UNIVERSITÀ
DEGLI STUDI DI MILANO-BICOCCA

SYLLABUS DEL CORSO

Culture e Società dell' Asia Meridionale e Sud-Est Asiatico - Formazione d'Area

2627-1-F0102R010

Course title

Cultures and Societies of South and Southeast Asia

Topics and course structure

Course topics and structure The course addresses a fundamental aspect in the construction of modern, local and/or national societies in South and Southeast Asia: the practices of welfare and giving in their traditional and contemporary forms, ranging from solidarity to hierarchical relations of help, hospitality and labour. Gift-giving and "giving" will be examined in their symbolic dimension — for example in various religious worldviews — as well as in their embeddedness in moral economies. Specific attention is devoted to the relationship between attitudes of help and the constitution of a cultural self.

1. First part (lectures 1–6, indicatively): an introduction to Erica Bornstein's analysis of gift-giving and philanthropy in India, used as a prism that can offer a general interpretive framework beyond the Indian case. Each chapter of Disquieting Gifts will be read and discussed in class. Ethnographic film screenings will provide the basis for further discussion.
2. Second part (lectures 7–12, indicatively): a general introduction to Southeast Asia as a region from a historical and geopolitical perspective, focusing on Indonesia's transition from Hindu-Buddhist kingdoms to sultanates and the modern Indonesian state. Various articles and other documents will be read and discussed in class. Among these is a classic reading in anthropology: Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 10 and 11.
3. Third part (lectures 13–18, indicatively): examples of studies on formal welfare and informal solidarity networks, youth poverty, and humanitarian enterprises in Indonesia. Specific research will be presented and analysed (see bibliography). With regard to post-disaster assistance, key concepts will be addressed, including trauma, resilience, reconstruction, and social and individual rehabilitation, the condition of

victimhood, the transition between victimhood and "ordinary" poverty, and informal welfare, with a specific focus on the study of childhood and youth. This year, particular attention will be devoted to the relationship between attitudes of help and the constitution of a cultural self (readings will be uploaded during the course). Although the ethnographies presented in the course concern Indonesia, the topics covered draw on authors fundamental to the anthropological approach more broadly. Toward the end of the course, two research projects will be presented by invited scholars.

Objectives

The course aims to promote:
Knowledge and understanding:
• Develop basic knowledge and understanding of welfare relations in Asia, with particular attention to Southeast Asia.
• Identify the fundamental concepts of the anthropological study of South and Southeast Asia.
• Understand and integrate different levels and scales of disciplinary and interdisciplinary analysis.
Applying knowledge and understanding:
• Use scientific literature in the analysis of contemporary Asian and Southeast Asian societies.
• Apply notions and analytical frameworks to the understanding of real, concrete situations.
• Master the critical anthropological gaze and the methodology appropriate to the area.
Making judgements:
• Understand the complexity of Asian societies and address biases arising from preconceived ideas.
• Evaluate personal and collective actions in light of situated awareness.
Communication skills:
• Express ideas, knowledge and arguments clearly.
• Write texts and reports using different forms of expression.
• Formulate well-founded judgements, integrating information from diverse and reliable sources.
Learning skills:
• Develop and refine learning methods, autonomously identifying and constructing topics and areas of study.

Methodologies

50% lectures.
50% interactive teaching: case discussions. Viewing and discussion of visual or other material from the field. Discussion of texts.
One or two lessons shared with another course in the same semester.

Online and offline teaching materials

The course will develop through collaboration between instructor and students, both in the reading of selected texts and in proposals for supplementary material. Recommended texts are available in the library. Throughout the course, additional texts and materials (films, websites, interactive documents) will be indicated progressively, and, depending on the topic under discussion, some will be made available online. The course website will remain the primary reference point.

Programme and references

Students are required to study 4 texts, available in the library:

1. Bornstein, E. (2012). Disquieting Gifts: Humanitarianism in New Delhi. Stanford University Press.
   2.1) ITALIAN SPEAKERS: Vignato, Silvia. 2020. Le figlie delle catastrofi. Un'etnografia della crescita nella ricostruzione di Aceh. Milano, Ledizioni. (for those who read Italian).
   2.2) 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.
2. ONE text to be chosen among the following:
   • 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.
   • Stodulka, T. (2016). Coming of Age on the Streets of Java. transcript Verlag.
3. Classic readings:
   Clifford Geertz, The Interpretation of Cultures, Chapters 4, 5, 6, 10 and 11.
   Non-attending students are STRONGLY advised to acquire a historical overview of the region, for example: Church, Peter. 2022 (6th ed.). A Short History of Southeast Asia. London, Wiley.

Assessment methods

The examination aims to assess students' knowledge of the texts included in the reference bibliography and of the general frameworks presented during lectures (for students who have attended the course). A good command of the fundamental elements of knowledge of the region is required. Active participation in the course constitutes an element of assessment. In-class presentations will also constitute an element of assessment.
The examination consists of an **oral interview** (lasting 10–20 minutes) during which the student will present parts of the set texts and engage with the examiner on the topics covered in the course. Further details: **the examination will be oral only**.
Oral examination on the content of the course, aimed at assessing the knowledge acquired through the critical study of the texts included in the examination programme and of other materials made available, as well as active participation in the activities proposed during the course (for attending students only). No intermediate assessments are planned. The choice of the oral interview as the examination format is consistent with the objectives of the course, as it allows, through a situation of communicative dialogue, interaction with the student to assess their critical understanding of the course topics and their ability to draw connections between theory and practice. No intermediate assessments are planned.

Office hours

To be decided through email.

Programme validity

Course tutors and assistants

Sustainable Development Goals

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