

Opening of The International Anthropology Conference in Dalat: Forging Connections Between Generations and Creating a Global Vision

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Translated by Minh Tran, Yale University

The academic communities in Vietnam and abroad just witnessed an important milestone as the international scientific conference “Global Perspective on the Anthropology of Vietnam” was officially kicked off in Dalat, the ‘city of flowers,’ on June 17, 2026. On the opening day, the conference welcomed more than 150 researchers, leading experts, PhD candidates, and undergraduates from various countries with strong academic landscapes like the United States, Germany, Denmark, Canada, Australia, France, the Czech Republic, Ireland, the Netherlands, Japan, Israel, Switzerland... and Vietnam.

This large-scale event was organized by the Department of Social Work - Anthropology - Sociology of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City), in collaboration with Dalat University, University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University - Hanoi), and the Institute of Ethnology and Religious Studies. The conference was supported and sponsored by distinguished international academic institutions including the Wenner-Gren Foundation, Yale University (United States), Copenhagen University (Denmark), and Bielefeld University (Germany).

From the Memories of the Foundational Conference in Binh Chau to a Forum that Connects Generations

A distinctive and emotionally meaningful feature of the opening day was the gathering of scholars from multiple generations. The conference recalled the 2007 Binh Chau Anthropology Conference, a milestone in collaboration that established a foundational connection between the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City) and the University of Toronto (Canada). Over the past two decades, what began as a forum to ‘initiate dialogue’ has evolved into a platform that amplifies the voices of multiple generations of anthropologists, reflecting continuity and growth.

Reflecting on early challenging days in establishing the Department of Anthropology, Professor Ngo Van Le (former President of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City), one of the pioneers of

anthropology in Vietnam, shared that in its early days, Vietnam still faced significant institutional and economic barriers. However, the resilience and self-driven spirit of Vietnamese academics and educators, combined with support from international partners, most notably the Ford Foundation, helped the Department of Anthropology take root and grow rapidly, particularly in Southern Vietnam.

Sharing his views on the training of anthropologists in Vietnam, Professor Luong Van Hy (former Department Chair of Anthropology at the University of Toronto, Canada), expressed strong confidence in the capabilities of the next generation: “The quality of doctoral dissertations in anthropology in Vietnam has reached a high standard, and is comparable to those produced by students at leading institutions in Europe or North America”.

Alongside leading figures who laid the foundations for Anthropological studies in Vietnam, particularly in the southern region, such as late Professor Oscar Salemink, Professor Luong Van Hy, Professor Ngo Van Le...the conference also brought together a new generation of scholars deeply committed to advancing the field, including Professor Nguyen Thi Nguyet Minh (Bielefeld University, Germany) and other contemporary Vietnamese academics. Altogether, they offered multidimensional, up-to-date research perspectives on anthropology in Vietnam.

The Significance of “Age 25” and the Mission of Connecting Knowledge.

Taking place in a special context, looking toward the 25th anniversary of anthropology as a formal discipline in higher education (2002-2026), as well as the 70th anniversary of the founding of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City), the conference offered an opportunity to reflect on a transformative journey. From its strong foundations in ethnology, with many research projects on local ethnic minorities, anthropology in Vietnam has expanded to address issues deeply shaped by contemporary realities, including climate change, urbanization, labor migration, digital anthropology, and other globalization trends. Professor Ngo Thi Phuong Lan (President of the University of Social Sciences and Humanities (Vietnam National University - Ho Chi Minh City) conveyed a powerful message about the future vision of the Department:

“We have been an attractive field of research for international scholars. As we approach our 25th anniversary, we have both the right and the responsibility to aim higher. Our ambition should extend beyond a receptive approach to an ‘Anthropology of Vietnam’. We should strive to make theoretical, methodological, and conceptual

contributions to global anthropology from Vietnam. This is both the responsibility of the current generation and the goal for the future”.

The Tay Nguyen Identity and Early Foundations

Explaining the rationale for selecting a highland location for the conference, Dr. Mai Minh Nhat (President of Dalat University) noted that the Central Highlands (Tay Nguyen) embody a strong academic spirit. More than just a geographical location, the region represents a vibrant cultural landscape. Nearly a century ago, it was the area where several well-known anthropologists such as Georges Condominas and Jacques Dournes lived and wrote canonical works in the field. The combination of Dalat University's “Humanistic Growth” educational philosophy and strong collaboration among institutions and universities has created an ideal academic environment, where global knowledge and local identity meaningfully intersect.

Following the opening ceremony, the academic atmosphere took shape with Phase 1: “Knowledge Creation”. The first four presentations directly examined key perspectives on post-colonial approaches, interdisciplinarity, and the global dissemination of knowledge about Vietnam in the context of globalization.

The series of international conferences will continue until June 19, 2026, featuring 9 thematic panels and 34 scientific papers. Participants hope that the discussions and debates at the conference will open new, groundbreaking directions and reaffirm the position of Vietnamese Anthropology on the global academic stage.

Images taken on the first day of the conference:

Photo source: Tuan Vu