

THEO299

Religions and the Southeast Asian Societies

Instructor: **Nguyen Quang Dung, Ph.D.**

Class Time: Tuesday, 1:30 – 4 pm

ABOUT THE COURSE:

Interdisciplinary approach in Southeast Asian Studies to religions in Southeast Asian societies prefers to tackle the dynamics of religious practice as they play out in social, cultural and political life, at multiple levels. We will explore ways religions are localized and interpreted in a wide range of regional setting, which allows the rethinking of religions in relation to various aspects of the contemporary societies of Southeast Asia.

This module will cultivate **the following learning outcomes:**

(1) An appreciation of religious dynamics in Southeast Asia, particularly the specifically localized ways doctrine and practice are manifested.

(2) More insights into the interplay of major religious traditions with folk practices

(3) A critical perspective of the impact of religions in the region's political sphere -- including case studies of religious extremism and nationalism.

And finally, (4), a field trip to explore religion as it is practiced in southern Vietnam.

ASSESSMENT:

This is a 100% CA module. There is no final exam.

The assessments are as follows:

Participation (discussion in class – 40%) : You are required to complete ALL the required readings for each week and to participate substantively in all class discussions. To maximize participation, students should prepare the readings conscientiously, take notes on it, ask questions of it, and think deeply about it, all in advance of class. You will be asked on a rotating basis to provide thoughtful and analytical questions, based on the readings. Guidelines for reading assigned materials:

- What is the argument(s)? Compelling?
- What types of evidence/source material are used to support the argument(s)?
- What are the implications from the case study of the reading to the broader religious context of Southeast Asia?

Reflection Essay (30%): Each student will write on a theme (1500-2000 words) as listed in the syllabus, based on relevant assigned readings. For example, you choose to write on Syncretism in Southeast Asia (see theme 8), you need to primarily base on the

assigned readings of this theme (Hoskins, J. 2014 and Kitiarsa, P. 2005). On the first day of the class, students will draw straws for themes to write on (from theme 3 to theme 8). The essay has to provide critical and meaningful thoughts and questions that arise in response to the assigned readings. It is not intended as a research exercise, so no further readings are required. The essays should be analytic, not a summary of the readings. **DUE time** for submission of essays: **by 1:00 pm, the date of the chosen theme**, to the instructor email: nguyenquangdung86@u.nus.edu -- For example: If you write a reflection essay on theme 3, it must be submitted to the instructor by 1:00 pm, 10 Sept.

Student Seminar (30%) : Week 13

A student presents an individual reflection on what he/she sees during the field trip. Your analysis must be put in a comparative framework, which addresses local practice of the religious traditions as explored in the field trip. Slideshows, not exceeding 10 minutes each, must include photos taken during the trips, with insightful implications/interpretations. Other students will then be asked to offer a critique of this presentation and to argue either for or against the religion-related analysis made by the presenter. Since one key goal is to prepare for the professional world of interaction and debate, students are requested to refer to notes as little as possible in discussion.

(Student Seminar also welcomes presentations on Vietnamese religious practices and problems, based on personal observations / data collections apart from the fieldtrip.)

THEME 1 (27 August):

Introduction and Admin Matters (Introduction to the study of religions in Southeast Asia)

Readings:

Randall Nadeau. 2014. *Asian Religions: A Cultural Perspective* (Part 1: Religion & "Religion" and the Religions), Wiley-Blackwell.

THEME 2 (3 Sept.): Theravāda Buddhism in Mainland Southeast Asia

Keyes, Charles F. 1983. "Merit-Transference in the Karmic Theory of Popular Theravada Buddhism," in *Karma: An Anthropological Inquiry*. Charles F. Keyes and E. Valentine Daniel (eds.), Berkeley: University of California Press, pp. 261-86.

Keyes, Charles F. 2016. Theravada Buddhism and Buddhist Nationalism: Sri Lanka, Myanmar, Cambodia, and Thailand, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol.14, issue: 4, pp.41-52.

THEME 3 (10 Sept.): Local forms of Mahayana Buddhism in Vietnam

Paul Williams. 2009. Mahayana Buddhism: The doctrinal foundations (Introduction), pp.1-44, Routledge.

Soucy, A. 2007. Nationalism, Globalism and the Re-establishment of the Truc Lam Thien Buddhist Sect in Northern Vietnam, in Taylor, P. (Ed.), *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam*, pp. 342-370, ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

THEME 4 (17 August): Engaged Buddhism in Southeast Asia

John Whalen-Bridge and Pattana Kitiarsa. 2013. Introduction: “Buddhist Politics” as Emptiness: History and the Forms of Engagement in Asia, in in Whalen-Bridge J. and Kitiarsa P., *Buddhism, Modernity, and The State in Asia: Forms of Engagement*. Pp. 1-16, Palgrave Macmillan.

Nhat Hanh, Thich. 2008. "History of Engaged Buddhism: A Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, Hanoi, Vietnam, May 6-7, 2008," *Human Architecture: Journal of the Sociology of Self-Knowledge*: Vol. 6 : Iss. 3, Article 7.

Darlington S.M. 2013. Sacred Protests and Buddhist Environmental Knowledge, in Whalen-Bridge J. and Kitiarsa P., (eds.), *Buddhism, Modernity, and the State in Asia: Forms of Engagement*. Palgrave Macmillan, New York.

Documentary/Talks (watch in advance)

- TIME; 2008. Buddhist Monks In War And Protest

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8GGGanSfQn4>

- Engaged Buddhism: To Ensure A Future, We Must Act Today | Dharma Talk by Thich Nhat Hanh, 2006 10 12 (Plum Village);

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=b64AfUSfotU>

THEME 5 (24 Sept.): Confucianism and Vietnamese Society

Xinzhong Yao. 2003. "Confucianism," in Xinzhong Yao (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, pp. 1-11, London: Routledge

Keith Knapp. 2003. "Confucianism and Women," in Xinzhong Yao (ed), *The Encyclopedia of Confucianism*, pp. 161-162. London: Routledge

Grosse, I. 2015. Gender Values in Vietnam—Between Confucianism, Communism, and Modernization. *Asian Journal of Peace Building*, vol. 3, no. 2, pp.253-272.

The Economist – 8 June 2019, Vietnam has one of the highest shares of women in work in the world, <https://www.economist.com/asia/2019/06/08/vietnam-has-one-of-the-highest-shares-of-women-in-work-in-the-world>

THEME 6 (1 Oct.): Christianity in Southeast Asia

Bautista, J. 2014. “Christianity in Southeast Asia: Colonialism, Nationalism and the Caveats to Conversion”, in Wilfred, F. (ed.) *The Oxford Handbook of Christianity in Asia*. New York: Oxford University Press, pp. 215-230

Bautista, J. (2011) “The Bearable Lightness of Pain: Crucifying Oneself in Pampanga” in Andrzej Dańczak and Nicola Lazenby (eds.) *Pain: Management, Expression and Interpretation*, pp. 151-159, Oxford: Interdisciplinary Press.

CNN. 2019. *Every year a Filipino man marks Good Friday with an actual crucifixion. He just did it for the 33rd time.* <https://edition.cnn.com/2019/04/19/asia/philippines-crucifixion-practice-33rd-year-trnd/index.html>

THEME 7 (8 Oct.): Spirit Worship, Possession, Goddess and Magic in Southeast Asia

ABC News. 2019. “Vietnamese monks ordered to stop scamming faithful with ‘bad karma eviction’ ceremonies”, <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2019-03-24/vietnamese-monks-reprimanded-for-scramming-believers/10933142>

Taylor, J. 2015. “Popular Buddhism: monks, magic and amulets”, in Salemkink O. and Turner S. B. (eds.), *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*, pp. 219-230, Routledge: London and New York.

Vũ, T.T.A. 2015. The Modernization of Đạo Mẫu: The Impact of Political Ideology and Commercialism on the Worship of the Mother Goddess in Vietnam. *Journal of Indigenous Social Development*, vol. 4, no. 1, pp. 1-17.

Phuong, P. 2007. Empowerment and Innovation among Saint Tran’s Female Mediums, in Taylor, P. (Ed.), *Modernity and Re-Enchantment: Religion in Post-Revolutionary Vietnam*, pp. 221-249. ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute.

THEME 8 (15 Oct.): Syncretism in Southeast Asia

Hoskins, J. 2014. An Unjealous God? Christian Elements in a Vietnamese Syncretistic Religion, *Current Anthropology*, vol. 55. Issue 10, pp. 302-311.

Kitiarsa, P., 2005. Beyond Syncretism: Hybridization of Popular Religion in Contemporary Thailand, *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* vol. 36, no. 3, pp. 461-487

22 Oct.: No Class, North-Central Excursion

THEME 9 (29 Oct.): Fieldtrip to a Caodai temple, a Christian church and a Mahayana Buddhist Temple in Ho Chi Minh City

THEME 10 (5 Nov.): Islam and the states of Southeast Asian archipelago

ABC News. 2018. Fatwas, niqabs and 'acceptable standards': Is conservative Islam on the rise across Indonesia. <https://www.abc.net.au/news/2018-09-09/are-we-seeing-a-rise-in-islamic-conservatism-across-indonesia/10173972>

Sumaktoyo, N., 2019. How ‘moderate’ are Indonesian Muslims? <https://www.newmandala.org/how-moderate-are-indonesian-muslims/>

Shamsul, AB. 2018. Islam and Cultural Diversity in Malaysia as a Mirror for Southeast Asia, *Islam and Cultural Diversity in Southeast Asia*, vol.2. (edited by I. Tokoro & H. Tomizawa, TUFU: Tokyo).

THEME 11 (12 Nov.): Religion and Politics: Buddhism, Democracy, Nationalism and Ethnic Cleansing in Myanmar

New York Times. 2019. He Incited Massacre, but Insulting Aung San Suu Kyi Was the Last Straw, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/29/world/asia/myanmar-wirathu-monk-buddhism.html>

Walton, M. and Jerryson, M. 2016. The Authorization of Religio-political Discourse: Monks

and Buddhist Activism in Contemporary Myanmar and Beyond, *Politics and Religion*, vol. 9, no.4, pp. 794-814.

Documentary (watch in advance): ‘Burma VJ: Reporting from a closed country.’

(Going beyond the occasional news clip from Burma, the acclaimed filmmaker, Anders Østergaard, brings us close to the video journalists who deliver the footage. Though risking torture and life in jail, courageous young citizens of Burma live the essence of journalism as they insist on keeping up the flow of news from their closed country. Armed with small handycams the Burma VJs stop at nothing to make their reportages from the streets of Rangoon. Their material is smuggled out of the country and broadcast back into Burma via satellite and offered as free usage for international media. The whole world has witnessed single event clips made by the VJs, but for the very first time, their individual images have been carefully put together and at once, they tell a much bigger story. The film offers a unique insight into high-risk journalism and dissidence in a police state, while at the same time providing a thorough documentation of the historical and dramatic days of September 2007, when the Buddhist monks started marching. (Source: http://burmavjmovie.com/about_the_film/)

THEME 12 (19 Nov.): Religious Freedom in Southeast Asia

Jonathan Fox. 2016. Freedom of Religion in Southeast Asia: An Empirical Analysis, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp. 28-40.

Reg Reimer & Hien Vu. 2016. Towards the Rule of Law for Freedom of Religion and Belief in Vietnam, *The Review of Faith & International Affairs*, vol. 14, no. 4, pp.78-88.

THEME 13 (26 Nov.): STUDENT SEMINAR & CONCLUSION (Overall Discussion, with guiding questions from the instructor to be sent to students one week in advance)