





January 2026

Director's Foreword New Year, New Leadership

Last Word

This is my last ARI Newsletter foreword. My term as ARI Director runs until the end of December 2025. Indeed, by the time you read this in early 2026, [Prof Vineeta Sinha](#) will have assumed directorship. I will continue to head the institute's Asian Urbanisms research cluster and look forward to supporting Vineeta and A/P Maitrii Aung-Thwin (who will continue as Deputy Director) as they lead ARI into an exciting new phase of development.

Across my experience of typing many Newsletter forewords over the past six and a half years, one common denominator stands out: I have repeatedly struggled to fit everything that I wish to report into the number of words allocated to me! Of course, that should be seen as a "happy problem"; during my two terms as Director, it has been a sign of a highly active and vibrant institute with no shortage of individual as well as collective accomplishments to recognize. The period since September 2025 which is covered in this foreword is no exception.

Events Galore

High-profile international events were held in each of the final four months of the year, on themes ranging from pop culture, to environmental futures, to sacred geographies:

- On 18-19 September, ARI's Distinguished Professorial Fellow, Chua Beng Huat, led organization of [East Asian Pop Culture: 30 Years of Transformation](#) which was co-hosted with the Cultural Studies in Asia Programme at NUS and the William Lim Siew Wai Fellowship Fund. The event was co-convened by Asst Prof Eunbi Lee, Dr Bertha Chin, and Dr Soh Kai Ruo from the Department of Communications and New Media.
- On 16-17 October, former ARI postdoctoral fellow Birgit Bräuchler (now Associate Professor at the University of Copenhagen) co-organized [Bytes and Biomes: Navigating the Digital-Environment Nexus across Southeast Asia](#) with her colleague Dr Lukas Fort as well as Dr Walker DePuy from ARI's STS cluster. This workshop was funded by the DIGINEX project and supported by the Independent Research Fund Denmark.
- On 11 November, Prof Himanshu Prabha Ray (Jawaharlal Nehru University) gave a public lecture at the Asian Civilizations Museum (ACM) on [Ritual Bronzes Across the Seas](#) under the Nalanda Professorship in India–China Studies. Prof Ray shared insights on the production and circulation of bronze and gold Buddhist objects across Asia, and discussed their implications in conversation with Dr Priya Maholay-Jaradi from the Department of History.
- On 4-5 December, ARI hosted the conference [Exploring the Sacred: People, Place and Power in the Islamic Indian Ocean](#) under the Muhammad Alagil Distinguished Professorship in Arabia Asia Studies. Convened by Dr Sumit Mandal and Dr P.K.M. Abdul Jaleel, the programme included an inaugural Arabia Asia Studies Lecture, [The Sacred is Relatedness: Arabia–Asia as a Geography of Friendship](#), delivered by A/P Ismail Fajrie Alatas (New York University) with a commentary by Dr Harini Kumar (Yale University).

Recognition and Awards

A/P Jiat-Hwee Chang, Research Leader of ARI's STS Cluster and jointly appointed with NUS Department of Architecture, received the [Dean's Chair at the CDE Awards](#) for outstanding scholarly achievements. In addition, two scholars from ARI's Migration and Mobilities research cluster – Profs Brenda Yeoh and Elaine Ho – were named in Stanford University's list of the [World's Top 2% Scientists](#). Congratulations to these outstanding colleagues. My thanks also to everyone who helps to sustain the institutional infrastructure which makes such individual accomplishments possible.

In a more team-based register, I am pleased to note that the [Carbon Governance in Southeast Asia \(CGSEA\) project](#) at ARI was featured in Ignite Magazine, highlighting innovative research at NUS. Issue 2 focused on how researchers are turning to nature for inspiration and innovation, foregrounding CGSEA's work on governing Nature-based

Solutions in Southeast Asia.

ISAC

ARI has hosted the [Initiative for the Study of Asian Catholics \(ISAC\)](#) since summer 2021, providing a platform for international collaboration and social scientific research on Asian Catholics in contemporary societies. After celebrating its four-year anniversary in September 2025, ISAC is taking a pause to reflect on its accomplishments and future direction.

Under the leadership of Dr Michel Chambon, Research Fellow with ARI's Religion and Globalisation Cluster, ISAC has organized 11 workshops, 18 online roundtables, four podcast series, and established a book series, among many other achievements.

We are grateful to Michel for his leadership, vision, and energy, which have been at the heart of ISAC's successes.

In Memoriam

Finally, it is with great sadness that I report the passing of [Emeritus Professor John Miksic](#), whose pioneering work transformed the study of Southeast Asian history and archaeology. Prof Miksic served as a research leader at ARI between 2003 and 2006. We extend our deepest condolences to his family.



Tim Bunnell
Former Director (Between 2021 and 2025)

ARIscope

Can the One Piece flag in Nepal's Gen Z protest be an Inter-Asia referencing practice?



On 8 September 2025, Nepal's Generation Z flooded the streets in a protest that would reshape the nation's political landscape. Among the banners and placards that filled Kathmandu's streets, one symbol stood out, the Jolly Roger flag from the Japanese manga *One Piece*, modified and reimagined as an emblem of rebellion.

[Dr Zehzhou Yang](#) reflects on protest, popular culture, and inter-Asia connections.

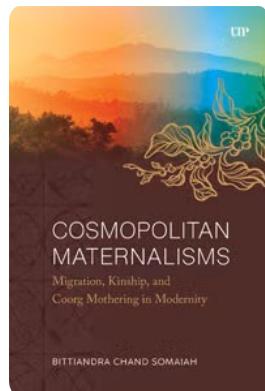
[Read More](#)

New Books

Cosmopolitan Maternalisms:

In Conversation

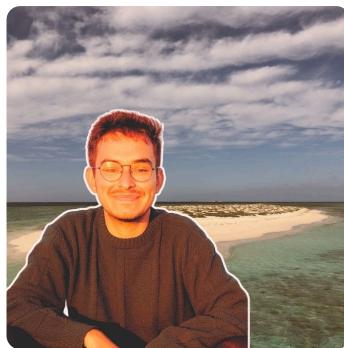
Migration, Kinship, and Coorg Mothering in Modernity



This women-centred study examines social reconstructions of immigrant mothering among a middle-class minority community of first-generation Coorg women – Kodavathes – in urban Karnataka, Singapore, and Sydney through conceptual lenses of new cosmopolitanisms and new maternalisms. By Bittiandra Chand Somaiah. Published by University of Toronto Press.

[Read More](#)

Q&A with Dr Jonathan Galka



Historian Jonathan Galka explores the human, scientific, and political currents shaping mid-20th century deep-sea mining.

"I think that, despite how Singapore's engagement with the seascape is so dynamic, people in Singapore remain largely unaware of how profound these changes have been."

[Read More](#)

Featured Event Arabia Asia Studies Conference and Lecture

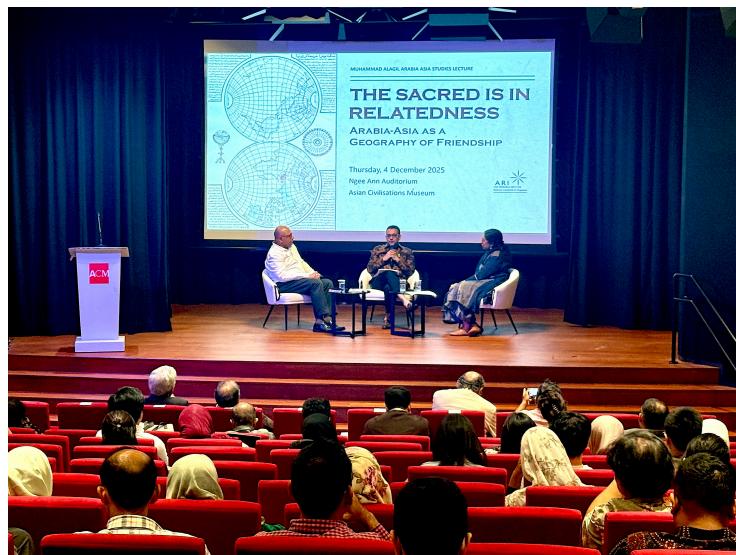


Sumit Mandal, Muhammad Alagil Chair, speaking at the opening of "Exploring the Sacred" with Tim Bunnell (left) and Muhammad Alagil (middle).



Group photograph of conference presenters and discussants.

The Muhammad Alagil Chair in Arabia Asia Studies organised an international conference and a lecture on the 4th and 5th of December 2025. [Exploring the Sacred: People, Place and Power in the Islamic Indian Ocean](#) was the eighth conference in a series begun in 2014, and opened novel themes and revised our thinking on key topics. Sufi textual, performative, and devotional work was a major theme that presenters explored anew by focusing on transregional sacred sites, rituals, health care, and wellbeing. Presenters also upended prevailing views about sovereignty, authority, and flows of Islamic knowledge, among other things, by showing how debates that arose in the seventeenth-century Malay world influenced scholarly production in Mecca and Egypt. Sixteen presenters based in Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, India, Singapore, Indonesia, United Kingdom, France, United States and Canada came together to form a lively intellectual community with plans for ongoing collaboration.



Ismail Alatas flanked by Sumit Mandal (left) and Harini Kumar (right) in discussion following the inaugural Muhammad Alagil Lecture in Arabia Asia Studies.

Ismail Alatas of New York University gave the inaugural Muhammad Alagil Lecture in Arabia Asia Studies on the topic "[The Sacred is in Relatedness: Arabia-Asia as a Geography of Friendship](#)." He spoke on transregional relationships of affect and kinship over and above the flow of goods, people, and ideas. Framed around the Bā-'Alawī, whose beginnings lie in Yemen, Alatas put forth an Arabia Asia Studies agenda that moves geographies of friendship from the periphery to the centre of our attention. Harini Kumar of Yale University provided a critical reflection of the lecture.

Bulletin Board

Call for Papers Submission Deadlines:

- **6 February 2026** - [Gaming Asia: Asian Nationalism through the Lens of Video Games](#) [Exploring the Sacred: People, Place and Power in the Islamic Indian Ocean](#)
(29-30 April 2026)

- **1 March 2026** - [Sonic Efficacy: Mantras, Music and Placemaking in Global Southern Asia](#) (3-4 September 2026)
- **31 March 2026** - [Dis/assembling Concrete's Environments](#) (20-21 August 2026)

Staff Changes

ARI warmly welcomes Prof Tansen Sen, Prof Aeneas Zi Wang, Prof Anna Triandafyllidou, Dr Johanna Ullmann, and Dr Carin Graminius as visiting scholars this term.

At the same time, we bid farewell to Prof Gregory Clancey, Dr Bernice Loh, Dr Myra Mentari Abubakar, Dr Kathleen Burke, Dr Walker DePuy, Mr Chu Hao Pei, Ms Jenne Tok Jie Ying, Ms Belinda Cheng Yan Shu, Mr Nicholas Liang Hong, Mr Henry Kwan Wai Hung and Mdm K Kalaihelvi a/p C Krishnan as they conclude their time with us.

Opportunities

Closing date: 1 February 2026:

- [Research Associate \(Heritage Diplomacy: connecting histories and futures\)](#)
- [Research Fellows \(Heritage Diplomacy: connecting histories and futures\)](#)
- [Senior Research Fellow \(Heritage Diplomacy: connecting histories and futures\)](#)

Closing date: 3 March 2026:

- [Research Associate \(Southeast Asian Studies Next Generation Collaboratory\)](#)

In the News

- Prof Elaine Ho featured in CNA Insider '[Being Singaporean](#)'
- The Muhammad Alagil Chair in Arabia–Asia Studies was featured in [Arab News](#)
- CGSEA Research Fellow Yingshan Lau's lead-authored review paper on 'Challenges in Forest Carbon Governance: Insights From Southeast Asia', was featured by [Mongabay](#).

Featured Video



'Ritual Bronzes Across the Seas'. A talk by Professor Himanshu Prabha Ray initially held at the ACM Ngee Ann Auditorium on 11 November 2025. Jointly organised by ARI NUS and the Asian Civilisations Museum and held in conjunction with the Nalanda Professorship in India-China Studies.

Connect with us!



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