

**University of Nottingham Malaysia Campus
School of Modern Languages and Cultures
Summer School July 5 – July 16, 2021**



Source: <http://www.seameo-innotech.org/SEAtoolkit/index.php/culture/item/45-crafts-and-artefacts>

Module Code: MLAC2023

Politics, Culture and Media in Southeast Asia

Module Convenor: Dr Niki Cheong

Location/Times: Online (See itinerary for timing)

First lecture: July 5, 2021 (5.30pm Malaysian time)

Convenor Contact Details: TBC

This booklet contains information on:

- * Module outline
- * Programme overview
- * Schedule of classes and reading lists
- * Assessment



**The University of
Nottingham**

Module outline

“...by culture here I mean the actual grounded terrain of practices, representations, languages and customs of any specific society. I also mean the contradictory forms of common sense which have taken root in and helped to shape popular life”

(Stuart Hall 1996: 439)

The question about how “culture” (both in its real and imaginative sense) is connected to politics, political spaces and practices is a major problematic. In recent years, state-sponsored market liberalization and media (de-)regulation have sparked a mushrooming of a diversity of genres and formats in the mainstream media.

This module explores contemporary Southeast Asian politics, culture and media through analyses of hegemonic and counter-hegemonic practices within the “public sphere”, paying close attention to policies, propaganda and the notion of “citizenship”. It encourages students to question to the need/cause for resistance, dissidence and opposition increasingly taking place in the region, whilst constantly being mindful of the political/social structures that control the very formation of (imagined) progressive alternatives. Deploying examples from various forms of cultural production (including film, visual art, and news media), students will be challenged to consider the changing historical relationships among political power, cultural production and everyday life.

Students will also have the opportunity critically to reflect on conceptual and methodological issues such as: the different subjectivities involved in thinking about the East alongside “Western” notions of democracy and nation-states; the multiple meanings and forms of ‘culture’ in the past and in historical analysis; the nature of power and legitimacy in the construction of social, national, ethnic and gender identities; and the subtle productive and enabling dimensions of societal power.

Discussions will largely engage with issues arising from the mixed political landscape of Southeast Asia.

Module Structure

This module is taught online by means of guided discussions via lectures, seminars and guest talks. The aim of the sessions are to ensure not only that each participant has understood the texts adequately and thus has grasped the key elements of each methodological approach, but also to encourage critical assessment of the texts, methods, and relevant discourses within the scope of the module.

You should not only read the texts but also take notes. You are also encouraged to meet up virtually with your coursemates before tutorials to discuss the texts and to share your understanding and any difficulties you might have with the texts with each other.

You should come prepared to share your knowledge, questions and views with the tutorial group. It is helpful to take some notes during the tutorial and also during the other sessions. If you experience any difficulties with a particular tutorial or the module as a whole you should consult the module convenor.



Preparing for Lectures

For the lectures and seminars, you should attend online sessions with

- copies of the essential reading
- your notes on the texts you have read
- points for discussion or questions
- examples from your home country/country of interest

Module Aims

This module aims to enable students to think about contemporary Southeast Asia and, specifically, to engage theoretically with that role of culture in social development and in the establishment and evolution of the postcolonial states. It will also enable students to enhance and develop a range of intellectual and transferable skills, in particular the evaluation of primary source material, as listed below.

Learning Outcomes

- a. Knowledge and understanding. By the end of the module, students should be able to:
 - demonstrate a broad acquaintance with the changing historical relationships among political power, cultural production and everyday life in Southeast Asia.
 - interpret the political meanings and significance of a range of key cultural texts in various genres
 - evaluate different responses to and interpretations of Southeast Asian cultural development
- b. Intellectual skills. By the end of the module, students should be able to:
 - think critically and imaginatively about Southeast Asian cultural development
 - engage with key problems in the interpretation of cultural history
 - read and evaluate critically primary source documents in a range of genres
 - assess and evaluate a range of approaches to understanding cultural history
 - construct coherent and independent arguments on the subject matter
- c. Professional/Practical Skills. The module will develop students ability to:
 - analyse information and arguments from a range of primary and secondary sources
 - use IT to complete written assignments
- d. Transferable skills. The module will also develop students ability to:
 - manage large, incomplete and disparate bodies of knowledge
 - develop oral and written communication skills
 - work with other students on the module researching in primary and secondary sources
 - take responsibility for their own learning
 - demonstrate IT skills in research and presentation



Module Assessment

| | | Deadline |
|--|----------------------------|-----------------|
| Live (Online) Group Presentation (30%) | 10 minutes + Q&A per group | 15 July 2021 |
| Post-event assessment (70%) | 2,000 word essay | 31 July 2021 |

Students should submit the assessment via Moodle *and* to the following email address:

TBC

Your essay should demonstrate (i) detailed knowledge of at least one major theorist, critical movement or problem area; (ii) understanding of the theoretical issues raised by the material investigated; (iii) critical appreciation of the limitations of a theoretical approach; (iv) ability to apply the theoretical approaches covered to contemporary phenomena.



Recommended Reading

Kuan-Hsing Chen and Chua Beng Huat (eds.) (2007). *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*. London and New York: Routledge

John Nguyet Erni and Siew Keng Chua (eds.) *Asian Media Studies*, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005

Joel S. Kahn (ed.) (1998) *Southeast Asian Identities: Culture and the Politics of Representation in Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand*, Singapore: ISEAS

Joel S. Migdal (1988) *Strong Societies and Weak States: State-Society Relations and State Capabilities in the Third World*. Princeton: Princeton University Press.

James Curran and Myung-Jin Park (eds.) (2000) *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. London and New York: Routledge

John Storey (1998). *An Introduction To Cultural Theory And Popular Culture*. Athens: The University of Georgia Press.

John Tomlinson (1991). *Cultural Imperialism*. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins. 1991.

Graeme Turner (1990). *British Cultural Studies: An Introduction*. London and New York : Routledge.

Robert Atkins and Svetlana Mintcheva (eds.) (2006). *Censoring Culture: Contemporary Threats To Free Expression*. New York: The New Press.

Tony Bennett et al. (eds.) (1981). *Culture, Ideology And Social Process*. London: Batsford Academic.

Simon During (ed.) (1993). *The Cultural Studies Reader*. London : Routledge.

Programme Overview (Subject to change)

| | DATE | SESSION |
|----------|--------------|--|
| 1 | 5 July 2021 | Introduction to Politics, Culture and Media in Southeast Asia Activity: Virtual Quiz on Southeast Asia |
| 2 | 6 July 2021 | Lecture 1: Orientalism and Cultural Imperialism Workshop: Breakout rooms for group discussion/peer research Lecture 2: Decolonizing Southeast Asia |
| 3 | 7 July 2021 | Lecture: Hegemony, Control and Regulation Online Plenary: Media practitioners from SEA (TBC) Activity: Opportunity to talk to journalists and other media practitioners about their work and experiences |
| 4 | 8 July 2021 | Lecture: Propaganda and Political Communication Workshop: Breakout room for group tasks |
| 5 | 9 July 2021 | Lecture: Politics and Citizenship Activity: Group work in preparation for Final Presentation |
| 6 | 12 July 2021 | Lecture: Media Technologies and Social Movements in Southeast Asia Workshop: Digital Ethnography tasks (Case studies) |
| 7 | 13 July 2021 | Popular Culture in Southeast Asia Screening: Short films from the region |
| 8 | 15 July 2021 | Guest speaker: Ian Yee, R.AGE (Malaysia), Peabody-nominated investigative journalism team (TBC) Workshop: Live Group Presentations |
| 9 | 16 July 2021 | Bringing all together: Wrap Up Session |



Detailed Session Information

Session 1:

Orientalism and Cultural Imperialism



Ahmed Ben Hassan (Rudolph Valentino) and Lady Diana Mayo (Agnes Ayres), *The Sheik* (1921)

This session will offer an overview of the scope of politics, culture and media that will be discussed in the forthcoming sessions. It will challenge the existing definitions and (pre-) conceptions of these terms and highlight the various discourses that seem to influence/dominate the way we think about the East/Southeast Asia/the “Other”. We will consider the relevance of Western notions pertaining to media and cultural imperialism, and discuss the (many) contradictions when situated within the context of Southeast Asia.



Essential Readings

Sun Ge, ‘How Does Asia Mean?’ pp.9-65, in Kuan-Hsing Chen and Chua Beng Huat (eds.) *The Inter-Asia Cultural Studies Reader*, London and New York: Routledge 2007

Wang Hui, ‘The Politics of Imagining Asia: A Genealogical Analysis) pp.66-102 (ibid.)

Edward Said, ‘Chapter 1: The Scope of Orientalism’, pp. 29-110 in Said, Edward, *Orientalism*, London: Penguin, 2003.



Session 2: Hegemony, Control and Regulation



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In this session, we will look at how cultural policies necessarily (often implicitly) control the minds and movements of society, albeit systematically disguised as a useful tool to promote multi/interculturalism. We will consider the role and implications of such policies on the rights of the displaced and marginalized within the population. It is also useful to explore how censorship and self-regulation is often legitimized by policymakers and how these (may) dominate cultural practices and expressions in the region.



Essential Readings

Lawrence Soley, 'Private Censorship, Corporate Power', pp.15-28, in Robert Atkins and Svetlana Mintcheva (eds.) *Censoring Culture: Contemporary Threats To Free Expression*. New York: The New Press, 2006

Yuvi Thanagarajah and S.T. Hettige, 'Policy, State, Nation-State and Ethnicity in Sri Lanka', pp.152-185 in Abdul Rahman Embong (ed.) *Rethinking Ethnicity and National-Building: Malaysia, Sri Lanka & Fiji in Comparative Perspective*, Selangor: PSSM, 2007



Session 3: Propaganda and Political Communication



This session will look at propaganda and political communication in the Southeast Asian context, looking at how this works in the interest of maintaining political power for the current party. Propaganda in this region include official mouthpieces of governments, media institutions and online channels. This session will also include discussions on censorship and the many forms it takes including reverse censorship and self-censorship, among others.



Essential and Further Readings

Essential Reading:

Nain, Zaharom (2000). 'Globalised theories and national controls: The state, the market and the Malaysian media', in Currant and Park (eds) *De-Westernizing Media Studies*. London: Routledge, pp.139-153.

Duncan McCargo (2003). 'Media in Times of Crisis: Media and Democratic Transitions in Southeast Asia' in McCargo, D., *Media and Politics in Pacific Asia*. London & New York: Routledge.

Cherian George (2008). 'Framing the Fight Against Terror: Order Versus Liberty in Singapore and Malaysia' in Sen, K. & Lee, T. (2008) (eds.) *Political Regimes and the Media in Asia*. London & New York: Routledge.



Session 4: Politics and “Citizenship”



<http://www.nst.com.my/news/2017/01/206594/initiative-make-rukunegara-preamble-constitution-launched>

This session will discuss the formation of Malaysia and the nurturing of the “Malaysian” identity, focusing especially on the historical foundations of nation-state building. Among others, the main focus would be on defining the “national” identity and discussing and evaluating the many political framework and social and economic policies that have been introduced to achieve the “Malaysia” nation-state.



Essential and Further Readings

Essential Reading:

Yeoh, Brenda. (2005) The Global Cultural City? Spatial Imagineering and Politics in the (Multi)cultural Marketplaces of South-east Asia. *Urban Studies* 42: 945

Faist, Thomas. (2000): Transnationalization in international migration: implications for the study of citizenship and culture, *Ethnic and Racial Studies*, 23:2, 189-222

Filomeno V. Aguilar Jr. (1999): The triumph of instrumental citizenship? Migrations, identities, and the nation-state in Southeast Asia, *Asian Studies Review*, 23:3, 307-336



Session 5: Media Technology and Social Movements in Southeast Asia



This session will engage with and critically examine debates regarding the purported roles and benefits of communication technologies, both globally and within Southeast Asia, with a particular focus on their role in political communication and change. It will introduce students to a historical-theoretical perspective on emergent or 'new' media technologies, focusing on the social structures, forces and processes underlying these technologies and their development, before exploring the relationship between communication technologies and centres and processes of political and economic power.



Essential Readings

Dahlgren, P. (2001). 'The Public Sphere and the Net: Structure, Space, and Communication' in Bennett, W.L. & Entmann, R. (eds.) (2001), *Mediated Politics: Communication in the Future of Democracy*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

Lievrouw, L. (2011). Chapter 2: The roots of alternative and activist new media. *Alternative and activist new media*. Polity: Cambridge & Malden.

George, C. (2005), 'The internet's political impact and the penetration/participation paradox in Malaysia and Singapore', *Media, Culture, Society*, Vol. 27, No. 6, pp: 903-920.



Session 6:

Popular Culture in Southeast Asia



This session will explore the diverse nature of Southeast Asian nations and the various ethnic, linguistic, cultural and geographical divisions that continue to exist within the modern nation state. It will look at various media text produced in the region and its influences. The session will revisit some of the ideas from earlier sessions including imperialism, control, indigenous ideas and the role of ASEAN. It will also explore the role of popular culture in Southeast Asia's socio-political landscape.



Essential Readings

Ubonrat Siriyuvasak, 'The Culture Industry and Asianization' pp.149-180 in Doobo Shim et al. (eds.) Pop Culture Formations Across East Asia, Seoul: Jimoondang, 2010

Koichi Iwabuchi, 'Discrepant Intimacy: Popular Culture Flows in East Asia' pp.19-36 in John Nguyet Erni and Siew Keng Chua (eds.) Asian Media Studies, Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2005

John Clarke et al. 'Sub Cultures, Cultures and Class' pp.53-80, in Tony Bennett et al. Culture, Ideology and Social Process: A Reader, London: The Open University Press, 1981



ASSESSMENT (TBC)

Post-event assessment

Answer ONE of the following questions in no more than 2,000 words.

1. Critically evaluate the notion that globalization is leading to the weakening of local cultural identities, resulting in the production of new, arguably hybrid, cultural meanings and attitudes.
2. Discuss the implications of (state) censorship and self-regulation on cultural practices and freedom of expression within the context of a particular nation-state. Reflect also on notions of agency and resistance in relation to such practices.
3. Why do Southeast Asian political leaders control the media in their respective countries? Using at least one country as example, critically analyse how successful these efforts are and what implications these actions may have on their respective communities.
4. Critically evaluate the politics and role of digital media in terms of activism, suppression and mobilization of the masses. Consider how these “new” forms of interaction may implicate the way societies negotiate with existing hierarchical and hegemonic structures.