

2024 NATIONAL CONFERENCE ON LOCAL HISTORY AND HERITAGE

# House Museums in Southeast Asia: Examples from East Timor, Myanmar, Thailand and Indonesia

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Organized by the Seasrep Foundation  
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Zoom Registration Link:  
[bit.ly/HouseMuseumsSEA](https://bit.ly/HouseMuseumsSEA)

## **HOUSE MUSEUMS IN SOUTHEAST ASIA: EXAMPLES FROM EAST TIMOR, MYANMAR, THAILAND, AND INDONESIA**

Heritage programs aim to promote tangible connections of different social groups to a common past. Supported by historical infrastructures—museums, archives, special library collections, memorial sites, heritage zones, performances, walking tours—these programs help articulate the narratives, cultures, and landscapes of the nation.

One type of museum is the subject of Seasrep's panel: house museums or homes of historical figures and families that have been converted into museums by various stakeholders. Operating at the boundaries between formal and informal memorials, house museums serve as a place of intersection between personal and group memories, experiences, and histories, and between private and public spaces. For museum founders, the establishment of house museums represents an attempt to link everyday stories, lives, and artifacts of the former inhabitants to broader narratives, symbols, and identity. The connections between the particular and the general, the individual or family and the whole (community, nation, or region) indicate how the past is to be remembered by means of the museum. The Seasrep panel examines house museums as documents that reference both a particular past and present and the crucial connections between formal and informal, individual and collective.

## PANELISTS



### **Dr. Kisho Tsuchiya, Center for Southeast Asian Studies, Kyoto University, “Reconsidering the Concept of Museum: The Case of Timorese Sacred Houses”**

Based on my ongoing research on Timorese legends and folktales, I argue that Timorese sacred houses (*uma lulik*) could be considered as a sort of museum. Though not open to the general public—the community offers access to those who obtain permission at a given time—sacred houses are part of the older Timorese village structure and retain meaningful cultural objects for the community, such as old Portuguese flags given by the colonizers, Japanese and Australian badges and medals, sacred or ritual objects and other artifacts of inter-community interactions. Each community has one or more elderly people who are tasked to memorize their community’s past (*lia-nain*, or lord of words/lord of tales) and take care of the sacred houses. As in other Southeast Asian countries, the decolonization of Timorese historical narratives has been proposed by local scholars, intellectuals and *lia-nains*. I have engaged in semi-academic conversations with such persons in order to find a new historical methodology and meaningfully interpret historical information from their archaeological sources and legends.



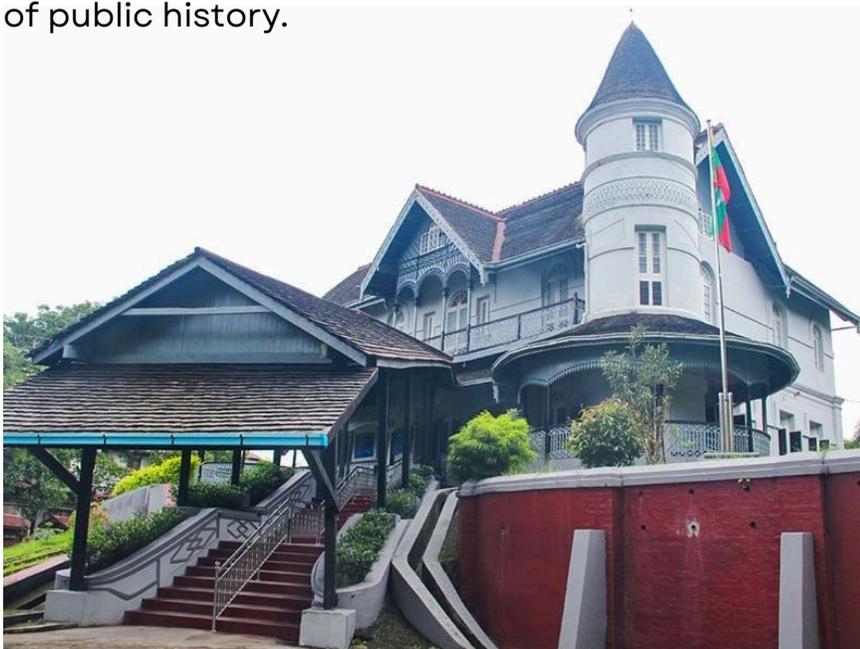
**Sacred House 1**  
*Rebuilding the sacred house (uma lulik) in Fad Locar, Ainaro District, Timor Leste*

## PANELISTS



**Dr. Maitrii V. Aung-Thwin, History Department,  
National University of Singapore,  
“Domesticating the Nation: The Aung San  
Museum and the Presence of Public History in  
Myanmar”**

Scholars in Southeast Asia have been critical of textbooks, monuments, and museums that position nation-states as the primary unit of analysis and the only subject with a history, simplifying the diversity of experiences, locales, and communities or relegating them to the background (Winter & Daly, 2012). Attempts to intervene through the promotion of counter-narratives have only reified the position that expressions of national history are “bad to think.” This paper reassesses the place of nation-building history by examining the memorialization of a house in 1950s Myanmar (Burma). It explores the role of domestic and international actors in the historical construction of the Aung San Museum, the home of the man who is widely considered to be the “father” of modern Myanmar. Following research into the domestication of history and the analysis of home museums in America (West, 2013), this study examines the potential of public history as an entry point to re-engaging nation-building histories in Myanmar and Southeast Asia. At the same time, it considers how social-cultural dynamics particular to Southeast Asia may expand how we might think about the role and field of public history.



**Aung San Museum**  
*Bogyoke Aung San Museum  
in Bahan, Yangon*

## PANELISTS



### **Dr. Vattana Pholsena, Department of Southeast Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, “The Ho Chi Minh House Museum in Northeast Thailand: His Story Is Also Thai”**

In 1928, Ho Chi Minh arrived in Siam with the aim of establishing, with the help of Vietnamese migrants, revolutionary bases in the northeast of the country, close to Vietnam but beyond the reach of French security services. His travels across this region over the course of a year have become material for commemorations in places where he is believed to have stayed. This paper is about one such place: a village located in the province of Nakhon Phanom on the Lao-Thai border. In 2001, to honor his time spent in the village, a house museum known as the Ho Chi Minh House was constructed on the land where it is believed he resided. The significance of the Ho Chi Minh House extends beyond being a memorial site. Memories of Ho Chi Minh’s time in the village have been preserved and elaborated through a mythologized narrative of his stay, recounted by the museum caretaker and her family and echoed by others who believed it. However, what might appear as self-promotion on the part of the caretaker’s family should also be viewed as an effort to redress the historical narrative, anchoring it in the time frame of Ho Chi Minh’s presence in the village, and giving due recognition to the village ancestors for their overlooked involvement in the Vietnamese revolution in Siam/Thailand.



#### ***Ho Chi Minh House Museum***

*Ho Chi Minh house in Ban Na Chok village, Nong Yat sub-district, Nakhon Phanom province, northeast Thailand*

## PANELISTS



### **Irmina Maria Silas, Curator of the House of Sampoerna from 2005-2018, “The Use of Storytelling Narratives in the House of Sampoerna Museum to Reinforce Indonesian National Spirit”**

Surabaya played a massive role in defending the independence of the Republic of Indonesia. One of the buildings which bore witness to the battle of November 10, 1945 was an orphanage compound built in 1862-1864 in Jalan Taman Sampoerna. Liem Seeng Tee, an immigrant from China who had been orphaned at age six, purchased the compound in 1932 and turned it into the first factory of Sampoerna kretek and the Sampoerna Theater. Being a nationalist, Seeng Tee allowed some space of the compound to be used by local army forces to practice warfare simulation in facing the Allied forces. Some casualties occurred at the front of the Sampoerna Theater, which was one of the defense areas of the city. Seven teenagers perished during the battle.

Seeng Tee was a visionary, developing a business philosophy and corporate culture of giving back to the community. Profoundly interested in local art and culture, he hosted cultural performances at the theater. In 2003 the third generation of Sampoerna established the House of Sampoerna Museum in Seeng Tee’s honor and memory. I will discuss the museum’s storytelling techniques and how these narratives, through the life of Seeng Tee, relate to and reinforce the Indonesian national spirit.



**House of Sampoerna**  
*Photo by Consigliere Ivan, 2015*

# ABOUT SEASREP

Established in 1995, the Seasrep Foundation (Southeast Asian Regional Exchange Program) promotes Southeast Asian studies in the Southeast Asian region through collaborative researches, training programs, and networking activities with scholars and institutions in the region. Seasrep also acknowledges the value of public Southeast Asian studies and the place of practitioners and knowledge producers on the ground who help illumine Southeast Asian realities as experienced in everyday life. In addition to connections with the public, Seasrep values connectivity with fellow producers of knowledge in other parts of the world who study Southeast Asia and draw meaningful and necessary comparisons that allow a deeper understanding of the region.