UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

COURSE SYLLABUS

Cultures and Societies of Asia

2425-2-F0101R024

Course title

Cultures and societies of Asia

Topics and course structure

The course will deal with a fundamental aspect in the construction of modern, local and/or national societies in Southeast Asia: **the practices of welfare and gift both in their traditional and contemporary forms ranging from solidarity to hierarchical relationships of help, hospitality, and work**. The gift and “giving” will be examined in its symbolic dimension, for example in various religious world views, as well as in its inscription in moral economies.
A section of the course will introduce Erica Bornstein's analysis of **gift and philanthropy in India** as an example of the prism that can be used as a general interpretation beyond the Indian case. Each chapter of the book *Disquieting gifts* is going to be read and discussed in class. The vision of 2 ethnographic films will constitute a basis for further discussion.
Another section of the course deals with a **general introduction of Southeast Asia** as a region in its historical and geo-political aspect: the example of the development of Buddhist (Theravada) monarchies with the case study of Thailand will go alongside the example of the Indonesian transition from Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms to sultanates and the modern Indonesian state. Various articles and other documents will be read and discussed in the classroom.
A** third section of the course presents some examples of studies regarding welfare and the humanitarian enterprises in Indonesia** . Specific research will be presented and analysed (see reading list). Regarding post-catastrophe help, some fundamental notions are going to be approached such as trauma, resilience, social and individual reconstruction and rehabilitation, the condition of victimhood, the transition between victimhood and “ordinary” poverty, informal welfare as well as a specific focus on the study of childhood and youth. A special attention is going to be paid to visions of future. Although the ethnographies presented in the course concern Indonesia , the topics include fundamental authors in the anthropological approach.

Towards the end of the course, two research projects will be described by invited scholars.
Language. The course will be held in English and/or Italian depending on the composition of the class. **Erasmus students** are provided with special attention. **Students who are not fluent in English** can nevertheless participate to the course and choose a part of the reading list in Italian.

Objectives

The course aims to develop basic knowledge and understanding of welfare relationships in Asia, with a special focus on Southeast Asia.
The students will be required to connect the different parts of the course and develop a personal standpoint.
This will enable them to use the Asian experience as a general tool in the analysis of similar phenomena in other parts of the world.

Methodologies

50% Lectures. In-classroom discussion of texts, video or otherwise produced fieldwork materials.
50% Interactive learning. Shared readings. Autonomous suggestions coming from the students are welcome. Depending on the availability, a few researchers will be invited to present their researches.

Online and offline teaching materials

The course relies on an active collaboration between the teacher and the students both in reading and discussing shared texts and in evaluating original suggestions coming from the students. According to different inputs coming, among others, from the actualities of Southeast Asia, some materials will be made available online. The students will have the possibility to present in classroom chosen texts from the reading list and/or from the classroom materials. The course website is to be considered as the main reference for exchange and communication on the course. All the texts in the reading list are available in the Univsrisity Library.

Programme and references

1. Bornstein, E. (2012). *Disquieting gifts: humanitarianism in New Delhi*. Stanford University Press.
2. Bolotta, Giuseppe, 2021. *Belittled Citizens: The Cultural Politics of Childhood on Bangkok's Margins*, NIAS Press*.*
   3.1) ITALIAN SPEAKERS: Vignato, Silvia. 2020. *Le figlie delle catastrofi. Un'etnografia della crescita nella ricostruzione di Aceh*. Milano, Ledizioni. (for Italian speakers).
   3.2) NON-ITALIAN SPEAKERS
   Vignato, S. (2020). “Ganja in the Mountains, Sabu in the Sea”: The Rural Drug Landscape in Aceh, Indonesia. In *Living with Drugs* (pp. 109-123). ISTE.
   Vignato, S. (2017). Orphans, victims and families: An ethnography of children in Aceh. *Antropologia*, 4(2 NS).
   Vignato, S., (2020). Motherly Landscapes: Matrifocality, Marriage, Islam and the Change of Generation in Post-Conflict, Post-Tsunami Aceh, *East And west* 1, 29-98.
3. The students will choose one of the following texts/group of texts:

Smith, Catherine, (2018), *Resilience and the Localisation of Trauma in Aceh,* Indonesia, NUS Press.
Nooteboom, G. (2016). *Forgotten People: Poverty, Risk and Social Security in Indonesia* (p. 324). Brill.
Vignato, S., ed. (2017). Dreams of Prosperity: Inequality and Integration in Southeast Asia, Chiang Mai, Silkworm/EFEO

Non attending students are STRONGLY ADVISED to acquire a sounder picture of the area studies through the study of materials available on the course homepage as well as of an integrative text such as Church, Peter. 2022 (6th ed.) A Short History of Southeast Asia. London, Wiley.

Assessment methods

The exam aims to assess the students' knowledge of the texts included in the reference list as well as of the general frames explained during the lessons (for students who have attended the course). A good command of the basic elements of the region is expected. The active participation to the course is an element of evaluation. In-classroom presentations will also be an element of evaluation.
The examination consists of an interview (between 10 and 20 minutes) during which the student will expose parts of the textbooks and interact with the examiner on the topics of the course.

Office hours

To be decided through email.

Programme validity

two years

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

GOOD HEALTH AND WELL-BEING | GENDER EQUALITY | DECENT WORK AND ECONOMIC GROWTH | REDUCED INEQUALITIES | PEACE, JUSTICE AND STRONG INSTITUTIONS