

## Symposium report

# 2021 International Symposium on the Mekong Delta

Climate change, environmental migration, and land  
subsidence in the Mekong Delta and other Asian Deltas

Date | Friday, 26<sup>th</sup> November, 2021

Time | 14:00-17:30 (GMT +7)

15:00-18:30 (GMT +8)

Location | Online Event Using Google Meets

Language | English

Registration | <https://forms.gle/1L1odukTEXqZnDQ39>



For more information please contact  
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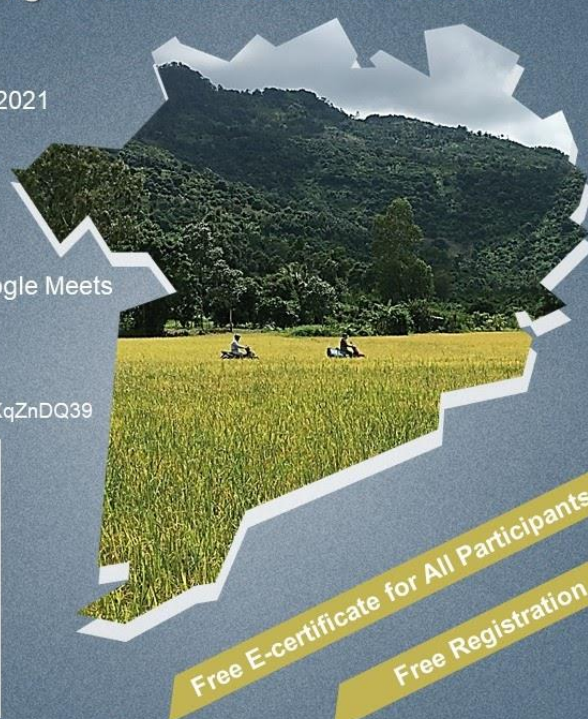
Organizer | National Taiwan Normal University, Taiwan (represented by Dr. Mucahid Bayrak)

Utrecht University, Netherlands (represented by Prof. Ajay Bailey)

Co-Organizers | Vietnam National University HCMC

An Giang University, Vietnam (represented by Mr. Tran Van Hieu)

Kien Giang University, Vietnam (represented by Dr. Duong Van Nha)



Free E-certificate for All Participants  
Free Registration



Sponsored by MOST -110-2636-H-003-007- and Seed-money Grant 2020 of the Water, Climate and Future Deltas (WCFD) Hub, Utrecht University.

By: Mucahid Mustafa Bayrak and Nien Tung

Taipei City, 2021/11/26

The 2021 International Symposium on the Mekong Delta entitled: **“Climate change, environmental migration, and land subsidence in the Mekong Delta and other Asian Deltas”** was held on Friday, 26th November, 2021, 15:00 to 18:30 (GMT +8) using Cisco Webex. The conference was organized by National Taiwan Normal University and Utrecht University, and co-organized by An Giang University and Kien Giang University.



Figure 1: Conference Agenda and Topics

The main objective of this online symposium was to understand the complicated relationship between climate change, human mobilities, transboundary water governance and land subsidence in the Mekong Delta of Vietnam, as well as other Asian deltas. The symposium critically reflected upon the stressors which reshape the Mekong delta’s landscapes, its peoples and economy. Several keynote speakers from universities in the Mekong Delta, such as An Giang University, Kien Giang University and Can Tho University, spoke about aforementioned themes. We thus primarily focused on emic and critical perspectives on the Mekong Delta. This symposium is part of a larger project entitled: *“To flood or to flee? A comparative study on flood-driven migration as a way to adapt to climate change in the Lower Mekong River Basin”* financed by the Ministry of Science

and Technology, Taiwan (MOST-110-2636-H-003-007). Additionally, this symposium presented preliminary findings of a seed grant from Utrecht University's Water, Climate and Future Deltas Hub entitled: *"Human costs of shrinking deltas: Adaptation pathways of vulnerable groups to sea-level rise in three Asian deltas"* (or HUMDelta in Short). Figure 1 shows the finalized program of the conference.

Ultimately, this symposium identified new research directions in Asian deltaic regions, both within the context of COVID-19 and broader transboundary environmental and political ecological challenges.

The symposium progressed as follows. First of all, Prof. Lin Tsung-Yi (National Taiwan Normal University) provided a welcome speech. He reflected upon how his own research is linked to the conference themes and welcomed all guests. Secondly, Prof. Ho Thanh Binh (vice-rector of An Giang University) provided an introduction to the Mekong Delta speech, and identified some of the most pressing issue the Delta is currently facing (Figure 2).

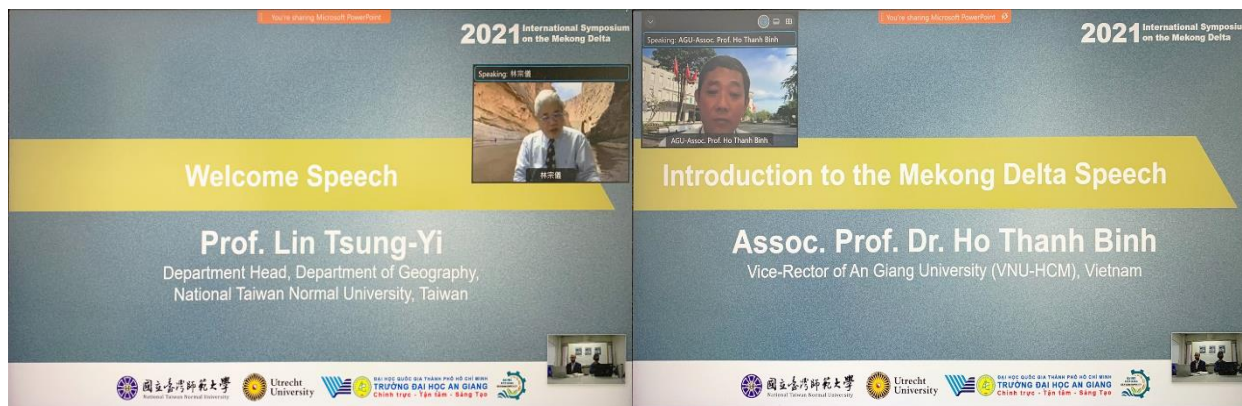


Figure 2: Welcome Speeches

The symposium consisted of three separate sessions. These sessions started with keynote speeches, in which after a round-the-table discussion followed. Session 1 focused on land subsidence, biodiversity depletion and water challenges. This session consisted of presentations of Prof. Van Pham Dang Tri (Can Tho University), Dr. Duong Van Ni (Can Tho University), and Dr. Thong Anh Tran (Australian National University – Figure 3). The three keynote speakers talked about land subsidence, environmental migration and water challenges in the Mekong Delta respectively.



Figure 3: Snapshots of Session 1

Session 2 focused on transboundary water governance, hydropower, agriculture and livelihoods (Figure 4). Prof. Le Anh Tuan (Can Tho University) discussed the most recent hydropower and transboundary water governance challenges in the Mekong Delta. This was followed-up by a keynote speech of Dr. Duong Van Nha (Kien Giang University) presenting findings on water demand for rice cultivation among drought conditions. Lastly, Mr. Tran Van Hieu linked local water governance challenges to households' livelihoods and incomes. Both sessions 1 and 2 were followed-up by round-the-table discussions related to the respective themes of each session.

Both sessions included presentations from very different academic disciplines ranging from physical geography to agricultural sciences and governance studies to livelihood research. Thus, the symposium approached the context of the Mekong Delta and climate change from a multidisciplinary perspective.

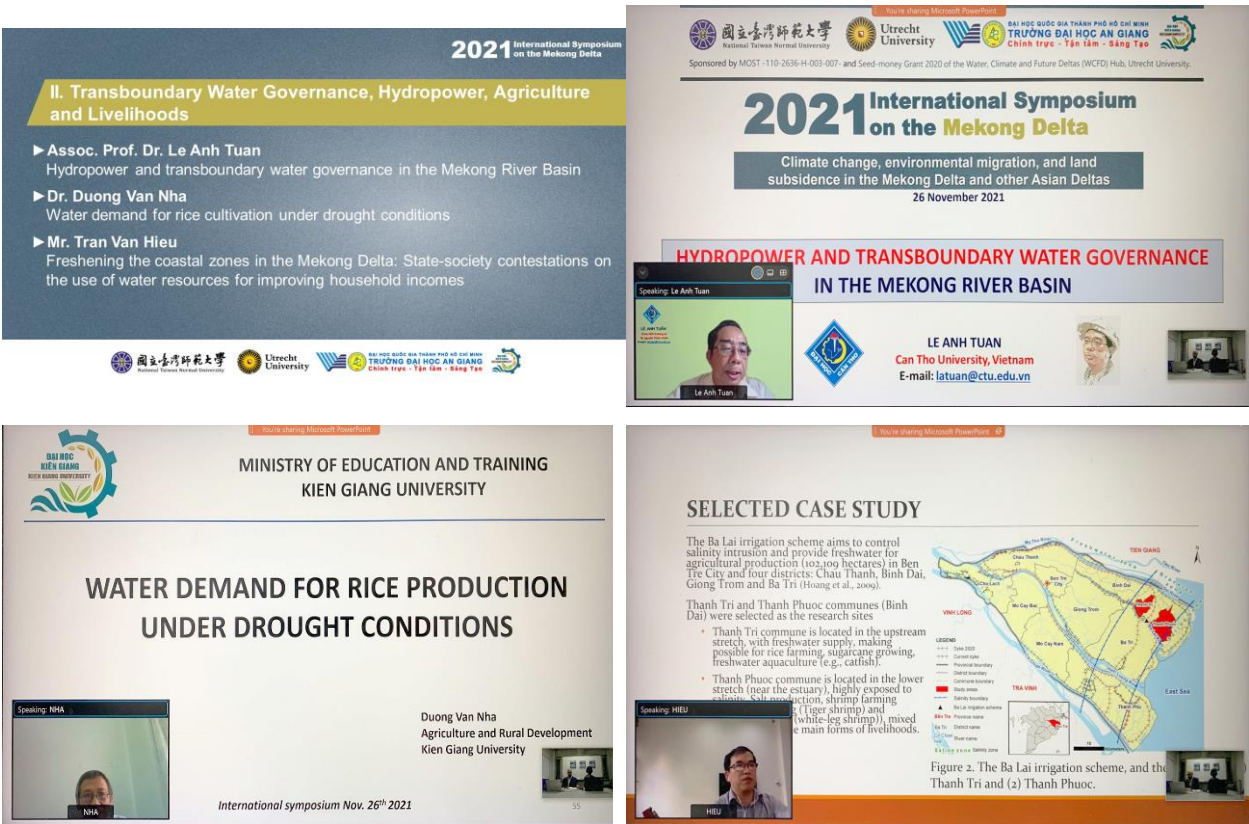


Figure 4: Snapshots of Session 2

Session 3 shared preliminary findings of the HUMdelta project (Figure 5). It started with a speech on applying a cultural lens to adaptation pathways to climate change by Prof. Ajay Bailey (Utrecht University). Following this presentation, Dr. Mucahid Bayrak (National Taiwan Normal University) and Dr. Selim Jahangir (Manipal Academy of Higher Education) applied this framework to Taiwan and India respectively. Also, findings from fieldwork in Thailand by Dr. Danny Marks (Dublin City University) were presented by Dr. Bayrak. Following the three keynote speeches, a plenary discussion was held with the central question: *What is the role of culture in adaptation processes or pathways in your own research?* Speakers from both within the Mekong Delta and beyond reflected upon the idea of linking culture to adaptation pathways, and various examples from the field were presented and discussed (Figure 6).

Prof. Ajay Bailey then concluded the symposium and follow-up plans were presented and further discussed. It is hoped that this symposium can result in the establishment of a research network, and this network could facilitate more academic activities across the three respective countries: Taiwan, Vietnam and The Netherlands.

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### III. Perspectives from other Asian Deltas / Countries

- ▶ Prof. Ajay Bailey  
Towards a cultural lens for adaptation pathways to climate change
- ▶ Dr. Mueahid Mustafa Bayrak  
Applying this cultural lens to a case study in Taiwan and insights from Thailand and India
- ▶ Dr. Selim Jahangir  
Jol e kumir, Dangai Bagh: Adaptation pathways of local communities to increasing extreme events in Sundarban Delta, India

## TOWARDS A CULTURAL LENS FOR ADAPTATION PATHWAYS TO CLIMATE CHANGE

PROF. AJAY BAILEY & HUMDELTA TEAM



Background:

**Local communities** are mainly engaged in agriculture, fishing, prawn seed, catching crabs and honey collection.

**Settlement:** Dates back late 19th century and continued to flourish through 20th century during the British colonial period.

**Population:** Migrant from the adjoining districts of Midnapore and also from central India. Predominantly the marginalised and tribal populations brought here by the British to construct the mud embankments.

Figure 5: Snapshots of Session 3

Session 3  
Round-the-Table Discussion

What is the role of culture in adaptation processes or pathways in your own research?

For instance:  
Power relations; Rural-to-urban mobility and change; Changing aspirations and life trajectories; Changing socio-economic landscapes; Bottom-up approaches / renegotiating culture and cultural processes; Repackaging cultural heritage into new livelihood opportunities; and ultimately how to decolonize delta research?

Chat:

used solutions support local community response to climate change? What is the role of mangroves in supporting coastal inhabitants' livelihoods? Thanks!

from Lawal to everyone: 6:08 PM  
Prof. Ajay: Thank you for the very insightful talk. Not sure if this question is relevant, but how can investment in culture (s) be relevant to climate change adaptations?

from Lawal to everyone: 6:15 PM  
That is exactly what I wanted to confirm. Brilliant!

Figure 6: Round the table discussion

The symposium ended with a group photo (Figure 7). Over 100 participants registered for the conference (Figure 8) coming from 14 countries, and holding various occupations (faculty

members, farmers, students, journalists, etc.). Actually, attending the symposium were more than 90 participants, and we provided an e-certificate for 66 participants who requested this.

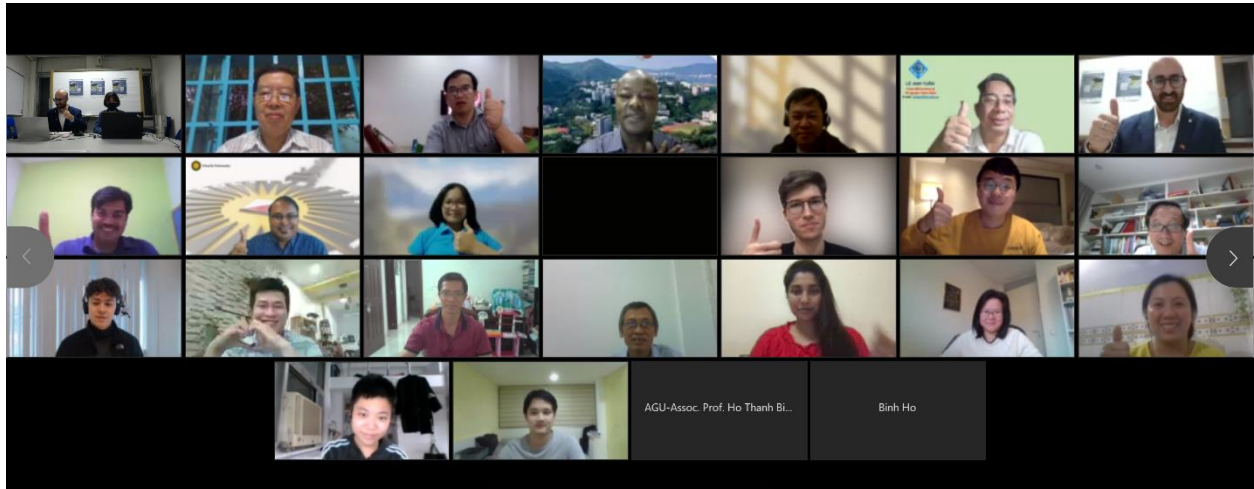


Figure 7: Group photo

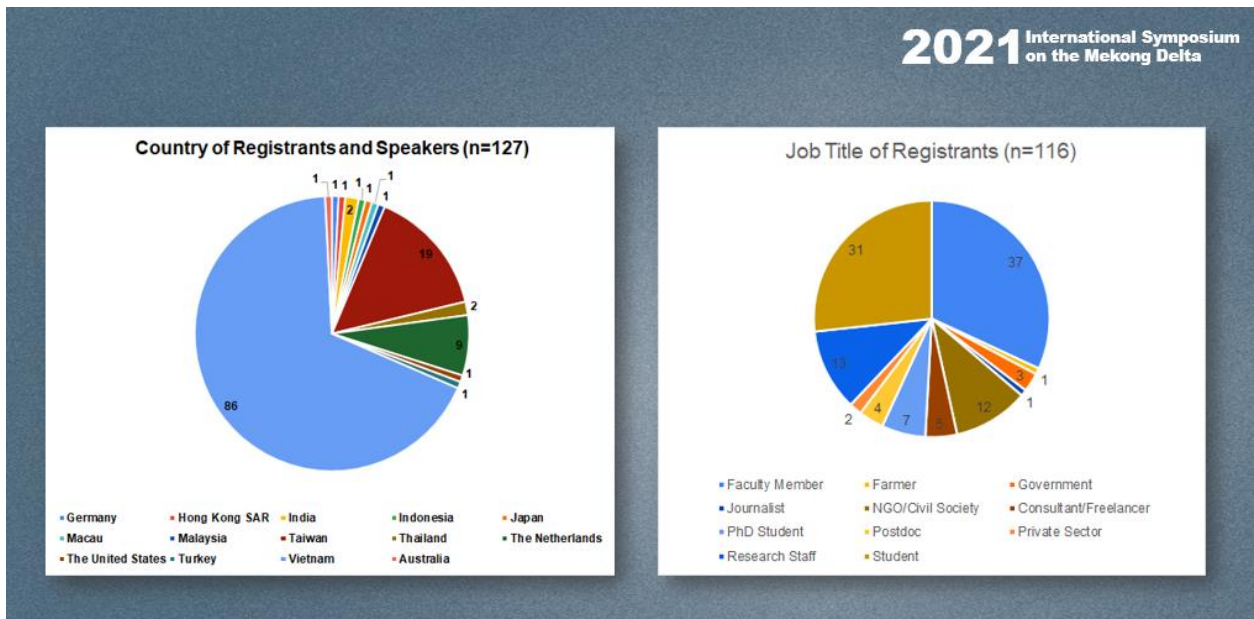


Figure 8: Participants of the conference

In conclusion, the symposium was a great success, and we would like to thank the Ministry of Science and Technology, Taiwan and the Water, Climate & Future Deltas Hub, Utrecht University very much for the support. For the next year, we plan to hold a face-to-face conference in An Giang

University if the COVID-19 situation permits, and we are currently discussing a separate workshop for the HUMDelta project, once the data collection activities are completed and analyzed. The next step of this symposium is also to create a research network, and explore whether we could organize a special issue for an academic journal, and explore synergies whether the topics presented in this conference could be transformed into a journal article.

## 中文摘要

2021 湄公河流域氣候移民座談會—「湄公河三角洲及其他亞洲三角洲的氣候變遷、環境遷徙及地層下陷」於 2021 年 11 月 26 日下午三點至六點半(台北時間)於線上舉辦，本座談會由國立臺灣師範大學及荷蘭烏特勒支大學共同辦理，並由越南安江大學及堅江大學協辦。本活動主題根據國立臺灣師範大學 地理系 莫家俊助理教授所執行之科技部計畫「洪水還是撤離？湄公河流域下游洪水導致的遷移以適應氣候變遷的比較研究」而擬定，期望透過座談會分享當地學者之洞見並促成多方議題交流。

本座談會邀請來自六位湄公河流域的專家學者，分別針對「地層下陷、生物多樣性枯竭及水資源困境」及「跨界的水治理、水力發電、農業與生計」主題進行分享及討論；並由烏特勒支大學 HUM-DELTA 團隊的三位學者從不同文化視角探討「其他亞洲三角洲面對氣候變遷的調適及因應」，共計有來自 14 個不同國家、超過 100 名的參與者報名，座談會當天亦有超過 90 名的與會者出席，共同就湄公河流域的氣候變遷及環境移民等議題進行深度討論及學習。

**Appendix A: All PowerPoint slides of the speakers (only for internal use)**