SOSANT2140 – Regional ethnography: East and Southeast Asia

Assignments for regular take home exam Spring semester 2025

Assessment guidelines

The overarching aim of this course was to present a comprehensive picture of anthropological research on East and Southeast Asia, and to discuss a wide range of case studies, theoretical, as well as methodological approaches. Throughout the lectures and texts, we approached East and Southeast Asia from a transnational perspective, addressing both historical legacies and current trends that have shaped and continue to impact social and cultural lives in the region *beyond* the framework of the nation-state. The exam questions are intended to provide students with an opportunity to demonstrate both their understanding of some of the case studies discussed in the assigned texts, as well as the ability to mobilize key theoretical and methodological frameworks to address some of the trans-national dynamics that shape East and Southeast Asia.

In what follows, we provide both general and specific guidelines for the take home exam. These grading guidelines are intended to point examiners towards the themes and issues that should be covered and the nature of the material that needs to be engaged with in relation to particular grades.

A: Shows an excellent understanding of relevant literature, selects it and combines it in an excellent manner that shows the capacity for an independent analysis of the problem. Shows an excellent ability to account for both theoretical arguments and ethnographic details in the texts. The presentation is clear, logical and structured.

B: Shows a very good and comprehensive understanding of the key points raised in the literature, and combines the literature in a very good manner that shows some capacity for an independent analysis of the problem. Shows a very good ability to account for both theoretical arguments and ethnographic details in the texts. The presentation is clear, logical and structured.

C: Shows adequate understanding of the main themes of the question as addressed in the readings. Combines the literature in an adequate manner that shows some capacity for an independent analysis of the problem. Shows ability to account for both theoretical arguments and ethnographic details in the texts. The presentation is clear, logical and structured with some mistakes or problems.

D: Shows some or moderate understanding of some of the major themes but many important aspects are left out. Little or no independent argument separate from that in the texts or lecture notes. There is little combination of arguments or own analysis. The presentation has some consistent problems.

E: Rudimentary understanding of some of the key issues but more gaps in the key knowledge than demonstration of key knowledge. Presentation is not adequate. Displays misunderstanding of key points or texts.

F: Total, or almost total, lack of understanding of the key issues and inadequate use of relevant literature.

In addition to these general criteria, please see below for some indications of how the various questions can be answered. These are not to be understood as the only, nor necessarily as the best ways of answering the questions. In general, we are not looking for one particular answer, but rather encourage students to draw connections and show the ability to critically link case studies with theories and methodological approaches. Additionally, we prefer that you engage in-depth with fewer sources, rather than superficially with many texts, and thus show your ability to think critically and independently.

1) Examine the notions of "Southeast Asia" and "East Asia" and discuss the connections or differences within or between these regions from one or more of the following perspectives: family and kinship; ethnicity and nationalism; migration; environmental conservation; religion and spirituality; rural and urban life; economic development; "regional ethnography" and social anthropology.

→ A good answer should engage with the readings of Week 1 that discussed the notions of "East Asia" and "Southeast Asia". Beyond this, an essay can take diverse paths, based on the list of perspectives given in the essay prompt. Ideally, a good essay would draw on readings from other parts of the syllabus to think about patterns across East Asia and Southeast Asia as regions or about the notion of regional ethnography. One could ask: what makes these regions coherent or not; what connects or differentiates the diverse parts of "Southeast Asia"; what connections or differences there are between "East Asia" and "Southeast Asia"; or what has shaped the relations between the peoples, countries, and histories of East and/or Southeast Asia.

2) How do gender and/or kinship relations influence labour practices, people's livelihoods, and broader economics? Provide two examples from East and/or Southeast Asia.

→ Answers can engage with either the topic of gender or kinship, or both. One could draw on case studies of transnational migration to consider how certain labour and livelihood practices are gendered. Additionally, one could discuss the role of kinship in specific labour environments and social reproduction, and how this helps us understand contemporary East and Southeast Asia. A good essay would engage with readings from across the syllabus.

3) With examples from East Asia and/or Southeast Asia, discuss why we should pay attention to gods, spirits, cosmic forces, and people's spiritual, philosophical, or religious identities?

→ The themes of religion and spirituality ran through various readings across the syllabus. In this answer, one could highlight how a focus on spirituality – broadly understood – has helped anthropologists explore economics, kinship, ethnicity, environment, and so on. A good essay could discuss any of the examples from the readings, including: Chinese kinship principles; Islam, animism, and Christianity in

Malaysia and Indonesia; Korean shamanism; spirit possession and capitalism in Malaysia; Shintoism in a Japanese “non-religious” environmental aid organisation; Christianity in Karen nationalism; Islam in Han-Chinese representations of ethnic minorities; and the distribution of diverse religions as a way of discussing the notion of Southeast Asia.

4) Globalisation and urbanisation benefit local people. Critically examine this statement.

→ A good answer will critically engage with this statement by considering both benefits and drawbacks of globalisation and urbanisation for local people, while demonstrating an understanding of their economic, social, and cultural effects. One could show how their consequences are uneven, and sometimes unintended. Additionally, one could discuss how anthropologists have approached the phenomenon of globalisation in local contexts and subsequently theorised globalisation. A good essay would engage with readings from across the syllabus.

5) Globalization has brought new prosperity, but also heightened inequalities in East and Southeast Asia. Discuss this claim and provide one example from a rural context and one from an urban context.

→ Here, answers could depart from a discussion of what "globalization" means when approached from an East/Southeast Asian perspective. Additionally, answers could focus on specific cases in which communities benefitted and suffered from increased economic and cultural connectivity over the past decades, and how this transformed social relations. Lastly, answers could also discuss how "globalization" shaped the very definitions of, and relations between, urban and rural in East and Southeast Asia.