ICIR 235 Strategic Networks in the Asia-Pacific

Course Description & Aims:
This course looks at strategic networks in the contemporary Asia-Pacific region. The course explores both the interconnectedness and the regional cultural, political, social and economic variations within the Asia-Pacific. Students are encouraged to apply a range of social science methods that are relevant to the social scientific study of the Asia-Pacific region and engage in interdisciplinary research.

An overview of the contemporary East Asian scene based on comparative politics and international relations theory. Issues are territorial conflicts, cross-strait relations, North-Korea/Six Party talks and East Asian Security architecture, economic models and limits of the developmental state, social issues (demographics, youth, old people), environmental issues and the state of democracy/democratization in East Asia and the Asia-Pacific. Students will understand; assess; analyze historical and contemporary issues of significance in the Asia-Pacific region.

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Assessment

Class participation 10%
Student activities 20%
Presentation 30%
Essay 40%

Course Learning Objectives:
At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. Describe and understand various influential networks in the Asia-Pacific region.
2. Analyze political, economic, and social issues in the Asia-Pacific region in a comparative perspective.
3. Discuss current and prospective challenges and opportunities facing different groups and networks in the Asia-Pacific region.
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**Assessment Methods and Criteria:**

The assessment is based on three components: classroom participation (30%), presentation (30%), and a final essay (40%).

1. **Classroom Participation 10%**
   Classroom participation is based on attendance, preparation for class and the quality of students’ participation in class discussions and in-class exercises.

2. **Student Activities 20%**
   Students will be assessed on their participation in student activities over the course of the term and the quality of their contributions there.

3. **Presentation 30%**
   Students are expected to identify a relevant research question in consultation with the instructor and do research on their chosen topic. They will then present their findings and argument to the class within 20 minutes. Afterwards, the presenters are expected to answer questions from the audience and to trigger and moderate a discussion about their presentation topic.

4. **Essay 40%**
   The final essay is a response of 3000 to 4000 words to one of several proposed essay questions. Students can come up with individual essay questions but need to seek approval from the instructor first. The paper should be well-organised, make a clear and compelling argument, contain a thesis statement, and fully cite all sources. Students should incorporate course readings as sources and adhere to academic conventions when writing their paper.
Introduction: Is the Asia-Pacific a distinct region?

**Topic description:** This week’s class introduces the main contents of the course and familiarizes students with the concept of the Asia-Pacific and the network approach.

**Key questions:** Does it make sense to approach the Asia-Pacific as a region? Why could it be helpful to study the Asia-Pacific in terms of networks and connections? Why has there not been the rise of an East Asian Federation or East Asian Union in the region?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will be able to critically engage with the notion of the Asia-Pacific and to discuss limitations and potential of the network approach.

**Readings and activities:**

**History and Memory in the Asia-Pacific**

**Topic description:** This week’s class will examine international relations in the Asia Pacific with special emphasis on China, Korea, Taiwan and Japan. It will look at how imperialism has influenced Japan’s relations with its neighbours in the present and how commemoration of the past is mobilized in political debates of the present. Students will be introduced to the wider contexts surrounding the discourses on the Nanjing Massacre, Yasukuni Shrine, the issue of “comfort women” and the Atomic bombs.

**Key questions:** How has imperialism influenced Japan’s relationships with her neighbours? How has the manner in which Japan surrendered affected its history during the post-war period from 1945 to the present? How is the narrative of national humiliation influencing China in the contemporary period?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will be able to understand how historical developments have shaped the Asia-Pacific region and evaluate the impact of colonialism and the Cold War on contemporary Asia-Pacific. Students will be able to analyze how memory debates have been a key challenge to regional integration.

**Readings and activities:**


**Film:** *The Grave of the Fireflies* (1988).

**Student activity:** The students will write a critical review of the movie and situate it in wider memory debates in Asia.

**Economic Networks in the Asia-Pacific**

**Topic description:** The class will outline the narrative of the “economic miracle”, the concept of the Developmental State, the Flying Geese Paradigm, the East Asian Economic Crisis, Abenomics, China’s Socialist Market Economy, inequality and social welfare in Asia-Pacific.

**Key questions:** Is there anything miraculous about the East Asian economic transformations? Can the economic development of China, Japan, South Korea or Taiwan serve as a model for other countries? What do we mean by “development”?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will be able to critically evaluate the concept of the developmental state and its applicability to the East Asian region. Students will be able to identify key issues in the economies of the Asia-Pacific and discuss the sustainability of economic development in the region.

**Readings and activities:**


**Student activity:** The students will debate whether dictatorship is the best path to development.

**Civil Society and Social Movements in the Asia-Pacific**

**Topic description:** This week will examine transnational networks of civil society and social movements in the Asia-Pacific region. Students will become familiar with the concept of Civil society and social movement theory and apply those ideas to their discussion of
authoritarianism and democratic politics in Asia-Pacific region. Case studies to be discussed in this week include the Tiananmen Massacre, the Labour Movement in Korea, the Anti-Nuclear Movement in Japan, Sunflower and Umbrella Movements in Taiwan and Hong Kong, the Candlelight Movement in South Korea, and the Me Too movement.

**Key questions:** How relevant is the concept of civil society to Asia-Pacific? What significance has the emergence of the middle class had for social activism and contentious politics in the region? Is there a distinctive model of East Asian democracy? How important are transnational links for the formation of social movements in the region?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will be able to critically reflect on the applicability of the concept of “civil society” to Asia-Pacific. They will be able to analyze important social movements in the region in terms of political opportunities, frames, and repertoires of contention and evaluate the significance of transnational social networks for social activism.

**Readings and activities:**

**Student activity:** Students will form small groups and choose a particular social movement in the Asian region, analyze it in terms of political opportunities, framings, and repertoires, and present their results to the class.

**Popular Culture in the Asia-Pacific**

**Topic description:** This week examines the spread of popular culture as one phenomenon that has created new links and networks across the Asian-Pacific region. Students will look at Cool Japan, Hello Kitty and cute culture, the Korean Wave, links between popular culture and soft power, and diverse sub cultures in the Asian-Pacific region.

**Key questions:** What is popular culture in Asia-Pacific? How does kitsch relate to popular culture? What accounts for the global success of Cool Japan and the Korean Wave?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will develop an understanding of important characteristics of Asia-Pacific popular culture. They will be able to analyze the historical, social and cultural environments that produce pop culture and discuss the potential of popular culture as a soft power resource.
Readings and activities:

Students activity 2: Students write a short, self-reflexive essay about their own engagement with a particular strand or genre of Asia-Pacific popular culture.

Review and Presentations

Topic description: This week offers an opportunity for review and student presentations.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to communicate complex ideas in an oral presentation. Students will be able to learn and work collaboratively and demonstrate interpersonal and intercultural skills.

Readings and activities:
- To be confirmed by the presenters

Migration, Mobility, and Identity Politics in the Asia-Pacific

Topic description: This week examines networks resulting from migration and mobility in the Asia-Pacific region. It will address labour migration, minority policies, cultural heritage preservation, tourism and look at very specific case studies such as the floating population in China, Tibet, Xinjiang, the Ainu, and the Zainichi in Japan.

Key questions: How is labour migration changing Asia-Pacific societies? How have nationalism and globalization affected ethnic identities in East Asia? What is the impact of tourism on the Asia-Pacific?

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to assess the impact of migration and mobility on identities in Asia-Pacific. They will be able to analyze minority policies in a comparative perspective and critically reflect on the importance of ethnicity for identity formation in the Asia-Pacific.
Readings and activities:


Student activity: Students will engage in a role play discussing the proposed development of tourism in an economically weak region with a significant share of ethnic minorities.

**Gender in the Asia-Pacific**

**Topic description:** The focus of this week’s class is on the role of gender in Asia-Pacific. It will discuss feminism and LGBT movements in East Asia, the family in East Asia, gender and the workplace in East Asia and analyze how gender shapes distinct networks in the region.

**Key questions:** How has economic development in Asia-Pacific affected men and women differently? How do women participate as social actors in development processes and practices similarly to and differently from men? What have been key concerns of the LGBT movement in Asia-Pacific? How are concepts of the family changing in Asia-Pacific?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will be able to apply gender as a theoretical lens through which to analyze Asia-Pacific networks. They will identify key challenges in the debates on gender and propose solutions for gender equality in the region.

Readings and activities:

Student activity 1: The students will identify a gender-related issue of inequality in the Asia-Pacific region. They will then develop suggestions on how to address the issue of inequality. They will compare their approaches and formulate policy recommendations in small groups.

Student activity 2: The students will select a popular brand or product in the Asia-Pacific and analyze its advertisements in terms of gender.

**Environmental Challenges in the Asia-Pacific**

**Topic description:** This week examines strategic networks in the Asian-Pacific region that have been formed to address issues of water pollution, air pollution, global warming and climate change.

**Key questions:** What are the most pressing environmental issues in Asia-Pacific? Does environmental degradation jeopardize economic growth in the region? What solutions have been proposed to deal with environmental challenges and how successful have such attempts been? How might environmental challenges contribute to regional integration or conflict?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will have sharpened awareness of environmental challenges and discuss environmental and economic concerns in Asia-Pacific within the sustainability framework.

**Readings and activities:**

Film: Chinese documentary Pollution (2014)

**Student activity:** Students will form small groups and analyze the issue of PM2.5 pollution from the perspective of public health, economic development, social inequality, international relations, and individual lifestyles. They will then present their results to the group and discuss potential solutions to PM2.5 pollution.

**China’s One Belt, One Road Initiative**

**Topic description:** This week introduces China’s efforts to create new networks and connections across the Asian-Pacific region through projects such as the New Silk Road, the One Belt, One Road initiative, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank.

**Key questions:** What are the motivations and aims for China’s One Belt, One Road initiative? Has it been successful in fostering connectivity across the Asian region? How valid are
accusations of China acting as a neo-colonial power? Is China reshaping the international economic order?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will be able to discuss China’s One Belt, One Road initiative in the context of China’s political and economic transformation. They will be able to critically discuss infrastructure-based development and analyze the concept of “alternative globalization” in the context of China’s new Silk Road project.

**Readings and activities:**

**Student activity:** The students will conduct case study research on particular projects within China’s One Belt, One Road initiative. They will then design a promotional brochure in support of the project as well as a critical pamphlet warning against it.

**The Korean Peninsula**

**Topic description:** This week’s class looks at the division of the Korean Peninsula. It will familiarize students with South Korea’s postwar development, North Korea’s position in the international system, the Juche ideology, North-South relations, and the discuss on the potential for unification.

**Key questions:** Why has the Korean Peninsula been divided into two countries? How important are international factors for the division? What has characterized South Korea’s development? How has the North Korean state evolved and how has it managed to survive until today? What are the prospects for Korean unification?

**Expected learning outcomes:** Students will be able to demonstrate understanding of the complex dynamics underlying the division of the Korean Peninsula. They will be able to critically comment on the characterization of North Korea as a “rogue state” and be able to discuss the prospects for unification on the Korean Peninsula.

**Readings and activities:**
Student activity: Students will engage in a role play acting as North Korea, South Korea, China, Russia and the United States’ representatives in negotiations about North Korea’s nuclear weapons.

Review and Concluding Discussion

Topic description: This week is reserved for a review of the course contents and a concluding discussion.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to synthesize information and draw connections between different themes and subject areas. They will be able to communicate their ideas clearly and concisely and collaborate with others to formulate findings and ideas.

Readings and activities: TBA