), Assistant Professor Gayathri Venkiteswaran (The University of Nottingham), and Ms Qyira Yusri (Undi 18), moderated by journalist Mr Kean Wong. The event recording is available on [YouTube](#).

In **October**, issues of economic and social development in Southeast Asia were explored through a tailored webinar series, kicked off by Dr Sandra Seno-Alday, who explained the rich-get-richer effect in the ASEAN global trade network and how it entrenches inequality.

More fascinating talks followed throughout the month, with Associate Professor Tihomir Ancev and Ms Chi Nguyen discussing strategic planning in agriculture in Southeast Asia; Dr Russell Toth presenting on the potential of digital finance schemes; and Professor Susan Park exploring global governance mechanisms and their relevance for communities who have experienced environmental harm from international development projects. Catch up on these talks [here](#).

Australia and the Philippines marked 75 years of diplomatic relations in 2021, and SSEAC [highlighted this relationship](#) with an active social media campaign in **November**, featuring videos recorded by the Australian Ambassador to the Philippines, Steven Robinson AO, and Philippine Ambassador to Australia, Ma. Hellen B. De La Vega. We handed over our [Instagram page](#) to the wonderful University of Sydney Filipino Student Society, whose team shared insights into Filipino culture, student life in Sydney, and much more. It was also an excellent chance to showcase the multidisciplinary research of our members on the Philippines, from disaster risk reduction to poetry and crop management. We topped off the week with a virtual edition of our ever-popular object-based learning workshop, held in collaboration with the Chau Chak Wing Museum, which focused on artefacts and artworks from the Philippines.

Art is often seen as a means of activism, resistance and solidarity, but it can also reflect a staid status quo and an acceptance of current power structures. In **November**, together with The Australian Sociological Association, we organised a half-day workshop at 16 Albermarle Project Space in Sydney, bringing together artists, activists, curators and scholars to interrogate the role of art in activism and social change. The workshop included a thought-provoking public webinar on the topic, which you can view [here](#).

We teamed up with MASSA again in **February 2022** to launch *Families, the State and Educational Inequality in the Singapore City-State* (Routledge, 2021), a new book by Dr Charleen Chiong, that explores how socio-economically disadvantaged families relate with the state and schools through relations of both dependency and responsibility. Dr Chiong discussed the book in conversation with Emeritus Professor Fazal Rizvi (University of Melbourne) and Dr Alistair Chew in a webinar, available to watch [here](#).

Professional development workshops were also a feature of the past 12 months. In **February**, SSEAC held its second online productivity workshop, bringing together 29 participants from across the university for a deep dive into the 'Getting Things Done' approach as implemented through the Todoist App, facilitated by Professor Michele Ford.

In **April and May**, we also held two workshops to support academic members to publish with SAGE Business Cases, a renowned collection of over 4,000 case studies used for teaching and classroom discussion. A number of participants submitted great pitches on Southeast Asia-related topics, and have been supported to develop and refine their case studies in preparation for submission.

SSEAC was also pleased to host a [stellar line-up](#) of Thailand-focused scholars in **May**, brought together online to discuss how to be successful in obtaining funding for Thailand-focused research projects. Joining us were Professor Tyrell Haberkorn (University of Wisconsin-Madison), Professor Duncan McCargo (University of Copenhagen), Professor Piya Pongsapitaksanti (Kyoto Sangyo University), Associate Professor Kanokwan Manorom (Ubon Ratchathani University), and Emeritus Professor Philip Hirsch (University of Sydney). Chaired by SSEAC's Country Coordinator for Thailand Dr Aim Sinpeng, the session included helpful guidance on challenges and opportunities in Australia, Europe, Japan, Thailand, the United Kingdom, and the United States, and some of the strategies that researchers might employ to obtain funding.

Several other events in **May** made for an action-packed month! We held an on-campus screening (and Q&A) of 'Freedom Street', a moving documentary that explores the plights of three refugees trapped in Indonesia as a consequence of Australia's border protection policy. We also partnered with the School of Literature, Art and Media to host Dr Tom Sykes (University of Portsmouth) for a webinar exploring the enduring representational tropes and devices that have defined Western Orientalist writing about the city of Manila. And finally, we co-hosted the online launch of *Memory in the Mekong: Regional Identity, Schools, and Politics in Southeast Asia* (Teachers' College Press, 2022), co-edited by Dr Will Brehm (University College London), which explores the possibilities, perils, and politics of constructing a regional identity in the countries along Southeast Asia's Mekong River delta.

Following Australia's federal election, in **June**, we turned our attention to exploring Australia's engagement with Asia. In partnership with the China Studies Centre and the University of Sydney Business School, we brought together industry and government representatives to discuss how Australia can deepen its engagement in the region, in light of the pandemic and geopolitical uncertainties. The event featured a presentation of findings from the latest report on Asian Business in Australia by the Business School and the Commonwealth Bank of Australia.





## Fostering high-impact research

The Sydney Southeast Asia Centre unites academics across disciplines to produce high-impact research and engagement with one of the world's fastest growing regions.

One of the Centre's key aims is to support researchers of Southeast Asia to secure significant external funding for their work. We do this by seeding research that can develop into bigger projects, and through initiatives such as our SSEAC Fellowship Hothouse, a mentoring program designed to support high-quality applications to the Australian Research Council (ARC)'s Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) and Future Fellow schemes.

Past success stories include 2019-20 Fellowship Hothouse participants Dr Rosemary Grey, Dr Josh Stenberg and Dr Sophie Webber, who all secured DECRA for their work, as well as Associate Professor Holly High, who was awarded a Future Fellowship.

Over the past 12 months, several projects have secured significant funding, including for the following researchers:

- SSEAC's Thailand Country Coordinator **Dr Aim Sinpeng**, who was awarded a DECRA in 2021 to research how digital repressive technologies impact activism in autocracies, focused on Thailand. Dr Sinpeng participated in SSEAC's Fellowship Hothouse program in 2020-21.
- SSEAC Director **Professor Michele Ford**, who secured an ARC Discovery Project grant to lead research investigating the role of the state, supply chain actors and activists in protecting commercial fishers' labour rights in Indonesia.
- SSEAC Deputy Director **Dr Elisabeth Kramer**, who was awarded an ARC Linkage Project grant as part of a multidisciplinary team to determine how legal, policy and socio-cultural factors influence the use of therapeutic opioids in Indonesia.
- SSEAC members **Professor Hans Pols** and **Associate Professor Nicola Hancock**, who secured an Australia-Indonesia Institute grant to develop social media campaigns to foster better mental health in Australia and Indonesia.

These projects span three of our five research clusters – economic and social development, health and state and society – and will generate important new knowledge in the years ahead. More details of each project appear in the pages ahead.

We also congratulate SSEAC members **Dr Sophie Chao**, **Dr Rosalyn Gloag** and **Dr Catherine Price**, who successfully secured Discovery Early Career Researcher Awards for non-Southeast Asia related projects.

# Supporting the Sustainable Development Goals

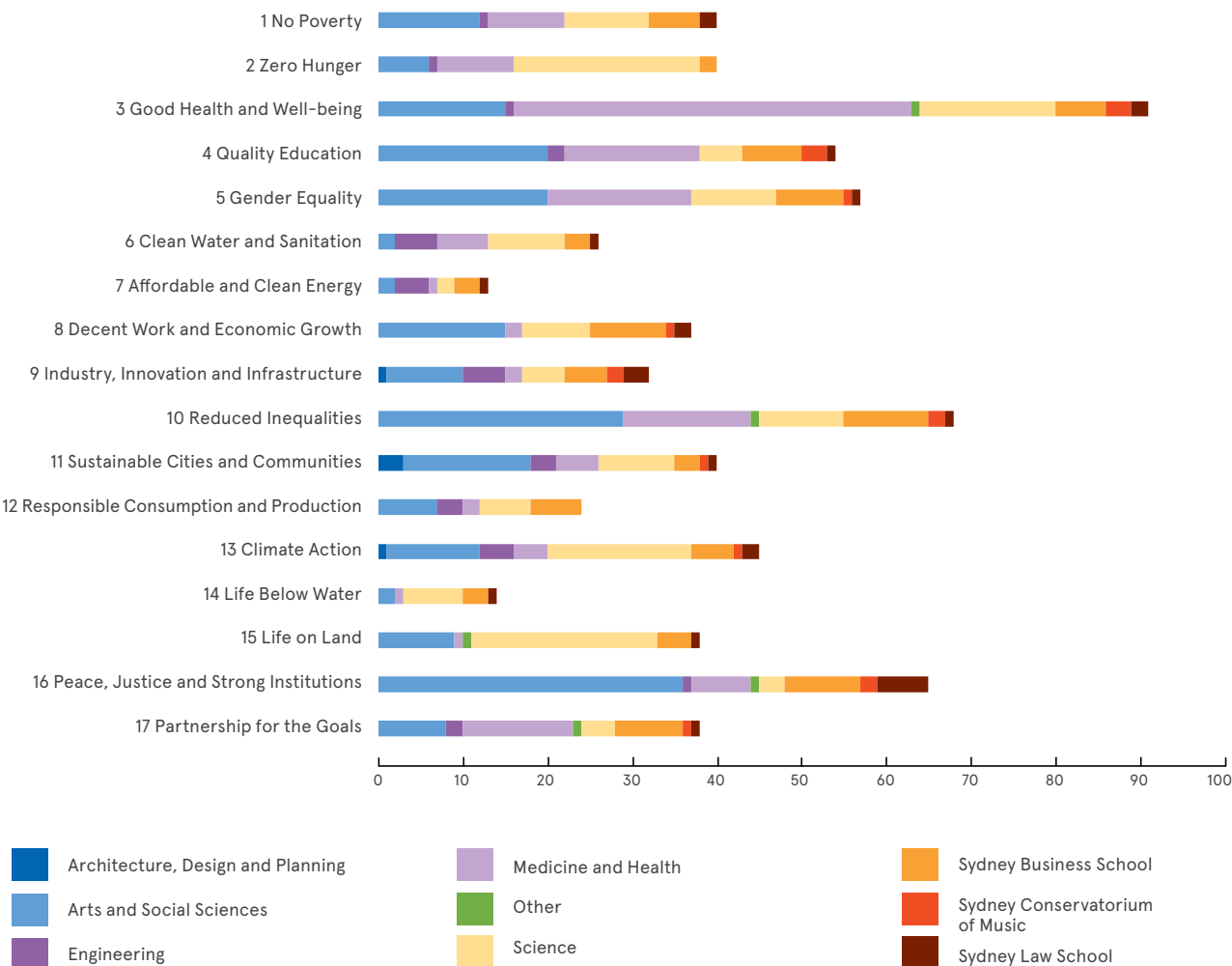
SSEAC is backing research projects and initiatives that take on key challenges faced by countries and communities in the region.

The Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a globally recognised set of social, environmental and economic objectives toward a better future. Adopted by United Nations’ member states in 2015, the 17 SDGs incorporate targets to address fundamental challenges, from combatting poverty, hunger, and inequality, to caring for the planet, strengthening institutions, and improving health and wellbeing.

SSEAC is committed to supporting projects that take on the key challenges faced by countries and communities in the region, whether through supporting multidisciplinary research, fostering new partnerships with industry and institutions, or leading education initiatives such as our field schools and training opportunities.

In 2022, we sought to gain a snapshot into how our members’ research engages with the SDGs, across faculties and research areas. In May, we conducted a survey with our academic members in order to document which SDGs they felt were most pertinent to their work. The results (displayed in the graph below) showed broad engagement across the SDGs among the 191 researchers who responded.

## SSEAC members and the Sustainable Development Goals





As the survey indicates, SSEAC's academic members are leading and supporting a range of research projects in Southeast Asia that support the SDGs. These multidisciplinary projects seek to enhance livelihoods, build local capacity and create opportunities, working in partnership with communities, civil society organisations, and governments.

A few examples of recent projects that address a range of SDGs and draw on strong collaboration with international partners, include:

- **Associate Professor Jeffrey Neilson (School of Geosciences)** is part of a multi-partner project (2021-24) that aims to improve the sustainability of coffee and black pepper farming systems, and the livelihoods of farmers, in Vietnam's Central Highlands region, funded by the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research (ACIAR).
- **Dr Jacqueline Thomas (School of Civil Engineering)** is the recipient of a SSEAC grant to evaluate sanitation technologies in Timor-Leste in order to reduce untreated wastewater in the environment, in partnership with the government, UNICEF and WaterAid.
- **Professor Michele Ford (SSEAC) and Dr Kristy Ward (SSEAC)** have secured an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project grant to produce the first systematic assessment of gender-based violence in Cambodia's construction sector, in partnership with Union Aid Abroad, Building and Wood Workers International, and The Solidarity Center.
- **Associate Professor Navneet Dhand (School of Veterinary Science)** is leading a \$4.3 million multi-agency program to train a new generation of 'animal disease detectives' across Southeast Asia and the Pacific. Funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, the project aims to prevent and contain

the spread of zoonotic and animal diseases in the region, and develop capacity for early intervention.

- **Professor Daniel Tan (School of Life and Environmental Sciences)** lead a multi-partner, ACIAR-funded project (2016-21) to support smallholder rice farmers in northwest Cambodia to adopt more effective and sustainable practices, in collaboration with industry, NGOs and government.
- **Dr Sophie Webber (School of Geosciences)** received a Discovery Early Career Researcher Award in 2021 to investigate the potential and limits of urban resilience infrastructure to protect cities against climate change, through a qualitative study of climate change hotspots in Indonesia and Fiji.

These projects are just a sample of the varied research conducted by our members in support of the SDGs. Several newly-funded research projects, addressing issues from mental health to labour rights, opioid use, and digital dissidents, are also detailed in the pages that follow (from page 24).

Our education initiatives, including the field schools we run across the region, support students from a variety of disciplines to engage with issues relevant to the SDGs and learn from the perspectives of communities, NGOs, and policymakers in Southeast Asia. Since 2014, SSEAC's field schools have run in seven Southeast Asian countries and covered issues including disability and social inclusion, women's empowerment, land rights, housing, healthcare, and food security.

In 2022, we also supported two new education initiatives, led by the University of Sydney Business School, that sought to foster creative thinking among students to address real-world issues in the region, including sustainability challenges. You can read more about these programs on pages 41 and 43.

# Cyber repression and political protests in Thailand

Dr Aim Sinpeng secured an Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award for her research on the impact of digital repressive technologies on activism in autocracies.

SSEAC academic member Dr Aim Sinpeng has been awarded a prestigious Australian Research Council Discovery Early Career Researcher Award (DECRA) for her important research on the impact of digital repressive technologies on activism in autocracies, through a case study of online opposition movements in Thailand.

Social media has become a crucial avenue for political discourse in Southeast Asia. Yet the growing decline in internet freedom and increasingly repressive and manipulative use of social media tools by governments means that social media is now an essential platform for control. “Disinformation” and “fake news” production is growing, and national governments are creating laws which often strengthen their powers of online control.

Aim’s project advances a new conceptual framework for the analysis of ‘networked counterpublics,’ which outlines the conditions under which social media aids or contains digital dissidents. Expected outcomes include a comprehensive study of interactions between the Thai State and the Free Youth Movement, and a series of conceptual tools to assess strategies for collective action in digitally repressive environments.

The project will also provide a roadmap to assist civil society and policymakers in building resilience against cyber repression and reclaiming online spaces for progressive change.

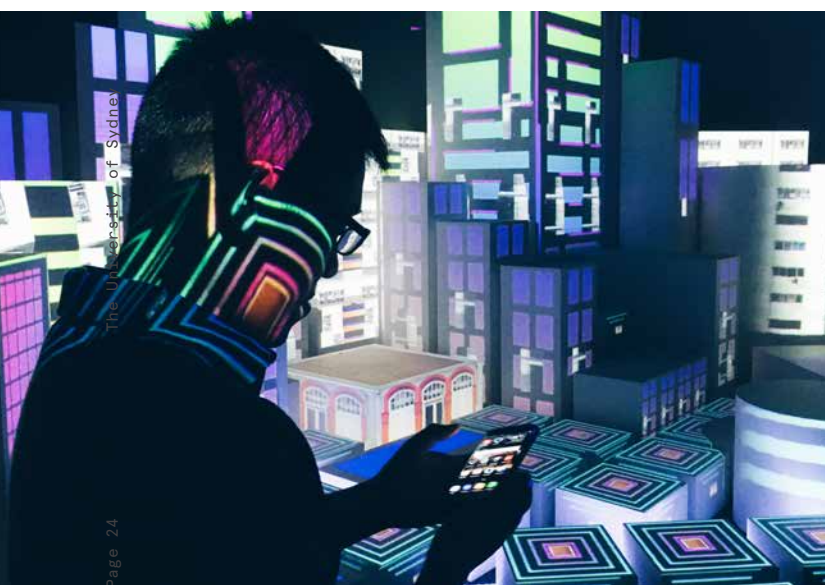
Aim participated in SSEAC’s ARC Fellowship Hothouse in 2020–21, an intensive mentoring program designed to support the development of high-quality applications to the ARC’s DECRA and Future Fellow schemes. She is a Senior Lecturer in Comparative Politics in the Department of Government and International Relations, and SSEAC’s Thailand country coordinator.

Aim’s books include *Opposing Democracy in the Digital Age: the Yellow Shirts in Thailand* (University of Michigan Press, 2021), which won the Early Career Book Prize from the Asian Studies Association of Australia in 2022, and *From Grassroots Activism to Disinformation: Social Media in Southeast Asia*, with Ross Tapsell (ISEAS, 2021).

She was awarded funding from Facebook for a project on hate speech in 2019, which led to the social media giant altering its hate speech policy in 2021 in line with the report’s recommendations. She subsequently won another Facebook grant in 2021 with Deborah Barros Leal Farias (UNSW Sydney) for a project on countering misinformation in countries with low press freedom. Aim was also awarded the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences Early Career Research Excellence Award in 2022.

“SSEAC’s fellowship hothouse was instrumental in me getting the DECRA. It provided a supportive and productive environment, under Michele’s leadership, to construct what started as a real ‘hot mess’ into a cogent, well-crafted winning application.”

**Dr Aim Sinpeng**





## Examining the use of therapeutic opioids in Indonesia

Dr Elisabeth Kramer secured an Australian Research Council Linkage Project grant to determine how legal, policy and socio-cultural factors influence the use of therapeutic opioids in Indonesia.

Dr Elisabeth Kramer is leading a multidisciplinary team of researchers to determine how legal, policy and socio-cultural factors influence the use of therapeutic opioids in Indonesia.

A team of nine researchers, including Dr Kramer, will work on the project, which was awarded an Australian Research Council (ARC) Linkage Project grant in 2022. The International Pharmaceutical Federation, an NGO representing over 4 million pharmacists and pharmaceutical scientists around the world, joins the project as a partner organisation.

The ARC's Linkage Projects promote research partnerships between academics, business, industry and communities which aim to tackle problems and advance new knowledge. This project on therapeutic opioids was among six successful University of Sydney-led Linkage Projects awarded funding in the latest round announced in January 2022.

Through its multidisciplinary and multi-scalar approach, the project aims to generate a nuanced understanding of the impact of non-medical considerations in contested areas of health policy. The researchers will develop a robust model of influences on decision-making that can be applied in Indonesia and adapted for use in other national contexts. This should provide significant benefits, including an innovative training program to empower doctors and pharmacists to make evidence-based decisions about the potential risks and benefits, both medical and social, of opioid-based treatment options.

Showcasing SSEAC's networks across faculties, the project combines deep country knowledge and expertise in pharmacy and medicine. As such, the project offers a model for bringing disciplines together to create health-focused projects that take into account the nuanced socio-political contexts of countries in Southeast Asia.

The project draws on wide-ranging academic expertise from across faculties and universities. University of Sydney researchers taking part include Professor Parisa Aslani, Professor Paul Glare, and Associate Professor Barbara Mintzes from the Faculty of Medicine and Health; Professor Simon Butt from The University of Sydney Law School; and Professor Hans Pols from the Faculty of Science.

The other members of the research team are Professor Sri Suryawati (Universitas Gadjah Mada, Indonesia), Professor Kirsty Foster OAM (University of Queensland), and Dr Agnes Vitry (University of South Australia).

Project lead Dr Kramer is SSEAC's Deputy Director and an honorary associate in the School of Languages and Cultures. Her other current research projects examine tobacco industry regulation in Indonesia and socio-political inclusion for people with disabilities, respectively. Her new book, *The Candidate's Dilemma* (Cornell University Press, 2022), explores money politics, anticorruptionism, and electoral campaigning in Indonesia.

# Working to reduce labour exploitation in commercial fishing

SSEAC Director Michele Ford is leading a new research project investigating commercial fishers' labour rights in Indonesia.

SSEAC Director Michele Ford will lead a new research project investigating the role of the state, supply chain actors and activists in protecting commercial fishers' labour rights in Indonesia, after securing an Australian Research Council (ARC) Discovery Project grant in 2022.

The project team also includes Dr Wayne Palmer, a researcher on labour migration and Indonesia at Bielefeld University in Germany, and Dr Dedi Adhuri, a senior researcher at the Jakarta-based Research Centre for Society and Culture, Indonesian Institute of Sciences.

Indonesia is the world's third-largest source of marine catches and the largest archipelagic state. The country's fisheries sector is a crucial part of the economy, supporting some 7 million jobs. However, many of those employed in commercial fishing have no protection under the country's industrial relations system.

This multi-scalar study will generate new knowledge about employment relations at sea. Despite the evident importance of this industry in Indonesia – and globally – there has been virtually no scholarly analysis of the commercial fishing industry from an employment relations perspective. By shifting the conceptual lens to employment relations, the project aims to move away from analysis of the (errant) behaviour of rogue employers and towards identifying ways that states, as industrial relations actors, can better address systemic labour exploitation in commercial fishing.

The project will generate a conceptualisation of employment relations that better accommodates fishers and workers in other non-standard occupations, including the gig economy. It incorporates a comparative case study of three regional locations within Indonesia – Natuna, Ambon and Bitung – all of which are government-designated commercial fishing industry hubs.

The project's findings will benefit governments, global supply chain actors and labour activists by helping them to identify and overcome impediments to more effective regulation of employment relations and work to reduce labour exploitation in commercial fishing globally.

This new project is the most recent of several ARC grants awarded to Professor Ford. She currently also leads a Discovery Project on Myanmar's garment industry and a Linkage Project on gender-based violence in Cambodia's construction industry. Among her recent books are *Labor and Politics in Indonesia* (Cambridge 2020, with Teri Caraway) and *From Migrant to Worker: Global Unions and Temporary Labor Migration in Asia* (Cornell University Press, 2019).

In addition to her research work, Michele is also the President of RC44 (Labor Movements) of the International Sociological Association. Michele has also engaged in extensive consultancy work for the international labour movement, the International Labour Organization and the Australian government.



Photo credit: Rimantė Paulauskaitė via Flickr

# Improving mental health through social media

Professor Hans Pols and Associate Professor Nicola Hancock are leading a project to leverage social media to foster better mental health in Indonesia and Australia.

The COVID-19 pandemic has had a negative impact on mental health worldwide. Amid lockdowns and isolation, many young people have realised that interacting with their peers on a regular basis is essential to maintaining mental health. Meaningful participation in a community strengthens resilience.

In early 2022, SSEAC Community Outreach Adviser Professor Hans Pols and Associate Professor Nicola Hancock assembled a team of researchers and consumers of mental health care in Australia and Indonesia to work on a project to develop social media campaigns to foster better mental health in both countries. The social media content for the campaign is developed by young consumers of mental health care who are unusually internet-savvy.

Funded by an Australia-Indonesia Institute grant, the project includes researchers from the University of Sydney and Atma Jaya University, Jakarta. They will work with members of mental health support groups to develop positive and uplifting social media campaigns with a focus on mental health. The project will also prepare guidelines for the campaigns that can be used by mental health support groups and NGOs in both countries.

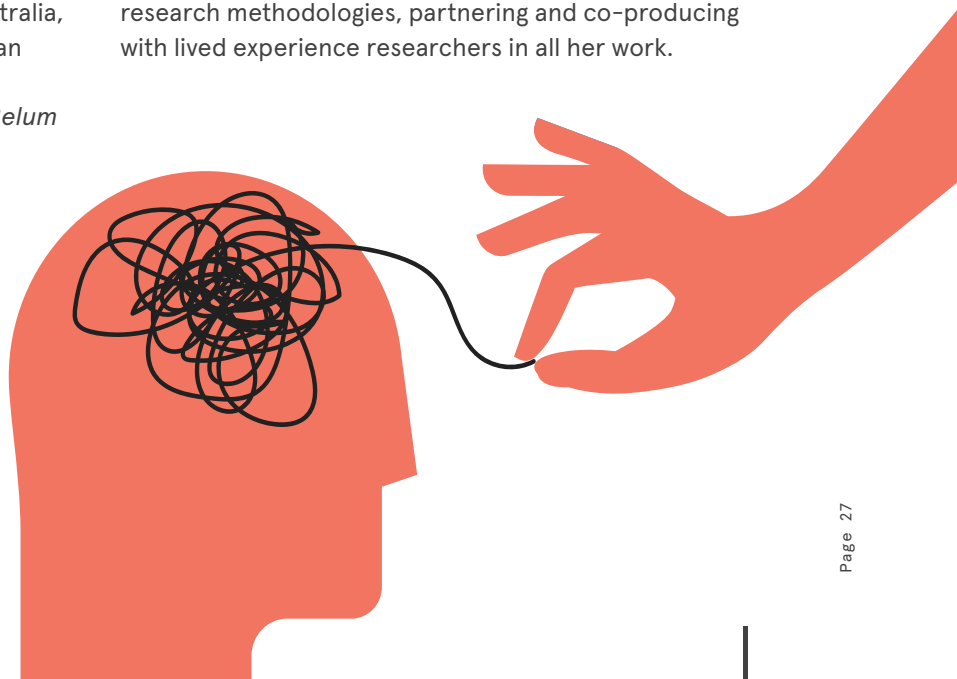
The project brings together members of WayAhead, ReachOut, the Mental Illness Fellowship of Australia, and SANE (all from Australia) with the Indonesian Schizophrenia Care Community, Bipolar Care Indonesia, Into the Light Indonesia, and *Yang Belum Sempat* (Indonesia).

These groups will select participants on the basis of their experience with social media who will meet for workshops in Jakarta and in Sydney to develop ideas about the envisaged social media campaigns, design social media content, and disseminate this content. Project members will later assess the impact of these social media campaigns, including the reactions received.

It is hoped that the project will strengthen awareness of the importance of meaningful involvement in various communities for maintaining and strengthening mental health, and that mental health is everybody's business, not just those who experience personal distress.

Hans is interested in the history, sociology, and anthropology of psychiatry and mental health, with a particular focus on Indonesia. His book, *Nurturing Indonesia: Medicine and Decolonisation in the Dutch East Indies* (Cambridge University Press, 2018), explored the history of colonial and postcolonial medicine in the Dutch East Indies and Indonesia, and was shortlisted for the inaugural Reid Prize in 2022, awarded by the Asian Studies Association of Australia. He recently edited, with Professor Mark Micale, *Traumatic Pasts in Asia: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma, 1930 to the Present* (Berghahn Books, 2021), which features essays on sites and experiences of past trauma in Indonesia, Cambodia, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, among other locales.

Nicola came to academia after working as a senior clinical occupational therapist. She has gained extensive research and evaluation experience over 20 years, and has led projects to evaluate innovative initiatives striving to enhance participation and inclusion of people living with mental illness. Her focus on participation extends to the use of participatory research methodologies, partnering and co-producing with lived experience researchers in all her work.



# Supporting research excellence

SSEAC supports members from across the university to initiate, refine or expand their high-quality research on Southeast Asia.



In the second half of 2021, SSEAC awarded a number of grants to support researchers and postgraduate students at the University of Sydney working on Southeast Asia-related projects. Among these were grants for outstanding early- and mid-career academics and higher degree by research candidates, respectively, to write an article based on their research. Due to ongoing travel restrictions, our mobility and other schemes involving travel were not able to be offered.

SSEAC awarded six Collaborative Research Grants to support members' research projects, and provide a pathway to securing external funding opportunities. Successful applications included projects to: examine food safety risks and practices in Vietnam, using a One Health approach; improve water treatment applications to aid in sustainable water production and waste minimization, with research partners from Indonesia and Malaysia; explore agriculture-related causes of conflict across the region (see opposite page); examine the impact of customary law recognition on land access and rural livelihoods in Indonesia; develop insights into the genetic predisposition to amyotrophic lateral sclerosis, a neurodegenerative disease, among a diverse cohort of patients in Malaysia; and understand the medication-related risk perceptions of Indonesians with asthma in order to drive targeted training for health professionals.

## Grants awarded in the second half of 2021

Category	No. awarded	Countries
Collaborative	6	Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam
EMCR Residency	3	Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam
Student Residency	14	Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Myanmar, the Philippines, Vietnam

# Research spotlight: Examining agricultural drivers of conflict in Southeast Asia

New research aims to understand less-studied causes of conflict that are linked to the agricultural sector.

Dr David Ubilava (School of Economics) and Professor Justin Hastings (School of Social and Political Sciences) are researching the agricultural causes of conflict in Southeast Asia, including the role of food availability and price fluctuations. The project will enable policymakers to better direct resources and optimise their decision-making to avoid conflict before it begins.

“Southeast Asian countries often see high levels of social unrest with plausible links to the food and agricultural sector,” said Dr Ubilava, who has worked extensively on commodity markets and climate shocks.

“In the Philippines alone, since 2016 there have been more than 10,000 such reported incidents, as per the [Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project](#), that involved an armed altercation or violence of some sort. There is a potential that the political violence relates to harvest-related income, and is amplified in response to global price shocks.”

The project will synthesise data from across the region, including on the location and timing of conflict incidents, seasonal patterns of production and harvesting, food prices, and less-studied drivers of conflict such as disputes over irrigation water rights or agricultural machinery. Among the expected outcomes of the research is an ability to explain and predict conflict based on seasonal changes in food prices.

Funded by a SSEAC Collaborative Research Grant, the research is a multidisciplinary undertaking, covering issues pertinent to climate science, agricultural economics, and conflict studies.

“Conflict has dire consequences for communities, governance and the effective functioning of economies,” said Professor Hastings, who is an expert on weak and failed states, violent non-state actors, and informal markets.

“Understanding the possible economic causes and patterns of conflict, and the role the agricultural sector may be playing, is vital – particularly as these systems continue to feel the myriad pressures of climate change and the pandemic.”



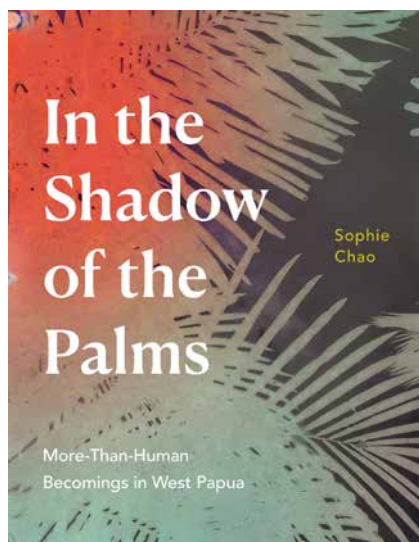
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**Professor Justin Hastings**

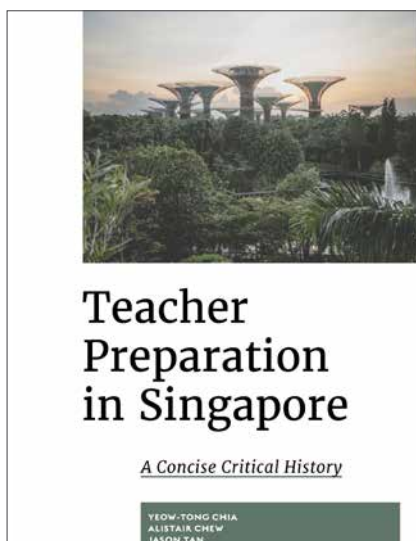
## Publishing highlights in 2021-22

From politics to history, education and the environment, these new books by SSEAC members showcase a diversity of interests and insight on all things Southeast Asia.

Several SSEAC members have seen the fruits of their research in print in the last year, with a string of new books related to Southeast Asia either published or forthcoming. Ranging across subjects, disciplines and countries, these new publications showcase the breadth of expertise and insight among our academic members. A range of these newly published gems are collated below. Listeners of our *SSEAC Stories* podcast will recognise some familiar themes and authors here.

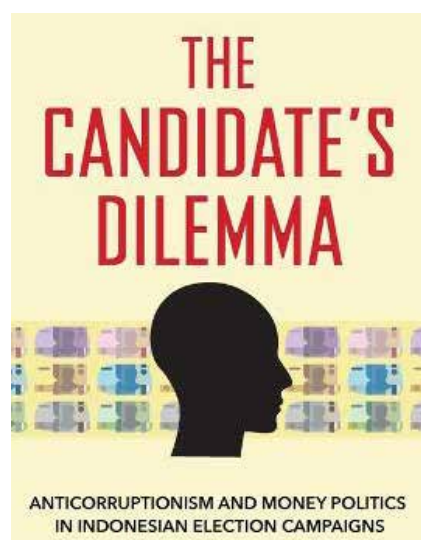
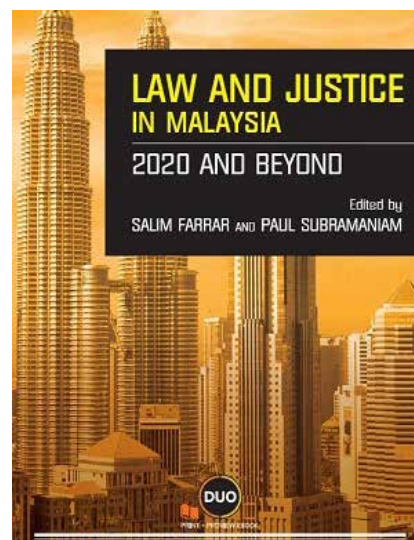


Dr Sophie Chao's *In the Shadow of the Palms: More-Than-Human Becomings in West Papua* (Duke University Press, 2022) examines the multispecies entanglements of oil palm plantations in West Papua, Indonesia. Situating the plant and the transformations it has brought within the context of West Papua's volatile history of colonization, ethnic domination and capitalist incursion, Dr Chao traces how Indigenous Marind communities understand and navigate the social, political, and environmental demands of the oil palm plant. By approaching cash crops as both drivers of destruction and subjects of human exploitation, Dr Chao rethinks capitalist violence as a multispecies act. The book was awarded the Duke University Press Scholars of Color First Book Award.



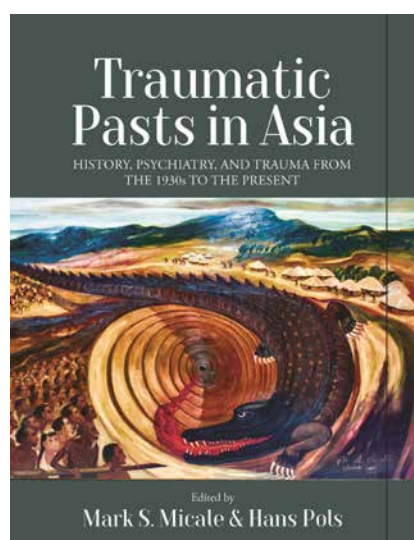
Co-authored by SSEAC's Singapore Country Coordinator Dr Yeow-Tong Chia, *Teacher Preparation in Singapore: A Concise Critical History* (Emerald Group Publishing, 2022) explores the history and philosophy of teacher preparation, training, induction and development in Singapore, from the colonial era to the present day. The book trains a critical eye on the social and political forces influencing Singapore's teacher education, and explores issues such as policy borrowing, diffusion of educational philosophies, and developments paralleling those in the United Kingdom and elsewhere.

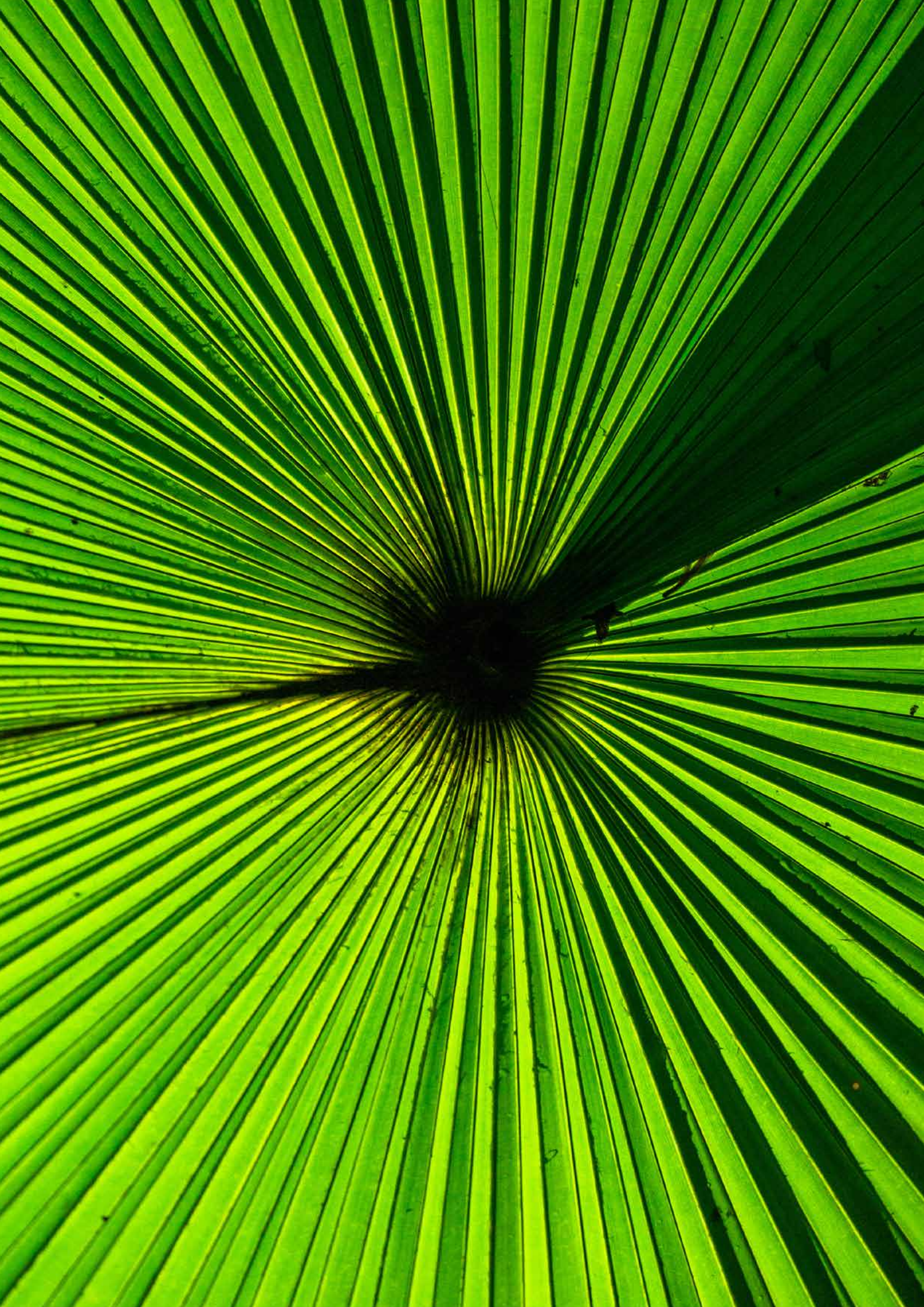
*Law and Justice in Malaysia: 2020 and Beyond* (Berghahn Books, 2021) surveys the landscape of law and justice in Malaysia through a re-evaluation of Vision 2020, a set of ideals for the nation outlined by prime minister Mahathir Mohamad in the early 1990s. Co-edited by Associate Professor Salim Farrar, the book contains the analyses of pre-eminent legal thinkers and writers, from across the ethnic and religious divide, on the role of law and justice within a holistic view of Malaysia's development. Pertinent issues in the Malaysian context are covered, including constitutional supremacy, legal pluralism, Indigenous law and Islamic law.



In *The Candidate's Dilemma* (Cornell University Press, 2022) SSEAC Deputy Director Dr Elisabeth Kramer explores how three political candidates in Indonesia made decisions to resist, engage in, or otherwise incorporate money politics into their electioneering strategies over the course of their campaigns. As they campaign, candidates encounter pressure from the institutional rules that guide elections, political parties, and voters, and must also negotiate complex social relationships to remain competitive. Published in June 2022, the book delves into the lived experiences of candidates to offer a nuanced study of how the political and personal intersect when it comes to money politics, anticorruptionism, and electoral campaigning in Indonesia.

In the early twenty-first century, trauma is seemingly everywhere, whether as experience, diagnosis, concept, or buzzword. Yet historical research on the topic has overwhelmingly focused on cases such as World War I or the Holocaust in which Western experiences and actors are foregrounded. In *Traumatic Pasts in Asia: History, Psychiatry, and Trauma from the 1930s to the Present* (Berghahn Books, 2021), Euro-American paradigms of traumatic experience are extended to largely overlooked sites of world-historical suffering. Co-edited by Professor Hans Pols, the book features essays on sites and experiences of trauma in Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam, among other locales.





# Sharing our members' stories

Our *SSEAC Stories* podcast, showcasing the eclectic research and insights of our members, has continued to grow exponentially over the past year.

From July 2021 to June 2022, we released 23 [new episodes](#) and registered over 116,000 downloads. The podcast is hosted as a special series on the US-based [New Books Network](#), and all episodes can be found there, as well as the main podcasting apps, including [Apple](#), [Spotify](#), and [Stitcher](#). SSEAC Director Michele Ford also co-hosts the New Books in Southeast Asian Studies program on the New Books Network, which features in-depth interviews with Southeast Asia scholars. Highlights from our *SSEAC Stories* podcast over the past 12 months include:



## **All Industry is Creative Industry: New Creativity and Innovation Practices in Vietnam**

Recent economic development in Vietnam has seen a proliferation of manufacturing. At the same time, Vietnam has embraced creative innovation, with new practices emerging throughout the country. These practices provide a creative outlet, but also connect to bigger themes around industry, wellbeing, productivity, and climate change. Associate Professor Jane Gavan untangles some of these threads, reflecting on innovative ways of raising productivity and valuing creativity in Vietnam.



## **Speaking Bones: Unearthing Ancient Stories of Illness and Disease**

For a long time, the arrival in Southeast Asia of a range of deadly tropical diseases was believed to be connected to the introduction of agriculture. But how long have these diseases really been around for? And how have they impacted people over time? Bioarchaeologist and SSEAC Postdoctoral Research Associate Dr Melandri Vlok sheds light on the complex science of paleoepidemiology and its use of advanced analytical practices to uncover ancient stories of illness and disease.



## **Rethinking Sustainable Development and Resilience in Cambodia's Tonle Sap Lake**

Each year, during the monsoon, Cambodia's Tonle Sap, the largest inland lake in Southeast Asia, is inundated with swelling waters from the Mekong River. But Tonle Sap is facing a triple threat of climate change, the damming of the Mekong and over-fishing. Dr Josephine Gillespie invites us to rethink global environmental protection regimes, arguing that environmental policies and projects must take into account people-place dynamics and livelihoods.



## **Ethnographic (Hi)stories from Upland Laos**

In Phongsali Province, in northern Laos, lies a tiny village of around 24 households. Until recently, it was a monoethnic Khmu village, a group with a historically ambivalent relationship to the national majority. It's also home to the Akha ethnic group. Dr Paul-David Lutz reflects on the importance of "animist" beliefs and practices in shaping a culturally-specific sense of post-colonial modernity, where massive infrastructure projects, interethnic tensions, spirit beliefs and animistic practices coexist and collide.



## **Architecture, Climatic Privilege and Migrant Labour in Singapore**

Migrant worker dormitories in Singapore are sites where structural inequities in architecture and legal regulations have had a significant impact on the living conditions of workers. These living spaces hit the headlines in 2020 as sites for the rapid spread of COVID-19. Dr Jennifer Ferng reflects on the relationship between architecture and labour, arguing that climate change, capital, and power intersect with the forced displacement of migrants to reinforce existing inequalities in Singapore.

# Research training for disability activists in Indonesia

With funding from the Australian Government's Australia-Indonesia Institute, SSEAC delivered a series of online workshops on research methods for disability activists from across Indonesia.

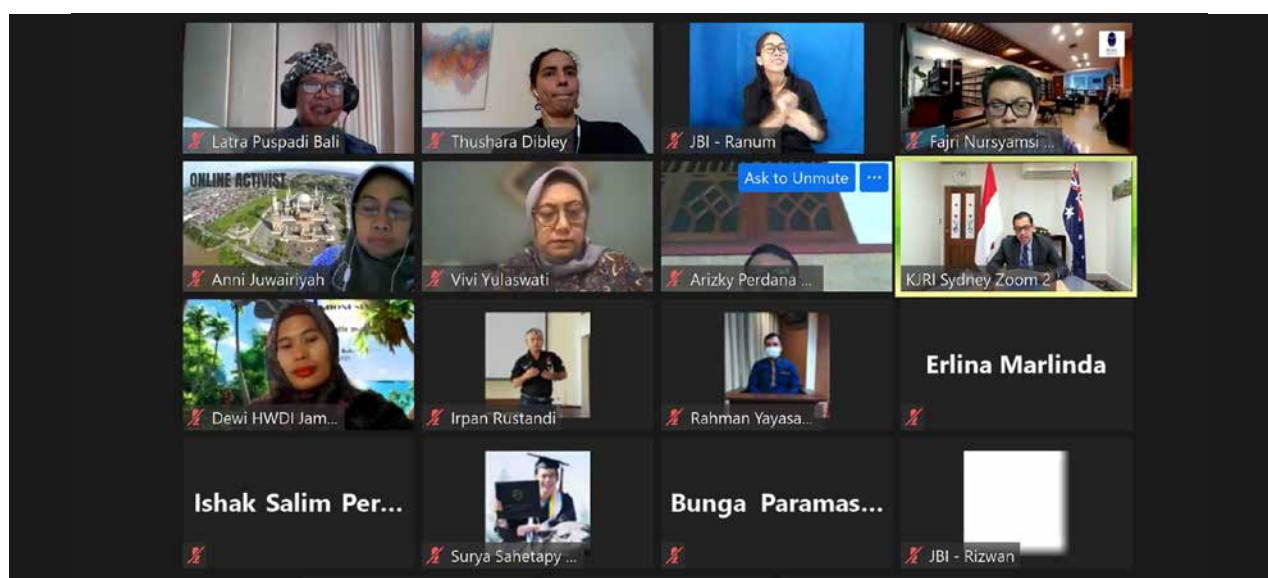
SSEAC has trained nearly 60 Indonesia-based disability activists in leadership, organisational development, project management and policy advocacy since 2016. In feedback to these courses, participants had consistently identified that they would also benefit from training in research methods that would help underpin their advocacy. To meet this need, in 2021, SSEAC partnered with the Jakarta-based Indonesian Center for Law and Policy Studies (PSHK) to deliver an online module on research methods for disability activists from across Indonesia, funded by the Australian Government's Australia-Indonesia Institute.

With the needs of people with a disability often overlooked in policy decisions taken during the COVID-19 pandemic, the course offered a timely means of supporting disability activists to more effectively use evidence in advocating for more responsive policies. The program was open to alumni of SSEAC's previous disability-focused Australia Awards courses run from 2016-20. A total of six workshops were held across July and August 2021, each attended by 12 participants, along with sign language interpreters.

The workshops were highly successful, with participants trained in a range of research methods and approaches. The course included four Indonesian-language videos, and focused on the development of research questions, using qualitative and quantitative data, data analysis, and writing results. The course design benefited from the input of Plumtree, an Australian disability service provider, and disability specific concepts were integrated into discussion.

As an outcome of the project, each participant was given the task of completing a detailed research proposal, designed to draw on skills developed during the course and to serve as the foundation of a grant proposal to fund their future research. Well-formed proposals were received on projects related to the employment of people with disability, involving people with disability in disaster response, and on the extent to which guarantees about the use of accessible technology in local disability laws were properly implemented.

We were thrilled at the participants' grasp of key research processes and are confident these skills will be harnessed to strengthen their advocacy. Throughout the project SSEAC worked closely with its partner PSHK, establishing a strong foundation for future collaboration.



# Training future university leaders around the region

Staff from universities in several Southeast Asian countries took part in the Office of Global Engagement's flagship program on higher education.



In 2021, non-academic staff from six universities in five countries of Southeast Asia were supported to take part in a well-recognised professional development program on higher education, run by the University of Sydney's Office of Global Engagement (OGE) as part of their Global Leaders Program.

Offered online over three interactive sessions in November 2021, the flagship Globalisation of Higher Education program was open to administrative and professional staff from universities across Asia. This iteration of the program welcomed 70 staff from 15 institutions across the region.

Through presentations, case studies and opportunities for discussion with academics and specialists, the program aimed to deepen participants' knowledge of internationalisation trends in higher education, how to engage with global partners, cross-cultural competence, staff development, and effective leadership.

The program also offered participants the opportunity to make connections with like-minded professionals. The final day included an interactive networking session which gave participants the opportunity to build professional relationships with other attendees and University of Sydney staff.

For more than a decade, the University of Sydney's OGE has run professional development programs for international government delegations, corporate groups, and university staff to build knowledge and expertise in their field. For this particular program, the OGE offered subsidised places to several university staff members based in Southeast Asia.

Drawing on our contacts in the region, SSEAC reached out to partner universities in Southeast Asia to circulate the program opportunity as widely as possible and encourage expressions of interest. Participants included staff from Hanoi Medical University (Vietnam), the University of Jember (Indonesia), Airlangga University (Indonesia), the University of Health Sciences (Cambodia), Mahidol University (Thailand), and the National University of Laos (Laos).

**“It was a brilliant, engaging, and inspiring program during these difficult times. Your program helped me get connected to the world again after the borders were closed.”**

**Course participant**



# The Sydney Vietnam Institute

A new multidisciplinary centre launched in 2021, the Sydney Vietnam Institute has had a busy first 12 months.

The Sydney Vietnam Institute (SVI) is a new multidisciplinary centre established within the Faculty of Medicine and Health in 2021. Its vision is to improve the lives of individuals and communities in Vietnam and beyond through excellence in collaborative research and education, including collaboration with SSEAC.

The Institute's inaugural Director is Professor Greg Fox, a respiratory physician and epidemiologist in the Faculty of Medicine and Health. He is supported by Dr Justin Beardsley, a Senior Lecturer in Infectious Diseases at the Sydney Infectious Diseases Institute, who is Deputy Director. Both have lived and worked in Vietnam for extended periods, and have deep research connections in the country.

The Institute has had a busy 12 months, with formal governance structures being set up, along with the appointment of an executive and an advisory committee. It has also developed an academic program, covering seven nodes: arts and social sciences; agriculture and environment; business and innovation; child and maternal health; chronic diseases; education; and infectious diseases.

SVI has been engaged in a range of exciting research and education-related activities over the past year. Some of the highlights include:

- External research funding of more than \$10 million awarded to researchers within the Institute over the past 12 months, to be implemented in Vietnam in its first year. Sources of this funding include National Health and Medical Research Council (NHMRC)-funded clinical trials and investigator grants, the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, and the Australia-ASEAN Council.
- With the support of philanthropic funding, a One Health research laboratory has been established at Hanoi Medical University in Vietnam, with negotiations underway for a similar facility to be established in Ho Chi Minh City.

- A range of public webinars have been held, showcasing research activities and covering subjects such as business innovation in Vietnam, drawing on the views of a panel of Vietnamese business leaders; challenges and lessons of the pandemic in Vietnam and beyond; non-traditional funding opportunities for Vietnam-related research; and the role of hospital-based surveillance in Vietnam to help understand the epidemiology of children with cerebral palsy, inform clinical practice and future research.
- In May 2022, a delegation including SVI's Director, Deputy Director, and key University staff met with government partners, the Australian Embassy to Vietnam, the Australian Chamber of Commerce and Industry, and other key education and research partners in four provinces of Vietnam to explore opportunities for collaboration.
- With funding from SSEAC, 11 University of Sydney students and staff completed 30 hours of Vietnamese language learning, and 13 more began online language training in June 2022.
- SVI held its fourth annual research symposium on 18 November 2021, a half-day event showcasing the research of the Institute and featuring keynote speaker Ms Nguyen Thi Thanh An, Vietnam Country Manager at the Australian Centre for International Agricultural Research. As part of the symposium, academics from universities in Vietnam and the University of Sydney presented a range of Vietnam-related research findings, including on diseases affecting black pepper plants; regulating social media and influencers; income and air pollution; cerebral palsy; and improving breast cancer detection.

As SVI continues to gain momentum, the Institute encourages all academics and students with an interest in Vietnam to [join its membership](#). You can follow SVI on [YouTube](#) and [Facebook](#), or contact [sydney-vietnam.event@sydney.edu.au](mailto:sydney-vietnam.event@sydney.edu.au) for further information.



# The next generation of research excellence

SSEAC is committed to supporting emerging scholars of Southeast Asia. The Centre's professional development programs offer opportunities for students and academics at the University of Sydney and beyond to make inroads on their research, sharpen their skills, and connect with peers.

## Postgraduate Retreat

Our postgraduate writing retreat returned in-person in 2022, with 41 students taking part in a three-day program of structured writing time, informal discussions and debriefing sessions, designed to encourage meaningful progress on an academic output. The retreat included postgraduate students from 12 universities around Australia, working in a range of disciplines, but all with a Southeast Asia focus.

Throughout the retreat, students were encouraged to reflect on their writing habits and productivity, set and share writing goals, and connect with their postgraduate peers. A key feature of the retreat was the daily work-in-progress discussions, in which students came together in small groups to share writing challenges and offer constructive feedback to each other.

The feedback was overwhelmingly positive, with many students reflecting that the sense of community and sharing of ideas helped inform their writing and drive them to keep going!

**“Feeling reenergised and inspired after being back at an in-person event again, surrounded and supported by so many researchers doing amazing work on Southeast Asia. Thank you SSEAC for everything you do to support postgrads.”**

**Student participant**

## Emerging Scholars Conference

Our annual Emerging Scholars Conference shifted online in 2021 due to pandemic restrictions, but was no less engaging, with 51 papers submitted and over 260 attendees. Held on 28 July, the online multidisciplinary conference offered postgraduates and early career researchers the opportunity to present their research on Southeast Asia-related topics.

Sessions were organised across SSEAC's five research areas: economic and social development; environment and resources; health; heritage and the arts; and state and society.

Fascinating papers covered a diversity of topics and countries, from transboundary water challenges in the Vietnamese Mekong Delta to social change movements and counter-movements in Thailand, the impact of COVID-19 on the arts in Singapore, and the migration decision-making of households impacted by climate change in the Philippines.

**“I thoroughly enjoyed the conference. Everything went smoothly; it was very well-moderated; the quality of the presentations was top notch; and the questions asked by participants were critical and intriguing.”**

**Conference attendee**

## Honours Bootcamp

In July 2021, SSEAC partnered with the ANU Indonesia Project to offer a three-day professional development program for Honours students around Australia studying Southeast Asia-related subjects. The program was delivered online, marking a new era in the evolution of this flagship program.

Held annually, SSEAC's Honours Bootcamp comprises a range of interdisciplinary workshops, seminars, discussions and group activities designed to help students complete their research projects, learn from scholars, peers and professionals working in or on Southeast Asia, and plan for life after their degree.

In 2021, the bootcamp drew students researching topics including the poetics of Filipino national dress, female merchants in early modern Vietnam, social cohesion in Malaysia, and post-disaster housing in Indonesia. Students from the University of Sydney were joined by peers from all around Australia.

**“It was so refreshing and enriching to hear from so many like-minded scholars working on such diverse topics – and that despite the diversity, we were united by a passion and interest in better understanding Southeast Asia.”**

**Student participant**

# Writing residency

SSEAC's inaugural writing residency supported emerging researchers to write an outreach or journal article based on their Southeast Asia research.

Communicating research findings in a clear, cogent and compelling way – whether for an academic journal, media outlet or other publication – is an integral part of the research process. Over several intensive sessions in November 2021 and February 2022, SSEAC ran its inaugural residency workshop series to support emerging researchers to write an outreach or academic article based on their Southeast Asia-related research.

Designed for Honours students, Masters by Research students, PhD candidates and early career researchers at the University of Sydney, the online workshops included targeted sessions on what makes a compelling outreach article, how to choose a publication outlet, and pitching to editors. Sessions also focused on structuring and editing journal articles, the peer review process, and giving and receiving constructive feedback.

Participants were drawn from a range of disciplinary backgrounds, from art history to engineering, legal studies and veterinary epidemiology. In the summer break between workshop sessions, they worked hard on draft articles based on their Southeast Asia research, putting the skills and knowledge gained throughout the program into practice, and benefiting from ongoing feedback and review.

Publishing highlights as a result of the residency included: Jennifer Yang's [piece](#) on visions of Indonesia, nationality and belonging through the work of Chinese-Indonesian women artists in the 20th Century (published on *New Mandala*); Jiva Lamsal's [journal article](#) on political theatre in the Philippines and Nepal (published in *Literary Studies*, a research journal of the Literary Association of Nepal); and Ivy He's [article](#) exploring the difficulties communities face in 'building back better' after disasters, with a focus on how communities recovered after the 2010 volcanic eruption of Mount Merapi on Java, Indonesia (also published on *New Mandala*).

SSEAC was grateful to call on a range of academics to share their insights and expertise with participants in the program, including Dr Yeow-Tong Chia, Dr Sophie Chao, Dr Kristy Ward, Dr Sabin Zahirovic and Dr Cheng Nienyuan from the University of Sydney, as well as Dr Benjamin Thompson (Monash University), Dr Jarrah Sastrawan (École française d'Extrême-Orient), Dr Elly Kent (Australian National University) and Ms Ele Williams (Australian National University).

**“Thanks so much for allowing me to be involved in the workshop – it's been a great experience and you have done a wonderful job conducting the sessions and providing genuine mentorship.”**

**Workshop participant**



Photo credit: Chiang Yu Tse, Balinese Girl, 1979, ink on paper, dimensions unknown. Private collection. Reproduced with permission from Teng Mu Yen, 2022.



## Students tackle real-world issues in Southeast Asia

Master of Commerce students developed a range of creative responses as part of the 'Make a Real Difference' initiative.

The result of a collaboration between SSEAC and the University of Sydney Business School, the 'Make a Real Difference' initiative offered Master of Commerce students the opportunity to apply their analytical and problem-solving skills in the Southeast Asian context.

In the first semester of 2022, students were presented with a range of key challenges pertinent to one or more countries in Southeast Asia, from food security and the spread of misinformation, to environmental degradation and the preservation of cultural heritage. Many of these challenges were global in scope, and equally resonant for countries such as Australia.

SSEAC's academic members provided students with detailed guidance on topic areas and produced ten stand-alone videos that gave students an overview of each country in Southeast Asia, including cultural, political and business considerations. Students then worked in small teams on their chosen problem, conducting further research and testing ideas before shaping their proposed solutions.

On 17 June 2022, 12 shortlisted proposals were presented as a business case to a panel of academics and industry leaders, including from CISCO AppDynamics, Maven Data, Nestlé, Ogilvy Australia and SSEAC. Among the creative solutions put forward included proposals to:

- roll out kinetic tiles in Singapore's busy subway stations to harness green energy and help reduce the country's carbon footprint, one step at a time;
- utilise social media influencers in the Philippines to disseminate accurate health information related to COVID-19 and boost low vaccination rates; and
- implement a community composting initiative in Hanoi, Vietnam to promote better management of organic waste and boost sustainability outcomes.

The winning entry, as judged by the panel, was a proposal to launch a rap competition in Indonesia - IndoRap Champion - to help preserve and promote the rich diversity of Indigenous languages in the country, particularly among younger people.

"The event was a great success with students putting forward ideas that were novel, useful and practical," said Dr Abdul Razeed of the Business School, who developed and coordinated the initiative together with SSEAC's Curriculum Coordinator Dr Natali Pearson and Business School tutor Ms Angela Baxter. "The collaboration with industry partners allowed us to share practical, student-led ideas and bring a greater educative focus on Southeast Asia."

The initiative was offered as part of the Creative and Analytic Mindset (BUSS5221) unit, which aims to equip students with the capacity and confidence to apply analytical methods, think creatively and devise novel approaches to practical problems. It is one of the university's largest units of study, with 1,760 student enrolments in the first semester of 2022.

"This collaboration with the Business School was a wonderful opportunity to embed Southeast Asia within the University of Sydney's curriculum," said Dr Pearson. "We are delighted to have students engaging with Southeast Asia in such creative ways, and in a manner that truly reflects the opportunities for research and innovation in the region. The final student presentations were incredibly impressive. I have great faith in the Asia-capability of these students, and commend them for their hard work this semester."

**"Thank you for facilitating the day - it was a lot of fun, and a great opportunity to meet some experienced professionals."**

**Student participant**





“A highlight of the Engage Asia Challenge has been having real discussions about why some solutions to problems aren’t as simple as they seem—it’s helped enlighten our thinking to be broader, more critical, and be more appreciative of both the challenges and opportunities in Asia and globally.

**Student participants  
from ‘Team Callipolis’**

## Engage Asia Challenge 2022

Students take on sustainability challenges in Asia as part of a new co-curricular initiative.

The University of Sydney’s Business School successfully held its Engage Asia Symposium in May 2022, showcasing the innovative ways the school is engaging in the region through education, research and dialogue. The event included the Engage Asia Challenge, supported by SSEAC, where talented students presented their solutions to some of the toughest sustainability challenges in Asia.

The Engage Asia Challenge is a new co-curricular initiative open to undergraduate Business School students. Over six weeks in Semester 1 of 2022, students worked in small teams to develop solutions to key sustainability challenges in the Asia-Pacific region. Students participated in a series of workshops to help sharpen their analytical skills and refine their ideas, with input from peers, industry experts and leading academics.

The top solutions were showcased at the Engage Asia Symposium, and judged by a panel of industry experts. These innovative ideas addressed a diverse range of challenges, with a significant focus on Southeast Asia. Among them were proposals to address the lack of access to clean drinking water in remote communities in Indonesia; childhood obesity in Malaysia; women’s economic empowerment in remote island communities of the Philippines; and the impact of soil erosion in the rice fields of northeast Thailand.

The winning pitch was ‘EcoFood’, a detailed proposal to combat rising fertiliser prices in Vietnam by transforming food waste into organic fertiliser for rice farmers. The ‘people’s choice’ award went to a creative proposal to engage networks of farmers and communities in

the Philippines to better treat, store and dry rice, helping to ameliorate rice losses due to the impact of climate change.

“This year’s Engage Asia Challenge participants have shown such rich insights into highly complex problems. They have also displayed a significant capacity to innovate,” said Engage Asia Academic Lead Dr Sandra Seno-Alday, who is also SSEAC’s Community Outreach Adviser.

“We clearly have a generation of inspiring leaders who are passionate about sustainability and prepared to tackle the grand challenges of our region.”

SSEAC was pleased to be a strategic partner of the Engage Asia Challenge for 2022, alongside Asia Society Australia, who joined the initiative as an industry partner.

# Learning about women's empowerment in Indonesia

Field school alumni Zoe Neill reflects on the lasting impact of connecting with grassroots women's activists during a SSEAC-run program to Indonesia in 2018.

For students, participating in a SSEAC-run field school to Southeast Asia is a unique opportunity to leave the textbooks behind (if momentarily!) and learn about different cultures, languages and perspectives by directly engaging with communities. For many, it can be the first step toward a deeper connection with the region.

Zoe Neill was among a group of undergraduate students who took part in SSEAC's field trip to Indonesia in July 2018 to study issues of women's empowerment. For Zoe, who was then a Bachelor of International and Global Studies student, the trip made a lasting impression.

Funded by the New Colombo Plan Mobility Program, students worked in interdisciplinary teams to learn about the position of women in Indonesia and the work of communities and civil society organisations. The two-week program included site visits to local NGOs in Jakarta (Java) and Makassar (Sulawesi), and input from the Empowering Indonesian Women for Poverty Reduction (MAMPU) program, a joint initiative of the Indonesian and Australian governments.

Reflecting on the trip, Zoe describes a visit to the Pangkajene Islands, off the coast of Makassar, as a clear highlight.

The students learned about the work of grassroots women's rights organisations and initiatives, including community-led Women's School groups formed to support women with education, skills and a greater role in local decision-making.

"It was really powerful," Zoe says. "These women's groups had achieved so much. I felt quite privileged to have heard their experiences."

Inspired by the field school, Zoe returned to Indonesia less than a year later to work with a women's rights organisation in Padang, West Sumatra. "I just thought: these women are making so much change and doing such great work. I want to be involved," she says.

Since returning to Australia, Zoe has taken up the role of Project Coordinator with the Salvation Army International Development team, where she works with local partners in Kenya and Tanzania on a range of community development projects. In June 2022, she travelled to Kakamega in western Kenya to see some of the projects first-hand, including a women's empowerment initiative.

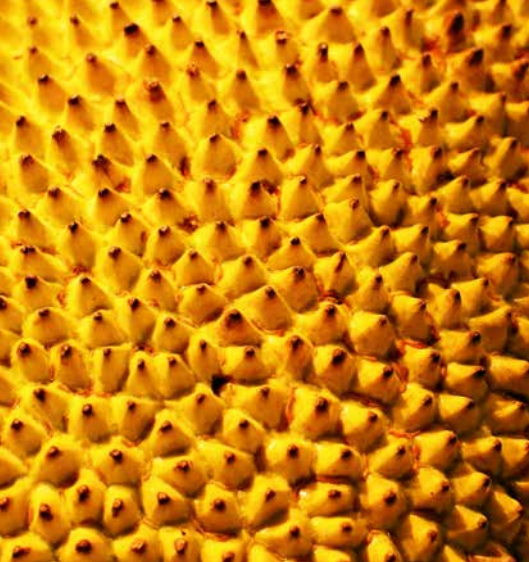
Zoe remains passionate about Southeast Asia and sees the field school experience in Indonesia as invaluable in shaping her knowledge, interests and career path.



**"Going on a field school can really ignite a new passion, or you may realise one that you'd already had. Even just to experience our nearest neighbours I think is really important.**

**Something that Australia lacks is a deep understanding about our neighbours, part of which is Southeast Asia. Definitely — everyone should go."**

**Zoe Neill, student participant in the 2018 SSEAC field school on women's empowerment in Indonesia**




With more than 300 academics working across all 11 Southeast Asian countries, the University of Sydney has one of the highest concentrations of regional expertise in the world.

From its central position within the University, the Sydney Southeast Asia Centre offers an innovative and engaged approach that reflects the region's complexity and recognises its importance to Australia's future.

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