

Join us for a special Melbourne Salon, following the official opening of the Alliance Française de Melbourne's New Caledonia Corner at the French Hub!

Wednesday 29th October 2025: 6-8pm

Jean Vanmai's *Chân Đăng* (1980) and the Tonkinese indentured workers in New Caledonia

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First published in 1980, and recipient of the prestigious *Prix de l'Asie* in the following year, Jean Vanmai's *Chan Dang* remains the only novel to recount the little-known story of Tonkinese indentured workers in colonial New Caledonia. Today, it stands as a key reference for understanding the experiences of indentured labour and the settlement of the Vietnamese diaspora in the South Pacific. By giving voice to these "shadow puppets" of history (Fer, 2014), Vanmai highlighted a community often overlooked both in New Caledonia, where thousands were sent to work between 1891 and 1939, and in their home country, Vietnam, where most eventually returned.

In this talk I will explore the challenges Vanmai faced in writing and publishing during a period of political unrest, and how his use of historical fiction reframed violence in ways that protected both victims and perpetrators. I will also introduce Clément Baloup's graphic novel *Les engagés de Nouvelle-Calédonie* (2020), a road-trip story which recounts the revival and transmission of the Chan Dang memories to younger generations. I conclude with reflections on our English translation of *Chan Dang* and its relevance for today's Anglophone readers.



Dr Tess Do is Senior Lecturer in French Studies at the University of Melbourne, where she teaches Francophone literature and culture. She has published widely on French-language writers of the Vietnamese diaspora and recently co-translated Clément Baloup's *Vietnamese Memories: Down Under* (2025).

Event includes:

Official opening of New-Caledonia Corner from 6pm to 6:45pm with drinks and canapés

Melbourne Salon talk from 7pm to 8pm

Alliance Française de Melbourne Level 1, 140 Bourke St, Melbourne

Free event but [registrations](#) required (spaces limited)

