

SEA- NEWSLETTER

The Department for Languages
and Cultures of Southeast Asia

Talks on Southeast Asian Studies in Bulgaria

(with a special focus on Vietnamese Studies)

**Thursday, 26 June 2025,
2:00 PM – 4:00 PM (CET)**

**Asien-Afrika-Institut,
Ostflügel, Room 121
Edmund-Siemers-Allee 1
Universität Hamburg**

**Webinar-ID: 610 5028 8103
Kenncode: 40721501**

[https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/61050288103?
pwd=m720cRdfFqR5lp8sjnkDLsxBV0PEfeo-.v3MI
s7Von3m7BLWC](https://uni-hamburg.zoom.us/j/61050288103?pwd=m720cRdfFqR5lp8sjnkDLsxBV0PEfeo-.v3MI s7Von3m7BLWC)

Southeast Asian Studies is a newly emerging academic field in Bulgaria, shaped by changing geopolitical dynamics, growing global interest in the region, and evolving interdisciplinary approaches. Despite the longstanding diplomatic relations between Bulgaria and Vietnam dating back to 1950, Vietnamese language and culture only became part of the curriculum at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski" in 2015, with the launch of the Southeast Asian Studies minor with special focus on Vietnam within the Asia area Studies program.

This academic development reflects a broader shift in attention toward Southeast Asia, particularly Vietnam, but also Indonesia, Thailand and the Philippines. The field has since gained momentum, supported by research in diplomatic history, cultural heritage, archival studies, and comparative regional analysis. The growth of interest in Vietnamese Studies related topics has been supported by ongoing student exchanges, collaboration with Vietnamese institutions, and interest from scholars in related fields.

Beyond academic coursework and research, the program also fosters cultural and creative engagement of students. Events such as Cultural Days, exhibitions, student performances, and public lectures have become an integral part of campus life, promoting intercultural understanding and offering students hands-on experience with Southeast Asian traditions.

Despite its promising development, the Southeast Asian Studies program in Bulgaria faces some challenges such as the need for expanded academic expertise, limited resources and the ongoing effort to continuously raise awareness and interest among students and the wider academic community.

However, recent dissertations, publications, and conference proceedings demonstrate increasing scholarly engagement with topics such as traditional belief systems, cultural identities, traditional and modern society, postcolonial transitions, political and economic dynamics and the contemporary Vietnamese diaspora in Bulgaria. We can see how Southeast Asian Studies in Bulgaria is emerging as a vibrant and relevant field of academic inquiry in Southeast Europe and the Balkans in the 21st century. •

About the speakers:



Rayna Beneva

is an Assistant Professor at the Center for Eastern Languages and Cultures at Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She holds a PhD in Theory and History of Culture – Korean Studies from Sofia University. Her main affiliation is in the Korean studies department but since 2015, she has introduced and developed the Southeast Asian and Vietnamese Studies minor within the curriculum of the Asian Studies Program. Her research interests include the traditional cultures of Vietnam and Korea, Vietnamese folklore rituals and beliefs, the ancient and modern history of the Korean Peninsula and Vietnam, cultural zones and ethnic diversity in Vietnam, as well as Bulgaria-Vietnam relations.



Dayana Ivanova

is a researcher at the Department of African and Indo-Pacific Studies, Sofia University "St. Kliment Ohridski". She holds both a BA and an MA degree in Asian Studies (South, East and Southeast Asia) from Sofia University. She also earned an MA degree in Vietnamese Studies at the University of Social Sciences and Humanities - Ho Chi Minh City. She is currently a PhD candidate, and her research interests include youth, educational programs and cultural policies in Vietnam, modern history and diplomatic relations, teaching Vietnamese as a foreign language.