

Q&A With A Librarian Of The Newly Announced Southeast Asian Anarchist Library

Southeast Asian Anarchist Library

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Contents

How did the idea to start the Southeast Asian Anarchist Library come about? How long did it take to get off the ground? 3

What’s been the greatest challenge so far in launching the library? 3

What features and future developments are you most excited about for this project? 4

Announcing a Southeast Asian Anarchist Library 4

We were delighted to receive news of a newly launched Southeast Asian Anarchist Library, a resource helping promote Southeast Asian Anarchist ideas and texts in multiple languages.

You can read the announcement itself below; an anonymous librarian from the project also answered a few questions about the library.

How did the idea to start the Southeast Asian Anarchist Library come about? How long did it take to get off the ground?

One of the librarians liked the idea of The Anarchist Library as a place to archive anarchist texts that are at risk of being lost to time and neglect. Indeed, being lost to time and neglect is also a problem for anarchist literature in Southeast Asia. Writings are haphazardly scattered across the internet and in selectively-printed zines. We feel a certain horror that such literature remains obscure, or worse, lost to time. So we asked the good librarians at The Anarchist Library for a Southeast Asian section last year. It generally did not take long to get started, but in the months since we started we now have hundreds of texts in multiple languages.

Usually, new language anarchist libraries are only for one language—Spanish, French, Korean or what have you. This makes sense for large languages that span countries (like English, Spanish, French) or countries with a largely homogeneous language (like South Korea and Korean). However, Southeast Asia is characterized by incredible diversity with more languages than nations. Some Southeast Asian languages only have a handful of anarchist texts so it does not make economical sense to have multiple small libraries with only a handful of texts in them. Additionally, the diversity of languages means that a single anarchist milieu in a country can produce texts in multiple languages. This is the case in the Philippines where Filipino anarchists write in English, Tagalog, and Bisaya. Unlike the other anarchist libraries, we wanted a place that can reflect the rich diversity of languages from Southeast Asia.

Since the start of the project in January, the SEA Library now has hundreds of texts in multiple languages. It has also become a site for original translations such as that in Tieng Viet. For example, David Graeber (rest in power) now has translations of his writings in Tagalog, Bahasa Indonesia/Melayu, Tieng Viet, and Thai. We are quite pleased that various anarchists across the region have made use of the SEA Library as a site for preserving their literature and submitting original translations.

What's been the greatest challenge so far in launching the library?

The biggest challenge we have faced is that we do not have librarians or connections with anarchists who are literate in Thai, Chinese, Lao, Khmer, and Burmese. Worse even, we have no texts in Lao, Khmer, and Burmese yet. We are unaware of any anarchists existing in Laos and Cambodia, much less anarchist texts in these languages. While we have offered our platform to anarcho-punks in Myanmar, they are likely too busy combating the junta government to upload anarchist texts or act as librarians.

More generally, there is also a challenge in the difficulty with sourcing texts and zines to preserve. Unfortunately there are already other texts that are already lost to time. Language barriers are also a big issue. There is no uniting language for Southeast Asia, though English serves as the de facto lingua franca, followed by Bahasa Indonesia/Melayu.

Another challenge is censorship by the Vietnamese government which, of course, bans texts critical of Marxism-Leninism and of States in general.

What features and future developments are you most excited about for this project?

The SEA Library is developing into a platform for original translations of anarchist literature. The most exciting development are the very first anarchist literature in Tieng Viet.

We hope that the currently-empty language categories such as Khmer, Lao, and Burmese would be filled with literature soon by anarchists literate in those languages. Another hope is that the SEA Library would platform anarchist cells and groups across Southeast Asia that have been left hidden or unheard. It is our hope that they use the SEA Library as a platform connecting them to the anarchist movement across Southeast Asia and the world. As a platform, we hope that Western anarchists are also able to exchange knowledge with comrades across Southeast Asia. We also think that this project is a good initiative for decolonizing and de-Westernizing anarchism if the SEA Library gets active and consistent support among Southeast Asian anarchists across the different milieus.

Announcing a Southeast Asian Anarchist Library

The Southeast Asian Anarchist Library is the newest offering from The Anarchist Library which features multilingual anarchist literature from Southeast Asia or in Southeast Asian languages.

Visit the Southeast Asian Anarchist Library!

In time of pandemic and insurrection anarchists are out in the streets in Yangon, Bangkok, Jakarta, Kuala Lumpur, and Metro Manila. Anarchism in Southeast Asia only a little more than thirty years old as anarchism was totally demobilized and eradicated in the region in the early 20th century. Still, anarchism re-emerges as the region's people looks for liberatory frameworks. To match increased libertarian militancy in Southeast Asia (SEA), The Anarchist Library now offers the Southeast Asian Anarchist Library as a site to collect and collate anarchist literature from the region or in the regional languages.

The SEA Library is a multilingual library that reflects the multilingual and plural diversity of the Southeast Asian region. Here you can find texts in English, Bahasa Indonesia, Bahasa Melayu, Tagalog, Bisaya (Cebuano), ภาษาไทย (Thai), Tiếng Việt (Vietnamese), and 中文 (Mandarin). The Library curates new texts through @SEAnarkis on Twitter.

The SEA Library is also a site for new translations such as the Vietnamese section whose translations are all original. Texts such as David Graeber's classic "Are You An Anarchist?" has been translated into Tagalog, Indonesian/Malay, Vietnamese, and Thai. In this manner, the SEA Library acts as free platform for anarchist propagandists in the region.

Like The Anarchist Library, you can download texts in the SEA Library in ready-to-print zine format or as ebooks. Feel free to download and distribute texts! You can even use bookbuilder to build your own zines and ebooks using any text from the catalog.

As a free platform, you can add new texts to the SEA Library that you think ought be on the platform. An account is not needed. The criteria of the SEA Library is that these texts have to have something to do with the libertarian and anti-statist movement from or about Southeast Asia or such a text in an indigenous regional language.

The SEA Library is also looking for volunteers for translation and acquisition of new texts. For example, the SEA Library currently does not have texts in မြန်မာစာ (Burmese), ລາວ (Lao), or ខ្មែរ (Khmer). The SEA Library would appreciate volunteers that can help the library expand its collection. Another pending task is translating the user interface of the SEA Library into indigenous languages.

If you would like to help out, you can email the SEA Library at: <library-sea [a.t] angrylists [d.o.t] com>. You can also hop in The Anarchist Library IRC where the librarians of the SEA Library also hang out.

The future of anarchism in Asia is bright. New anarchist and libertarian collectivities sprout yearly. Where there is authority there is resistance to it and a Southeast Asian Anarchist Library is a project that can help build that militancy.

For a Southeast Asian anarchism!

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**SOUTHEAST ASIAN
ANARCHIST LIBRARY**

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