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# SASS RESEARCH

## VISION 2023-25

Excellence in research and education that incorporates a socially engaged and diverse Global South perspective on the challenges facing the world.

## MISSION 2023-25

We conduct and publish research that:

- generates new knowledge and understanding of the human experience, past, present, and future;
- emphasises social and environmental justice, inclusion, and equity;
- interrogates what it means to live in a digital society;
- contributes a regional—especially Southeast Asian—perspective on global challenges;
- empowers individuals and communities—locally, regionally, and globally—to thrive in the face of these challenges.

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# MESSAGE

Head of School, Professor Duncan McDuie-Ra.



**T**he vitality of our School depends on high-quality, impactful research. Research in the Arts and Social Sciences globally includes discovery research - the creation of new knowledge and ideas about societies and the living things that make them, and applied research - the use of existing knowledge and ideas to look at complex human and social problems, cultures, and experiences in new ways. In SASS, our dedication to discovery and applied research drives experimentation, collaboration and interdisciplinarity within our School, across Monash University Malaysia and the entire Monash network, and with collaborators locally and internationally. We pursue our research with integrity, ethics, and rigour.

As our School has grown, so too have our research relationships outside academia, here in Malaysia and beyond. High-quality research is the basis of our governmental organisations, industry and communities.

The knowledge generated in our research feeds into what we do in the classroom, ensuring our students learn from leading scholars in their fields, and in turn, the energy in our classrooms spark new research ideas for our scholars. Furthermore, the research reputation of our scholars attracts high-calibre students to our higher degree research programs, building capabilities for future research through training and mentoring.

It is an honour to commence as Head of School during a very exciting time in the research life of SASS. Our four inter-disciplinary research strengths bring together scholars at different career stages, from different national and language backgrounds, and with different expertise. These strengths bring visibility to our research internally and externally, as will be detailed in the pages that follow. A further highlight is the establishment of the Southeast Asia Research Centre for Digital Tech and Society (SEADS) through the Monash University Malaysia Future Centres Program in 2024. SEADS showcases cutting edge research on digital technologies in Southeast Asian societies, and provides a platform for collaboration with other scholars across Asia, and a crucial connection to industry, government and communities.

A special thanks to Associate Professor Emma Baulch, our Deputy Head of School Research, for their outstanding leadership in our research portfolio and in compiling our first annual research report. And to all our staff, academic and professional, for their dedication to creating new knowledge; the essence of our profession.

## Deputy Head of School (Research), Associate Professor Emma Baulch.



It is with great pleasure that I present to you the first annual research report for the School of Arts and Social Sciences. This report showcases achievements that are the culmination of considerable growth and restructuring of research at SASS in recent years. Since 2020, SASS has created no less than ten new research positions and, guided by the Monash University's Impact 2030 Strategic Plan to address global challenges, we have organised our research into two strengths, Thriving Communities, and Geopolitics, Development and Governance - and two centres of research - the Monash Climate Change Communication Research Hub (Malaysia Node) and the Southeast Asia Research Centre for Digital Technology and Society (SEADS).

Research at SASS is international, interdisciplinary, impactful, and industry-facing. The primary focus of our research is on issues affecting Southeast Asia, and we draw on a wide range of humanities and social science disciplines to study developments in the region's politics, societies and cultures. We do this not only to produce new knowledge about Southeast Asia as an isolated object of study, but also because we believe researching this region can yield important insights needed to address pressing challenges that are international in nature, such as political polarisation, increasing socio-economic disparities, democratic decline, the social consequences of environmental destruction, and of war. We seek solutions to these problems by forming interdisciplinary teams with experts from outside the humanities and social sciences, including economists, public health experts, computer scientists, biologists, and engineers. And we seek to make an impact by collaborating with industry - including NGOs, international organisations, corporate institutions, governments and communities.

SASS has continued to perform superbly against key indicators of research excellence. Our research has become increasingly visible through publication in the top journals internationally in our disciplines and through prestigious international awards. In 2024, SASS researchers produced prize-winning research on Malaysian transgender men, cinema-going in the early 20th century, and the life trajectories of migrant workers in Malaysia. We also secured our largest ever number of internationally-funded grants in a single year, including those for research on pandemic preparedness in Southeast Asian prisons, to survey Malaysian attitudes to climate change, to develop methods for researching health problems related to climate change, to collaborate with civil society organizations in researching data governance policies in Malaysia, and to investigate the relationship between Southeast Asia's digital platform landscape and East Asian soft power.

Our small graduate student community is an important part of SASS research. Working out of the school's spacious and light-filled dedicated PhD workspace, SASS PhD students are a daily presence in our school. In 2024, our diverse graduate research cohort comprised 23 doctoral candidates, hailing from China, Indonesia, Malaysia, Sri Lanka, Thailand, and the UK, and for the most part they are researching aspects of Southeast Asian societies, politics and cultures. SASS PhD candidates participated in a variety of activities at school, campus and university level, including a new suite of SASS professional development modules, the Monash Malaysia 3 Minute Thesis and Poster competitions, and the Monash University-wide PITCH 24 (PhD Interdisciplinary Team CHallenge). Some of them saw their first journal articles appear in high quality outlets.

SASS' research achievements in 2024 would not have been possible without the excellent support researchers receive from professional staff. Senior School Manager Eswary Sivalingum leads a crack team with wide-ranging responsibilities including managing PhD milestones, internal research budgeting, project management, project reporting, staff travel, the school seminar series and major public events related to research. I wish to acknowledge the important, visionary reforms to school research management undertaken by School Research Manager How Shi Hui during her tenure at SASS (until April 2024), the nimbleness with which SASS' new School Research Co-ordinator, Tharanie Radha Krishnan assumed her role, the adeptness with which Nur Athira Azizan steps through the complex process of event management, and the patience of Doreen Maria Anthonyamy in assisting staff with procurement and travel.

# THRIVING COMMUNITIES

The Thriving Communities Research Strength focuses on issues of marginalisation and heritage in Malaysia and the Southeast Asian region. It brings together the expertise of academics who work in areas such as film, television and screen studies, public relations, writing and literature, communication studies, religious studies and gender studies. Research in this strength examines communities of people who are subjected to socio-economic disadvantage, and studies the rich political, film and public relations histories of the region.

Abdul Aziz, Herbarry Cheung, Jonathan Driskell, Agata Frymus, Joseph N. Goh, Thaatchayini Kananatu, Andrew Ng, Marek W. Rutkowski, Rizwanah Souket Ali, Meng Yoe Tan, Yeoh Seng Guan

## Awards

### **Sheila Cunnison Prize**

Joseph Goh won the *Journal of Gender Studies* Sheila Cunnison Prize 2024 for the most outstanding publication on gender in the global South. In his article, titled 'Everyday Precarity, Oblique Hostility and Gendered Liveability among Malaysian Transgender Men', Joseph looks beyond the sensational issues of discrimination against transgender men in Malaysia, to focus on the everyday forms of microaggression they experience in, for example, X Ray scanners and road blocks.

### **Leading film researcher in The Australian 2025 top 250 and BAFTSS best article prize**

Agata Frymus was named the leading researcher in film in *The Australian 2025 top 250* ranking. She also won the Best Journal Article Annual Award from British Association of Film, TV and Screen Studies (BAFTSS) for her 2023 article, 'Black Moviegoing in Harlem: The Case of Alhambra Theatre, 1905–1931,' *Journal of Cinema and Media Studies*, vol. 62, no. 2 : 304–325. The article examines the changing racial politics of the theater, which took place as a response to the increasing presence of Black residents in the area. It uses Black weeklies to reconstruct its attitude toward African American patrons, as the Alhambra progressed from a whites-only theater to a buzzing center of Black sociability.

### **New Mandala Emerging Scholar Award**

Herbarry Cheung won New Mandala's Emerging Scholar Award to promote the dissemination of outstanding PhD research on Southeast Asia to a global readership, was awarded a 3-year Research Associate Fellowship at The Maison des Sciences Humaines, Université libre de Bruxelles (MSH-ULB) to work on a project titled 'Exploring the intersections of intimacy and migration in Europe and Asia'.

## Grants

**The Integration of Mainland and Overseas Talents in Hong Kong.** 2024. Dr. Isabella Ng (PI), Dr. Vincent WEN (Co-I), Dr. Herbarry CHEUNG (Co-I), Mr. Marshall Jen (Co-I), Dr. Tommy Kwan (Co-I), Dr. Farid Hossain (Co-I), Mr. Sai Htong Kham (Co-I). 2024'. The Equal Opportunities Commission of Hong Kong. HK\$475,660

The project aims to understand how the Hong Kong government could adopt a comprehensive approach to attract and to retain these quality migrants, and the team comprises

**Penal pandemic: A comparative study on COVID-19 pandemic experiences in Southeast Asian prisons to inform future pandemic preparedness.** 2024. Dr Nasrul Ismail (Bristol University) and Dr Thaatchayini Kananatu. British Academy - ISPF ODA Challenged-Oriented Research grant. £195,958.81

The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed critical gaps in pandemic preparedness in Southeast Asian prisons, a topic scarcely addressed in current literature. This pioneering comparative study investigates how state democracy, capacity, resilience, and multilateral cooperation influence pandemic preparedness in prisons across Malaysia, the Philippines, and Thailand—countries with incarceration rates surpassing global averages.

## Key publications

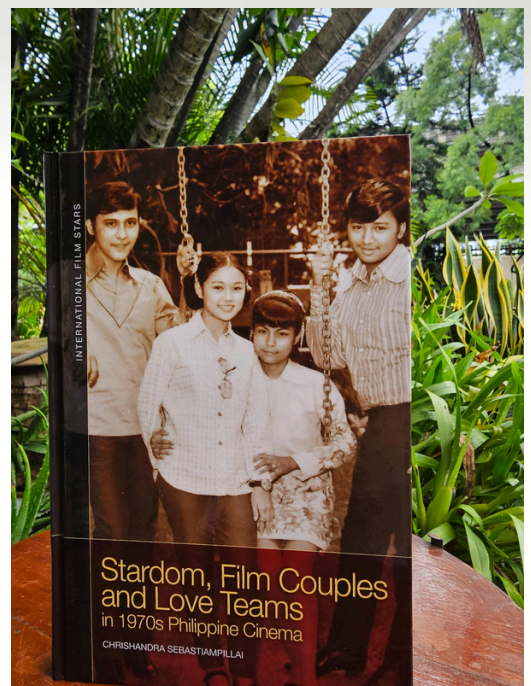


Cheung, H. 2024. *Single Mothers in Thailand: Women, Motherhood, and Going it All Alone*. Palgrave Macmillan

This book explores sociological issues and policies affecting single mothers in Thailand, focusing on gender, family, health, and social exclusion. Using ethnographic research, interviews, and policy reviews from 2020-2021, it examines how intersecting factors like class, ethnicity, religion, and health shape their marginalization. By applying gender and intersectionality theories, the book highlights overlooked challenges faced by single mothers and offers policy recommendations to promote gender equality and improve their lives in Thailand.

Sebastiampillai, C. 2024. *Stardom, Film Couples and Love Teams in 1970s Philippine Cinema*. Edinburgh University Press.

The 'love team', or the film couple, is a unique form of Philippine stardom consisting of three different identities – the star couple, the screen couple and the celebrity couple. The book investigates how popular love teams are an early training ground for successful stardom in the studio system and how film couples are constructed at various stages by stars, studios, film and other cross-media appearances, fandoms, and their wider societal contexts.



# GEOPOLITICS, DEVELOPMENT AND GOVERNANCE

The Geopolitics, Development, and Governance (GDG) research strength takes contemporary disruptions in politics, economics, technology, and ideas as opportunities to question established configurations of power, privilege and perspectives that have sustained national, regional and global orders. Research aligned with this strength studies the Asian regional order, law and politics and the assemblages of technologies and government that help constitute political power in Southeast Asia.

Helen Nesadurai, Stefan Bächtold, Thaatchayini Kananatu, Tae-Sik Kim, Marek W. Rutkowski, Reyhaneh Bagheri, Michael Kelly Connors, Koh Chien Aun, Chrishandra Sebastiampillai, Young-Nam Seo

## Activities

### **The EU Green Deal and ASEAN**

This timely and immensely relevant workshop, held on 3-4 December 2024, addressed tensions around the global green strategy adopted by the EU. The strategy will shape sustainability transitions in many parts of the global South and which has generated both criticism ("of crop apartheid, neo-imperialism") and praise ("innovative and path-breaking") by different audiences, including in Southeast Asia. Held in Bogor, Indonesia, the workshop was co-organised by 4 institutions: SASS/Monash University Malaysia; Institute of Humanities and Social Sciences of the National Research and Innovation Agency (BRIN), Indonesia; IPB University, Bogor, Indonesia; and Wageningen University, Netherlands. The SASS lead was Helen Nesadurai.

### **Contestation in Southeast Asia: Japanese and South Korean Public Diplomacy**

Organised by the TIES (Transnational Interaction: East and Southeast Asia) research cluster, and held on 6 November 2024, this workshop was part of an ongoing collaboration between TIES, Waseda University in Japan and Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS) in South Korea to research Japanese and South Korean public diplomacy in Southeast Asia, to gain a better understanding of the various sources and forms of soft power shaping the region's societies and politics. Organised by Taesik Kim and Koh Chien Aun.



### **MIS/CONCEPTIONS: Eyes on the death penalty**



On the World Day Against the Death Penalty 2024 on 10 October 2024, Eleos Justice and the School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS) organized activities promoting the abolition of capital punishment. Creative submissions—poems, essays, paintings, and photographs—challenging misconceptions about the death penalty were displayed on Monash University Malaysia's library digital wall from October 10-17, 2024. A screening of the film *There is No Evil* added depth to the program, prompting reflections on the moral and societal impacts of capital punishment. Attendees commended the event for raising awareness, fostering meaningful discussions, and inspiring action toward the global abolition of the death penalty.

# MONASH CLIMATE CHANGE COMMUNICATION RESEARCH HUB

Research on climate change communication at SASS takes place beneath the auspices of the Monash Climate Change Communication and Research Hub Malaysia Node, established in 2021. Working with collaborators in the School of Science and the Jeffrey Cheah School of Medicine and Health Sciences at Monash Malaysia and MCCCRC team at Monash's Caulfield campus in Melbourne, researchers at the node apply strategies from media studies, journalism, climate science, sociology, psychology, international relations, education, and political science to study public attitudes towards climate change, and ways to better communicate the science and solutions. They partner with mainstream media entities such as television networks and community news to deliver trusted localised climate information to large audiences in meaningful ways.

Azliyana Azhari, Raksha Pandya Wood, Adeline Johns Putra, Emma Baulch

## Activities

### *Climate Action and Just Transition Town Hall with the Minister*



On Thursday 19 September the Node hosted YB Nik Nazmi Nik Ahmad, the Minister of Natural Resources and Environmental Sustainability. Town Halls offer an opportunity for citizens to share their voice, ask questions and engage with the government. This event served as a platform for discussions on Malaysia's progress, current sustainability and development efforts, policies on the horizon, and actionable steps that academic institutions like Monash can offer.

### *Building capacity in reporting climate change*



As part of a project funded by the Asia Pacific Network-Global Change Research in 2023, and led by Azliyana Azhari and Raksha Pandya-Wood, node researchers convened workshops with journalists in Kuala Lumpur and Jakarta in May and June 2024. The project aims to provide training for journalists in Indonesia and Malaysia, in order to build capacity in reporting climate change by developing a shared bank of resources for climate journalists to use freely at any time, and running training programmes for journalists on how to use the resources.

## Grants

**Advancing normative, epistemic and democratic climate and health research methods and theory in Malaysia and Indonesia.** 2024. Raksha Pandya-Wood, Azliyana Azhari, Grace Wangge, Gabriella Fernando. 2024. World Health Organisation. USD\$50,000

The project will provide insights into barriers to developing research on climate and health, including the limitations of existing theories for understanding the links between climate and health as they manifest in Global South communities.

**Regional Hub for Asia Climate Change and Health (REACH) Consortium.** 2024-8. Professor Tin Tin Su, Raksha Pandya-Wood, Sudharshan N Raman, Dehesi Raja, Tan Sri Jamila Mahmood, Aminath Shazly. International Development Research Centre Under the FutureWORKS initiative, RM14.5 million project

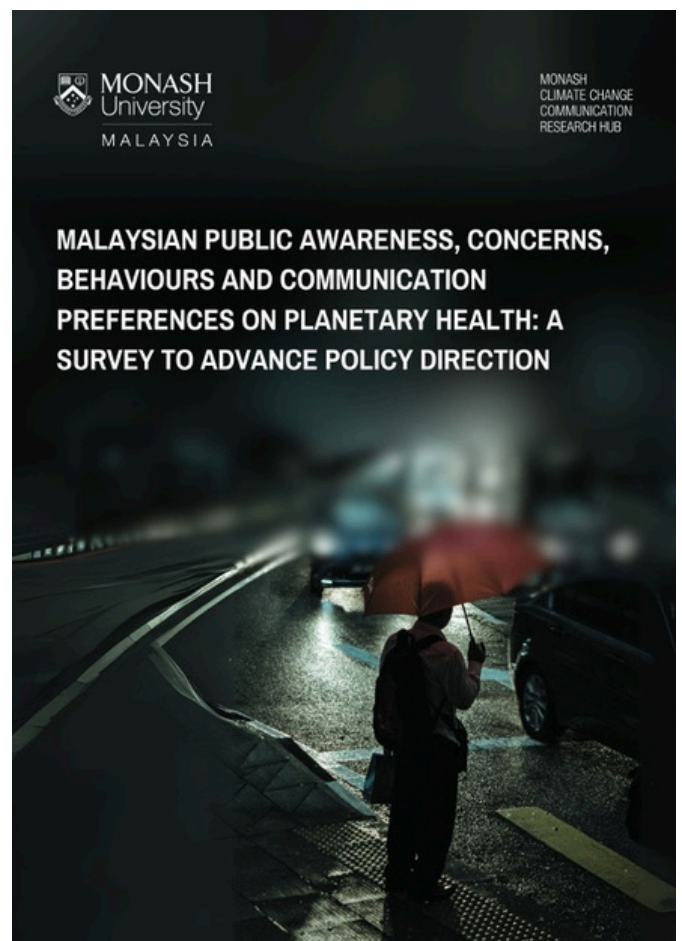
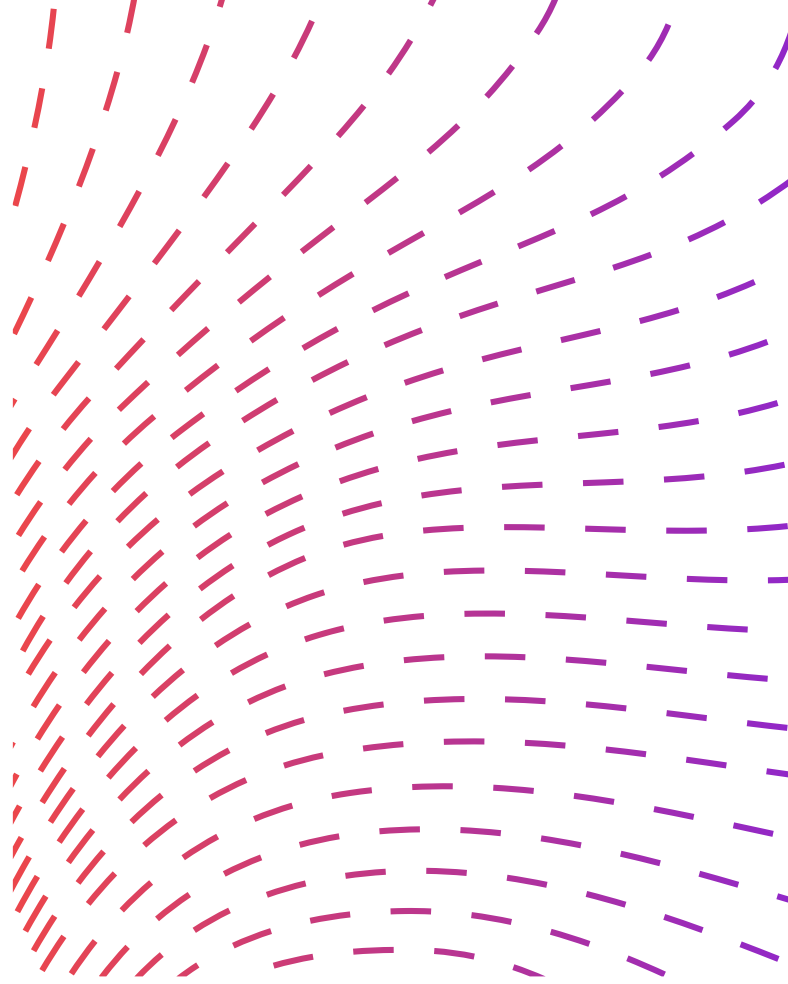
The project will establish an Asia hub at Monash University Malaysia to manage and support research studies and networks in a competitive selection process to build a climate-resilient health workforce.

**Bridging the Gap: Enhancing Net Zero initiatives in Malaysia's Energy Sector through through Climate Change Communication.** 2024. Azliyana Azhari, Ng Wen Cai, Raksha Pandya Wood and Chong Meng Nan. Monash University Malaysia ECR grant. RM 40,517

This project aims to address Malaysia's communication challenges in reaching net zero emissions by 2050 by enhancing public and industry understanding of net zero in Malaysia. It focuses on three key areas: assessing public awareness of net zero, evaluating industry knowledge of their emissions, and fostering collaboration between industry, policy, and the public.

**National Planetary Health Action Plan Baseline Perception Survey.** 2024. Ooi Wee Liam, Adeline Johns Putra, Azliyana Azhari and Raksha Pandya-Wood. Malaysian Public Awareness, Concerns, Behaviours and Communication Preferences on Planetary Health: Survey to Advance Policy Direction. Akademi Sains Malaysia. RM18,000.

The survey provides the National Planetary Health Action Plan with a robust and evidence-based understanding of the baseline of Malaysian population's behaviour, cultural attitudes, and current communication habits in the realm of planetary health.



# SOUTHEAST ASIA RESEARCH CENTRE FOR DIGITAL TECH AND SOCIETY (SEADS)

Research on digital technologies and societies in Southeast Asia at SASS takes place beneath the auspices of SEADS (Southeast Asia Research Centre for Digital Tech and Society). Established in 2024, SEADS serves as a platform that conjoins academic research with civil society, governments and corporations in ongoing dialogue, exchanges, and collaborations to explore alternatives, and inform the public. The work of the Centre is shaped by our vision of a society where digitally-mediated political, economic and social exchanges are equitable, transparent, inclusive and accountable, and its mission to:

- **Research:** We advance scholarship through critical examination of the relationships between digital technologies and human societies in Southeast Asia using humanities and social science approaches
- **Reform:** We will work with corporations, policy institutions and community organisations to bring about reform towards more ethical and inclusive digital futures in Southeast Asia
- **Engage:** We engage the public on important developments relating to our thematic foci and their implications for communities and citizens in Southeast Asia
- **Educate:** We develop pedagogical resources aligned to our thematic foci, and serve as a centre for research training in the Southeast Asia region

Emma Baulch, Stefan Bächtold, Katrien Jacobs, Duncan McDuie-Ra, Dyah Pitaloka, Monish Khetrinmayum Singh, Benjamin YH Loh

## Activities

### Tech and Society Chats



On 22 August, SASS PhD candidates Hizkia Polimpung and Ziran Zhao (Brandon) led discussions with two esteemed visitors, Professor Cheryll Soriano (De La Salle University, Manila) and Professor Sarah Pink (Emerging Technologies Lab, Monash University Australia). Brandon spoke to Sarah about her work on digital futures and Hizkia spoke to Cheryll about her research on digital labour.

### Public panel on OGBV



Also on 22 August, SEADS convened a public panel titled 'The Virtual is Real: Tackling Technology-Facilitated Gender Violence'. Professor Meera Sivasothy moderated a discussion with three experts of online gender-based violence, A/Prof Dyah Pitaloka, Mx. Dhyta Caturani, founder of Purple Code, a collective dedicated to developing a feminist internet, and Dr. Indriaswati Saptaningrum, Lecturer in Law at Atma Jaya University and an expert in Indonesian communications law and legal reform in Indonesia.

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## Grants

**Digital Technologies as Actors of Public Diplomacy.** Tae-Sik Kim, Emma Baulch, Stefan Bächtold, Chien Aun Koh, Chrishandra Sebastiampillai 2024. The Korea Foundation. USD 20,000 .

The project focuses on the impact of digital technologies on international relations, diplomacy, and policy-making.

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## Key publications

Lim, J. B. Y., Raghunath, P., & Bächtold, S. (2024). Exploring datafied practices, imaginaries and digital state assemblages in South and South East Asia. *Journal of Digital Media & Policy*, 15(3), 309-324. [https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp\\_00158\\_2](https://doi.org/10.1386/jdmp_00158_2).

This special issue resulted from the 'Governing Technologies: Exploring Datafied Practices, Imaginaries, and Digital State Assemblages in Asia' workshop, convened by Monash University and University of Nottingham Malaysia held in October 2022. It includes articles on #Metoo and hate speech in India, digital tracking systems for refugees in Malaysia, participatory governance tech in Southeast Asia, and Malaysian community media.

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Baulch, E., Grgić, A., Hock Soon Ng, A., & Yu, T. F. (2024). Mapping the music and video streaming landscape and its disruptions in Southeast Asia. Special issue of *Continuum*, 38(5). <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2024.2413674>.

This special issue arises from the 'Streaming Southeast Asia' workshop, held at Monash University Malaysia in July 2022. The workshop brought together a dedicated group of film, media and music scholars and practitioners from around the world to discuss how the proliferation of streaming has impacted the production, exhibition and distribution of Southeast Asian audiovisual and music works.

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Johns, A., Matamoros Fernández, A., Baulch, E. 2024. *WhatsApp: From a one-to-one messaging platform to a global communication platform*. Polity Press.

This book identifies WhatsApp's spread in the 2010s as an important development in the history of social media platforms. Riding the wake of the increasing affordability and uptake of smartphones, for many WhatsApp has served as a gateway for their first encounters with the internet. Our book explores the implications of this for everyday internet cultures, for political communication, and for the commodification of social life.

# ENGAGEMENT AND IMPACT

## Message from Dr Rizwanah Souket Ali, Director of External Engagement (Domestic)



The School Global and External Engagement Committee (SGEEC) drives the School's international and external engagement strategy.

On the global front, SGEEC promotes international research collaborations, agreements, and partnerships, while enriching student experiences through study tours, exchanges, and immersion programs. Key 2024 achievements include five new agreements/MOUs, prestigious awards, and the launch of the *Transnational Interactions: East Asia-Southeast Asia (TIES)* project. TIES builds platforms for collaboration with East Asian institutions, develops Korean Studies content, and engages Malaysia's Korean community to attract students. Domestically, SGEEC prioritizes strengthening donor and alumni relations, expanding Work Integrated Learning (WIL) and internship opportunities, and building collaborations with non-academic stakeholders, including NGOs, industry, and government. This year, the School celebrated its 16th anniversary with a successful alumni event, fostering stronger connections with its community. The Industry Advisory Board was further strengthened and expanded to guide research and teaching, ensuring alignment with industry needs. These initiatives collectively enhance the School's engagement and its contributions to society.

### Future Conversations Podcast Series



In 2024, SASS Professor of Practice Meera Sivasothy established the Future Conversations Podcast. The podcast amplifies Monash University Malaysia's research impact through dialogue on innovation and societal challenges, building partnerships, and enhancing community engagement through inclusive and strategic podcast content. Each episode brings together experts, researchers, and visionaries to explore how today's research shapes tomorrow.



### SEADS Roundtables



On 22 August 2024, SEADS organised a roundtable event with civil society stakeholders from civil society, media, and tech developers covering 2 themes: 1) *tech-enabled violence* and 2) *government, privacy, data justice*. These roundtables served as listening exercises for SEADS to get a better understanding of how stakeholders understand and frame these issues, and to start working out where SEADS can make a useful contribution in co-creating knowledge. Participants included representatives from Centre of Independent Journalism, Article 19, Engage Media, UNBound, Justice for Sisters, Sisters in Islam and Purple Code.

## Two Awards for Mapping Journeys



Yeoh Seng Guan won the Dean's Award for Excellence in Research Engagement and Impact, and a Commendation from the Monash University Malaysia PVC Award for Excellence in Research Engagement and Impact for the Mapping Journeys series of events, which aimed to expand and influence narratives on migration and migrants in Malaysia. Mapping journeys represented the culmination of a five year research project funded by the UKRI and examining the Nepal-Malaysia migration corridor, and included an exhibition and three public panels.

## Anti death penalty advocacy



On 1st August 2024, Thaatch Kananatu participated in a meeting between Monash University Malaysia and Malaysian Bar Council. The meeting was significant for both Monash University Malaysia and the Bar Council, in terms of future collaborations based on the mutual interest in legal and policy changes. The meeting was chaired by Prof. Adeeba Kamarulzaman (Pro Vice Chancellor, MUM) and Mr. Mohamad Ezri Abdul Wahab (President of the Bar), Dr. Adnan Trakic represented the School of Business and Dr. Thaatch Kananatu represented SASS in these discussions.

Thaatchayini Kananatu chaired a panel session at the Kyoto Bar Conference on "Resentencing and Reform: Exploring Malaysia's Journey to Secure the Abolition of the Mandatory Death Penalty" organised by the Anti-Death Penalty Asia Network (ADPAN) and Amnesty International on 18th September, 2024 at Hyatt House, Mont Kiara, Kuala Lumpur. The panel session on Path towards Abolition: Role of Bar Council, CSOs, NGOs, and Parliamentarians, involved esteemed speakers YB Ramkarpal Singh (MP), Kasthuri Patto (Former MP), Nicole Fong (AIM), Larissa Ann Louis (Co-Chairperson, Bar Council Human Rights Committee) and Ravi Chandran (Co-Chairperson, Bar Council Criminal Law Committee). The discussion centred on the contributions of various stakeholders in Malaysia's abolition movement. Exploration of advocacy efforts, successes, and challenges, and how experiences can inform regional campaigns. The conference was organised for lawyers from the esteemed Kyoto Bar, Japan.

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## Facilitation for PETRONAS Corporate Sustainability Recharge Day 2024 DoubleTree Hilton, Putrajaya, 16 October 2024

Adeline Johns Putra facilitated a two-hour session entitled “Our Common Climate Future” for the PETRONAS Corporate Sustainability Recharge Day, an annual retreat for the Corporate Sustainability division (comprising about 70 people). The aim of the session was to inspire the team to frame their work as geared towards a shared future for humanity and the planet. The intended outcomes were for participants to understand and feel empowered to undertake the kind of thinking, feeling, communicating, acting, and reflecting necessary to work together for a sustainable future.

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## Developing Climate Literacy in Children

Researchers at the Monash Climate Change Communication and Research Hub Malaysia Node worked with IDEAS School in Kuala Lumpur Malaysia (a refugee school) to develop a Climate Action Model. The collaboration involved the production of a video to showcase the work the students did as part of the module, which was screened at the WHO pavilion at COP29 Baku Ajarbarjaan.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=04iTDv5kdNw>

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## Migrant worker rights talk

Abdul Aziz spoke about migrant worker rights as a guest speaker at the Association of Bangladeshi Expats and Migrants in Malaysia on 19 May 2024. Migrant workers play a crucial role on the development of both their host and home countries, yet their struggles and marginalisation often go unheard. Aziz used the opportunity to urge government stakeholders to ensure that migrant workers have their rights protected and have easier access to information and resources essential for navigating their often precarious lives

## SASS research in the media

Pandya-Wood R. 2024. Mother Earth has a Fever: One Remedy is Nature-based Solutions, <https://carbonwire.org/carbon-voices/mother-earth-has-a-fever-one-remedy-is-nature-based-solutions/>

Pandya-Wood R, Fernando G, Azhari A and Lokmic-Tomkins Z. 2024. Women are central to climate change adaptation in Southeast Asia <https://360info.org/women-are-central-to-climate-change-adaptation-in-southeast-asia/> DOI:10.54377/f772-54e7

Pandya-Wood R and Azhari A. 2024. What the Loss and Damage Fund means for Indigenous communities <https://360info.org/what-the-loss-and-damage-fund-means-for-indigenous-communities/> DOI:10.54377/a68c-ca1b

Pandya-Wood R and Azhari A. 2024. Sea Level Rise a Clear Threat to Malaysia, <https://360info.org/sea-level-rise-a-clear-threat-to-malaysia/> DOI:10.54377/7ac6-e6b5 5)

Azhari A and Pandya-Wood R 2024 How Useful is the air quality index, 360info: <https://360info.org/how-useful-is-the-air-quality-index> DOI: 10.54377/3c01-a4f7 9)

Cheung, H. 2024. Human Rights Day 2024: Justice in Southeast Asia. Lens, Monash University. <https://lens.monash.edu/@herbarycheung/2024/12/10/1387230/human-rights-day-2024-justice-in-southeast-asia>.

Pitaloka, Dyah. 2024. How deepfakes cause real harm to women. Interview on BFM radio. 7 March. <https://www.bfm.my/content/podcast/how-deepfakes-cause-real-harm-to-women>

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## Consultancy expertise

SASS researchers can serve as expert consultants in the following areas:

- Qualitative research
- Ethnographic research
- Constructivist Grounded Theory Methodology
- Project design, monitoring & evaluation
- Theories of change
- Survey design and analysis

# GRADUATE RESEARCH AT SASS

## Message from Professor Sharon A. Bong, Graduate Research Director

**T**he Monash Doctoral Programme at SASS and MUM by extension, is a well-structured and rigorous one that offers quality supervision by active researchers and experts in established and emerging interdisciplinary fields of study in the Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences. We nurture core competencies of doctoral candidates as global citizens that include critical and creative thinking and practice, resilience in sustaining mental health and wellbeing throughout one's candidature and meaningful research that will potentially impact key stakeholders who comprise, governments, community-based organisations, society at large, and in particular, those marginalised in Asia in the pursuit of social and environmental justice.

These core competencies are strengthened through Professional Development, Communities of Practice among supervisors and GRS and Global Mobility Programmes and framed within an equity, diversity and inclusion ethos. We are committed to empowering graduates with life skills towards the production of new knowledge within academia that is grounded in the lived realities in Asia and transnational research in transforming mindsets, policies and programs beyond academia.

It is my honour as the school's Graduate Research Director to lead these initiatives and build communities. We have had a robust year and look forward to an exciting year ahead.



## SASS PhD cohort



Our Community of Practice comprising current GRS and PhD alumni with Tharanie Radha Krishan (left, back row) as the School Research Coordinator and Prof Bong (centre)

- **Prechaya Chaogunha.** *Because We are Aa Chee Wa: A Requiem for Vocational Students in Thailand's Political History.* Assoc Prof Michael Connors (Main), Dr Samson Lim (Associate), Dr Chrishandra Sebastiampillai (Associate)
- **Anindya Widita.** *Fan-Mediated Self-Branding and Presentation on Social Media in K-Pop Fandom.* A/Prof Emma Baulch (Main), Dr Taesik Kim (Associate), Dr Rizwanah Souket Ali (Associate)
- **Hizkia Yosias Simon Polimpung.** *Monetary Securitisation: ASEAN's Blockchain Geoeconomics beyond Hedging.* Prof Helen Nesadurai (Main), Dr Stefan Jurg Bachtold (Associate)
- **Batrisyia Binti Azalan.** *A Model of Combating Disease-Related Stigma in Malaysia: Engaging Religious Institutions and Health Experts.* Dr Tan Meng Yoe (Main), Dr Aiedah Khalek (Associate)
- **Frenia Nababan.** *Safety is in the eyes of the beholder: Alternative data governance on an Electronic Health Records.* Dr Tan Meng Yoe (Main), Dr Dyah Pitaloka (Associate), Dr Stefan Jurg Bachtold (Associate)
- **Khoo Pei Sze (Tasia).** *Collecting Memories: Space, Memory and Nostalgia in Bandung.* Assoc Prof Yeoh Seng Guan. Dr Dyah Pitaloka (Associate), Dr Cyren Wong (Associate), Dr Nadiyah Ahmad (Associate)
- **Paola Reale.** *Are Small-Scale Fishers destined to disappear? Young Fishers' Wellbeing and Aspirations in Penang, Malaysia.* Dr Sin Yee Koh (Main), Prof Kyoko Kusakabe (External), Dr Stefan Bachtold (Associate)
- **Kafliina Kamalul.** *Staying Connected: Unveiling Digital Literacy Through WhatsApp Everyday Practices Among Older Adults in Malaysia.* Assoc Prof Emma Baulch (Main), Dr Dyah Pitaloka (Associate)
- **Gabriel Pereira.** *Malaysian Kristangs in the 21st Century: The Racializing Turn and the Quest for Malaysianness.* Assoc Prof Emma Baulch (Main), Dr Yu Ting-Fai (Associate)
- **Theresa Symons.** *Going beyond the spiritual, ecological, and social divides: Tracking relational system change in moving from a needs-based to a rights-based approach for Good Shepherd Sisters in Asia.* Prof Sharon A Bong (Main), Dr Thaatchayini Kananatu (Associate)
- **Chloe Yap Wen Ting.** *Queer digital Sinophone Malaysia: Exploring internet-mediated reconfigurations of queer Malaysian Chinese subjectivity at the millennial turn.* Assoc Prof Emma Baulch (Main), Dr Yu Ting-Fai (Associate)
- **Jeanette Goon Chern Yuet.** *Going beyond the spiritual, ecological, and social divides: Tracking relational system change in moving from a needs-based to a rights-based approach for Good Shepherd Sisters in Asia.* Prof Sharon A Bong (Main), Dr Thaatchayini Kananatu (Associate)
- **Zhao Ziran (Brandon).** *Ritual and rule: The simulation mechanism of game platform.* Assoc Prof Emma Baulch (Main), Dr Taesik Kim (associate)
- **Lee Choo Sum.** *Kawaii Kayfabe: Co-construction and Negotiation of Indonesian VTuber Talents' Fictional Personas.* Dr Jonathan Driskell (Main), Dr Agata Frymus (Associate), Prof Olivia Khoo (Associate)
- **Adrian Yao Yong Tat.** *Vodcasts as digital instructional learning objects in the learning of Malay as a foreign language: Examining its effects amongst international students within self-directed learning environment.* Dr Andrew Ng (Main), Dr Neethiahnanthan Ari Ragavan (20%) - Taylor's University Malaysia, Dr Melissa Wong (20%) - Taylor's University Malaysia
- **Gwendolyn Bellinger.** *Trickster Spirits and Ghostly Echoes: A Cultural Exploration of Trauma and Haunting in Literature.* A/Prof Andrew Hock Soon Ng (Main), Dr Chrishandra Sebastiampillai (Associate), Dr Charlotte Mackay (Associate)
- **Aidonna Jan Binti Ayub.** *Analysing the Governance Architecture of Transnational Rules on SOEs and the Implications of these Rules on Southeast Asian Countries.* Prof Helen Nesadurai (Main), Prof Andrew Mitchell (Associate)
- **Sharifah Rose Ee Mei Lin.** *Engaging Older Groups in Co-designing Inclusive and Sustainable Digital Health Technologies.* Dr Tan Meng Yoe (Main), Dr Dyah Pitaloka (Associate), Dr Leah Heiss (Associate), Dr Rowan Page (Associate)
- **Charulatha Pitigala.** *Helpful or Harmful: The Role of Faith-based Interventions in Human Trafficking in Southeast Asia.* Prof. Sharon Bong (Main), Dr Samantha Gunawardana (Associate) and Herbarry Cheung (Associate)
- **Tham Jia Vern.** *A Critical Examination on the Use of the Death Penalty for Drug Trafficking in Malaysia.* A/Prof Mai Sato (Main), Dr Thaatchayini Kananatu (Associate), Dr Marek Rutkowski (Associate)
- **Arath Nirmala Prabhakar.** *Navigating Evolving Professional Identities and Care Landscapes: Female Keralite Ayurveda Therapists and their Negotiations of Migration Infrastructure to Malaysia.* Assoc Prof Yeoh Seng Guan (Main), Dr Sin Yee Koh (Associate)
- **Mehvar Khan.** *Media and Politics: Fake News and its Impact on the. Political Opinions and Attitudes of Malaysians.* Dr Tan Meng Yoe (Main), Dr Joel Moore (Associate)
- **Yuejiao Xu.** *Psychological Distress among Malaysian LGB Youth in Australia.* Dr Joseph N. Goh (Main), Dr Brady Robards (Associate)

## PhD completions & SASS Graduate Research Student Writing fellowship

In 2024, **Cheah Wui Jia** successfully completed her thesis, '(Un)broken Faith - Doubt and Departure in the Evangelical Church of Malaysia'. **Cheah Wui Jia** is SASS's first recipient of the Writing Fellowship that is aimed at fostering quality publications by GRS. She submitted a paper titled, 'My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?: Questioning the Evangelical God and church in Malaysia' to the *Journal of Beliefs and Values* at the end of her two-month fellowship period.

## SASS 3MT Competition Winners and contestants

Presenting what must feel like one's lifework in three minutes is daunting by any measure. Yet, for our fearless five, it was "rewarding", "a confidence booster" and "a wonderful opportunity". Survivors of this "significant challenge", tell their stories: "This competition was rewarding as it forced me to rethink my research as a story, one that can engage and be shared with anyone. It's helped remind me why my work is important and what it is I am really working for!" says **Gwendolyn Bellinger**, winner of the SASS-level 3MT competition that was held on 19 April 2024. For **Theresa Symons** who was runner-up and winner of the People's Choice award, participating in the 3MT "validated [her] decision to embark on this PhD journey" as one who had left a regional leadership position to take up the PhD full-time. The event fostered community-building as **Charulatha Pitigala** adds that, "It was also a refreshing change to see my peers' presentations and how each of them individually approached it in their own unique and engaging way". For **Paola Reale**, the collegiality was paramount as "SASS people make us always feel at home". In that regard, we thank the judges – Drs Tan Meng Yoe, Azliyana Azhari and Raksha Pandya-Wood. And **Kaflina Kamalul** opines that the overall experience not only in performing but also prepping for that performance, taught her "that my thesis represents only a small fraction of the broader worldview".



*The fearless five:  
Paola Reale,  
Gwendolyn Bellinger,  
Kaflina Kamalul,  
Theresa Symons and  
Charulatha Pitigala*

## Research Excellence Unit research week (1-5 July) showcasing quality research by GRS

Monash Graduate Research Week featured presentations in various formats by Monash University Malaysia graduate research students. Prizes were awarded for best presentation and best poster. Kaflina Kamalul emerged as the winner in the poster presentation category with her poster titled, 'Towards empowerment and inclusion: Framing digital literacy in the everyday lives of Older Adults'. Theresa Symons emerged as first runner-up in the oral presentation category with her presentation on, 'Exploring the spiritual, ecological and social divides among Catholic women faith-based practitioners in Asia'. Aidonna Jan Ayub also presented on 'Navigating global governance: State-owned Enterprise (SOEs) rules and their Impact on Malaysia' and Jeannette Goon presented "I will never die: Mona Fandey, a Monstrous-Feminine celebrity"



## MUPA awards

The Monash University Postgraduate Association's annual appreciation awards ceremony on 15 November honoured Ee Mei Lin Sharifah Rose Amie and Dr Tan Meng Yoe as the 'Outstanding PG student SAS'S and 'Outstanding supervisor (SASS)', awards the duo have won for consecutive years. Prof Sharon A. Bong, in recognition of her contribution as the Graduate Research Director of SASS was nominated and awarded 'Most approachable non-academic staff', a first win for an academic staff.



Sharon, Meng Yoe and Rose recognised by MUPA

## GRS @ conferences

**Theresa Symons** presented, 'Exploring the spiritual, ecological and social divides among Catholic women faith-based practitioners in Asia' at the Annual Meeting of the Society for the Scientific Study of Religion, Pittsburgh, PA, 18-20 October 2024 (self-funded)

**Theresa Symons & Gwendolyn Bellinger:** 19th [Singapore Graduate Forum](#) on Southeast Asian Studies, organised by the Asia-Research Institute, National University of Singapore, 26-28 June 2024

**Zhao Ziran (Brandon) & Ee Mei Lin Sharifah Rose Amie:** 74th Annual [International Communication Association](#) conference, 20-24 June, Gold Coast, Australia

**Aidonna Jan Ayub,** The Role of GLICs and GLCs in Promoting Green Initiatives, for a conference co-organised between UN Trade (UNCTAD) and Khazanah Research Institute (KRI) on Integrated Policy Strategies for a Sustainable Future, KL, Aug 2024

## GRS publications

Two GRS were happy recipients of the SASS Publication award for their high-impact publications:

1. Bellinger, Gwendolyn (2024). Immigrant Ghosts and Haunted Heritages in Rani Manicka's *The Rice Mother*. *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction*, 1-11. doi:10.1080/00111619.2024.2407542. [\[Scimago,Q1\]](#)
2. Zhao, Z. (2024). Being Prescribed to Perform Romance? Game Platform as a Place for Romantic Relationship Practice. *International Journal of Communication*, 18, 3982-4002. [\[Scimago,Q1\]](#)

## SASS VISITING FELLOWS 2024

In 2024, we are excited to welcome a distinguished group of Visiting Fellows to the School of Arts and Social Sciences (SASS) at Monash University Malaysia, each bringing unique expertise to enrich our academic community:

- **Liong Jing Hao** (July 2024 – July 2025): Jing Hao is a PhD candidate in the Department of Cultural Anthropology at Duke University. Under the supervision of Dr. Yeoh Seng Guan, Liong is engaging in a year-long residency to undertake research on migrant domestic workers in Malaysia.
- **Nasrul Ismail** (22 April – 3 May 2024): Nasrul Ismail is a Senior Lecturer in Criminology at the School of Policy Studies, University of Bristol. Hosted by Dr. Thaatchayini Kananatu, Dr. Ismail's visited to plan collaborations on a project related to penal policies and prison governance.
- **Louis Bayman** (22 July – 16 August 2024): Louis is an Associate Professor of Film at the University of Southampton. Hosted by Dr. Jonathan Driskell, Dr. Bayman visited to collaborate with Dr Driskell on a study of the 'folk' in Malay cinema.
- **Thameena Alam** (23 September - 8 November): Thameena is a PhD researcher and a President's Doctoral Scholar in the Department of English Literature and American Studies at the University of Manchester. Hosted by Professor Adeline Johns Putra, Thameena spent her time at SASS working on a chapter of her thesis that deals with climate dystopias and postcolonialism, with a focus on South Asia.

# PUBLICATIONS 2024

- Baulch, E, Johns, A & Fernandez, A. 2024. A critical review of media and communications scholarship on messaging apps. *Research Handbook on Social Media and Society*. 1st edn, Edward Elgar Publishing, Cheltenham UK, pp. 270-286. <https://doi.org/10.4337/9781800377059.00031>.
- Baulch, E., Grgić, A., Hock Soon Ng, A., & Yu, T. F. 2024. Introduction: mapping the music and video streaming landscape and its disruptions in Southeast Asia. *Continuum*, 38(5), 585–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10304312.2024.2413674>
- Chang-Tik, C., Dharmaratne, A., Driskell, J., & Kumari, Y. (2024). A framework informing the interplay of physical, digital and social spaces in supporting an environment for active learning. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02188791.2024.2309222>
- Cheung, H 2024. Navigating stigmatized motherhood: self-stigma of single mothers with mental illness in Thailand. *South East Asia Research*, 32(1), 59–75. <https://doi.org/10.1080/0967828X.2024.2320235>
- Cheung, H 2024. *Single Mothers in Thailand: Women, Motherhood, and Going it All Alone*. Palgrave Macmillan. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-57655-3>.
- Deejay, A, Wells, T, Henne, K & Bächtold, S 2024. Bad adopters or bad proponents of technology? Facebook and the violence against Muslims in Myanmar. *Third World Quarterly*, 45(8) 1309-1324. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01436597.2023.2285808>
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- Frymus, A 2024. 'Cobra Kai Never Dies!: generational seriality and revived legacies of 'The Karate Kid', *The Journal of Popular Culture*. <https://doi.org/10.1111/jpcu.13303>
- Frymus, A 2024. The movie-struck girl in British Malaya, 1919–1937. *Women's History Review*. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09612025.2024.2376817>
- Goh, JN 2024. The pursuit of deviant happiness and queer spiritual well-being among Malaysian gay men: a theological proposal. *Feminist Theology*, 32(3): 342-351. <https://doi.org/10.1177/09667350241233586>
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- Johns-Putra, A, Liu, X, Cesarino, L, Mai, G & Zhou, Y. 2024. Whose world? Whose world literature? Looking for climate fiction in China. In: Alice Duhan, Stefan Helgesson, Christina Kullberg, Paul Tennart (Eds). *Literature and the Work of Universality*. Walter de Gruyter,, pp. 315-332. <https://doi.org/10.1515/9783111209159-017>.
- Johns, A, Matamoros-Fernández, A & Baulch, E. 2024. *WhatsApp: From a One-To-One Messaging App to A Global Communication Platform*. Polity Press.
- Kim, T 2024. The geosemiotics of urban transnationalism: A case study of Vietnamese commercial landscapes in Prague. *City*, 28(3–4), 400–418. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13604813.2024.2377917>
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- Morton, D & Frymus, A. 2024. "A united stand and a concerted effort": black cinema-going in Harlem and Jacksonville during the silent era. In: Treveri Gennari, D., Van de Vijver, L., Ercole, P. (eds) *The Palgrave Handbook of Comparative New Cinema Histories*. Palgrave Macmillan, Cham. [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38789-0\\_4](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-031-38789-0_4)
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