

# SOSANT2140 – Regional ethnography: East and Southeast Asia

## Assignments for regular take home exam Spring semester 2023

### 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) Outline James Scott's notion of Zomia, then debate one positive contribution of this notion to our understanding of East and Southeast Asia, as well as one key criticism that has been made against it.**

→ A good answer should include a critical assessment of how James Scott conceptualizes “Zomia” in his own writings, and how Scott’s Zomia is more than just a particular geographical area. In doing so, the answer should ideally (but not necessarily) draw on other texts and case studies to show how this understanding of Zomia has been utilized, but also criticized, by scholars working in the region. One could also address some of the conversations we had in class about how Zomia challenges traditional divisions of scholarly area, and what this tells us about how knowledge is produced, by whom, and for what purpose.

**2) Describe and discuss Anna Tsing's notion of "frontier," then apply it to at least one example of a frontier economy from the texts assigned.**

→ In this answer we will not primarily assess which specific texts are used to discuss Tsing’s notion of frontier, but rather how students demonstrate the ability to critically mobilize this notion to better understand a particular case study. One way to think about this is to ask oneself: what does Tsing’s notion of “frontier” allow me to uncover, that I would not be able to see/understand otherwise?

**3) What does a focus on spirituality add to the study of East and Southeast Asian forms of capitalism? Answer this question, and give two examples of how anthropologists have mobilised this perspective in the texts we read in class.**

→ Anthropologists have long demonstrated that “markets” are deeply shaped by cultural norms and social practices. In this answer, one could highlight how a focus on spirituality – broadly understood – has helped anthropologists identify specific forms of capitalist economies in East and Southeast Asian contexts. Students may want to also touch on whether spirituality is a form of resistance against capitalism, or can also be an adaptation strategy.

**4) 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.