



Mahidol University
International College

ICIR 214 Perspectives on Thailand

Course Description & Aims

This course explores Thailand, its peoples and its interactions with the rest of the world in the twenty-first century from a multidisciplinary perspective. Particular attention is paid to how a sense of Thainess has been constructed and deployed by numerous actors within Thai society in order to advance and legitimize their interests and goals in various spheres of life. Students will discuss some of the key political, historical, economic, anthropological and sociological issues facing Thailand today, such as the urban-rural divide and the treatment of minority groups, and examine how they have been understood by both Thai and foreign scholars.

Traditional Thai culture, social structure and hierarchy; interpersonal relations; krong jai; family; the role of Buddhism and animism; folk traditions (birth, life, marriage, death, etc.); the modern period; the impact of Chinese, Western and Japanese culture; business culture; the rural-urban division. Students will describe; explain; analyze assess major approaches to perspectives on Thailand in international relations.

Lecturer: Dr. James A. Warren

Office Number: Office Hours: by appointment

Email address: james.war@mahidol.ac.th

Assessment

Classroom participation	10%
Mid-term examination	30%
Group presentations	20%
Final examination	40%

Course Learning Outcomes

At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. Describe the main features of present-day Thailand's politics, history, economy, society and culture
2. Identify and examine how Thailand's politics, economy, society and culture have evolved over time
3. Discuss and evaluate the different theories and perspectives of Thai studies scholars
4. Compare and contrast aspects of Thailand's politics, history, economy, society and culture with other countries in the rest of the world
5. Understand, interpret and analyze the situation of ethnic minority groups within present-day Thailand

Week	Topic
1	Introduction: Thais, Thainess, Thailand
2	State-building and the Creation of a Thai National Identity
3	Authoritarian and Democratic Traditions of Thai Governance
4	The Development of the Thai Economy
5	The Thai Belief System
6	Review and Mid-Term Examination
7	Gender and Sexuality in Thailand
8	Rural Thailand
9	Urban Thailand
10	Group Presentations: Ethnic Minorities in Thailand
11	Globalizing Thailand
12	Review

Assessment Methods & Criteria

1. Classroom Participation (10%)

Classroom participation is based upon students being an active member of the class by contributing and participating in group work and class discussions in a polite and appropriate manner. Asking questions and answering those posed by the lecturer or other students is encouraged and rewarded. This assessment component is also dependent on students attending class regularly and punctually.

2. Mid-Term Examination (30%)

The mid-term exam will be held in Week 6 and cover all the topics from Weeks 1 to 5. It consists of 3 sections. Section A (20%) is a matching exercise that tests students on the definitions of key words including people, places, concepts, events and terms. Section B (30%) consists of a number of essay questions related to the lectures and activities done in class; the students write a short essay answering one of these questions. Section C (50%) consists of a number of essay questions based on the take-home weekly reading assignments; students write an essay answering one of the questions.

3. Group Presentations (20%)

The group presentations will be conducted in Week 10. In groups of three or four, students will do a presentation of 15-20 minutes on a selected ethnic minority in Thailand (70%). For further details of the topics to be covered see the Week 10 description. They will then take part in a 5-10-minute Q&A session (30%). See the Appendix for some recommended readings.

4. Final Examination (40%)

The final examination is held in Week 13. It consists of two sections, each worth 50% of the total mark. Section A consists of a number of essay questions based on the take-home weekly reading assignments done between Weeks 7 and 12. Section B involves reading a short, previously unseen text related to one or more of the topics covered in the entire course and then writing an essay answering the related question.

Week 1 – Introduction: Thais, Thainess, Thailand

Students will be introduced to the course outline and forms of assessment. Students and the lecturer will consider who the Thais are and what Thainess is. Attention will be paid to the way in which Thai can be both a nationality and an ethnicity, with the lecturer outlining different ways of conceiving identities particularly ethno-linguistic concepts such as that of the Tai-Kadai language family in East and Southeast Asia. Lastly, the concept of Thainess will be problematized.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to explain different definitions of Thai. They will also be able to discuss how Thainess is a difficult concept to define precisely.

Readings and activities:

Homework assignment for class discussion: Students define and specify what Thainess means to them

Week 2 – State-building and the Creation of a Thai National Identity

Students will be introduced to how the modern nation-state of Thailand and a corresponding national identity meant to encompass all the country's inhabitants emerged as a consequence of Western imperialism in Southeast Asia during the nineteenth century and continued to evolve as a result of great power politics in the twentieth century. Particular attention will be paid to the roles of Kings Mongkut (Rama IV) and Chulalongkorn (Rama V) and the Western discourse of civilization/*siwilai* that the Thai elite sought to coopt to counter the colonial threats from the British and French, the role of King Vajiravudh (Rama VI) in promoting a Thai nationalism based around the three pillars of 'Nation, Religion, Monarchy', the role of Luang Phibun Songkhram in promoting hyper-nationalism focused on Thai ethnicity and Western modernity during the Second World War, and the role of Field Marshall Sarit Thanarat in restoring the Thai monarchy as the central focus of Thai identity in the mid-twentieth century.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to explain how the nation-state of Thailand was constructed in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and how Thai identity has evolved during that time. They will also be able to evaluate the role of key figures in Thai history in shaping Thai identity. Lastly, they will be able to discuss the ideas of a Thai scholar regarding Thai identity.

Readings and activities:

Sulak Sivaraksa, 'The Crisis of Siamese Identity' in Craig J. Reynolds (ed.), *National Identity and its Defenders: Thailand Today*, rev. ed., Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2002

Week 3 – Authoritarian and Democratic Traditions of Thai Governance

This week's topic will chart the evolution of the Thai political system from the early nineteenth century through to the present day. Attention will be paid to 'traditional' notions of governance as

exemplified by the paternal monarch/*pho khun*, the development of the absolute monarchy under King Chulalongkorn and its overthrow by the Peoples' Party in 1932, and the subsequent shifts between democratic and authoritarian forms of governance since then. In particular, students will consider why the military has been a consistent political player since 1932 and why Thailand seems to have resisted democratization trends.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to describe how the Thai political system has evolved over the last two hundred years. They will also be able to discuss why the Thai military has played a prominent role in Thai politics. Lastly, they will be able to analyse the reasons why Thailand seems to display a tendency towards authoritarian forms of governance.

Readings and activities:

Chris Baker, 'The 2014 Thai Coup and Some Roots of Authoritarianism', *Journal of Contemporary Asia*, Vol. 46 No. 3 (2016), 388-404

Week 4 – The Development of the Thai Economy

This week's topic will outline the development of the Thai economy since the nineteenth century, starting with Thailand's inclusion into the capitalist world economy as a result of Western imperialism in Southeast Asia. Attention is paid to how Thailand became a primary producer in the global economy, exporting rice and other natural resources overseas, and a market for Western manufactures; how Thai governments in the mid-twentieth century sought to encourage economic diversification and industrialization through import-substitution policies; and how Thai governments in the late twentieth century began to focus on export-oriented growth. Moreover, students will be introduced to the economic challenges and conundrums that twenty-first century Thailand faces, specifically, the fact that the country suffers from high levels of both wealth and income inequality, and that it has undergone what some scholars have called 'technology-less industrialization' (meaning a failure to promote technological innovation and development) and is consequently stuck in the middle-income trap.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to describe the development of the Thai economy from the nineteenth century to the present day. They will also be able to discuss the reasons why Thailand displays high levels of inequality and why it is stuck in the middle-income trap. Lastly, they will be able to compare and contrast Thai economic development with that of other Asian countries.

Readings and activities:

Pornphant Ouyyanont, 'Thai Economic Growth: Retrospect and Prospect' in Michael J. Montesano, Terence Chong & Mark Heng (eds), *After the Coup: The National Council for Peace and Order Era and the Future of Thailand*, Singapore: ISEAS Publishing, 2019

Week 5 – The Thai Belief System

Students will be introduced to the main elements of the Thai religious belief system – namely Theravada Buddhism, Brahmanism and animism – and how this belief system has evolved over time and adopted and adapted elements of other religions as well. Students will consider the purposes and expression of religious beliefs in general and discuss how such beliefs might influence behavior in the Thai case. The lecturer will outline different theories of religious syncretism for explaining the interplay of the different components of the Thai belief system.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to describe the main elements of the Thai belief system and discuss how these elements interact with one another and shape the behavior of Thai people. They will also be able to explain different theories of religious syncretism and apply them to Thailand.

Readings and activities:

Pattana Kitiarsa, ‘Magic Monks and Spirit Mediums in the Politics of Thai Popular Religion’, *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2005), pp. 209-226

Week 6 – Review and Mid-Term Examination

Week 7 – Gender and Sexuality in Thailand

Students will be introduced to how the social sciences have tried to understand and theorize gender and sexuality both in general and in the case of Thailand. In particular, students will consider how gender is a social construct and what it means to be a man or a woman in their own societies. The lecturer will outline the two ideals of Thai masculinity – the macho provider and the monastic recluse – and the virtuous woman as the ideal of Thai femininity, along with how Thai society views and regulates male and female heterosexual behavior. Students will discuss how various groups within Thai society – such as *muai thai* boxers, female criminal bosses, ladyboys/*kathoey* and *tom*/male-identifying lesbians challenge, reinforce and/or subvert Thai gender norms.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to discuss how Thai gender and sexuality norms shape Thai behavior. They will also be able to discuss how Thai people challenge, reinforce and subvert these norms.

Readings and activities:

Jigsaw reading activity: 1) Pattana Kitiarsa, “‘Lives of hunting dogs’: *Muai Thai* and the politics of Thai masculinities’, *South East Asia Research*, Vol. 13, No. 1 (March 2005), pp. 57-90; 2) James Ockey, ‘God mothers, good mothers, good lovers, godmothers: Gender images in Thailand’, *Journal of Asian Studies*, Vol. 58 No. 4 (November 1999), pp. 1033-1058; 3) Han Ten Brummelhuis, ‘Transformations of Transgender: The Case of the Thai *Kathoey*’ in Peter A. Jackson & Gerard Sullivan (eds), *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent Boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, New York: The Haworth Press, 1999; and 4) Megan Sinnott, ‘Masculinity and *Tom* Identity in Thailand’ in Peter A. Jackson & Gerard Sullivan (eds), *Lady Boys, Tom Boys, Rent Boys: Male and Female Homosexualities in Contemporary Thailand*, New York: The Haworth Press, 1999.

Week 8 – Rural Thailand

Students will be introduced to main features of Thai village life and the ways in which rural Thai society has been transformed since the nineteenth century. Particular attention will be paid to the expansion of rice cultivation in response to Thailand's incorporation into the capitalist world economy and impacts this had upon Thai farmers and the villages in which they lived. Students will also consider the impact of Thai government policies to promote urbanization and industrialization from the mid-twentieth century onwards. One of the central themes of this topic is how the relationship between the city, represented by Bangkok, and the country, represented by the village has evolved from one of relatively benign neglect by the capital to one of domination and exploitation during the twentieth century.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to explain how economic changes have affected rural Thailand. They will also be able to discuss how the relationship between the capital and the countryside has evolved.

Readings and activities:

Andrew Walker, Ch. 6 'Community, Legibility, and Eligibility' in *Thailand's Political Peasants: Power in the Modern Rural Economy*, Madison, Wisconsin: University of Wisconsin Press, 2012.

Week 9 Urban Thailand

This topic starts with an explanation of how Bangkok fits the definition of a primate city (meaning a city that dominates a country or region in every aspect, politically, economically, culturally etc) almost perfectly. Students will then be introduced to how Bangkok has evolved as a city since its founding in 1782, with particular attention being paid to its role as a royal seat, a port city, and a regional hub for international organizations and communications infrastructure. Students will also consider how and why Bangkok has been the focus of Thailand's political upheavals and protests. Lastly, they will consider the ways in which the transportation infrastructure of Bangkok reflects and reproduces social class formations.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to explain why Bangkok meets the definition of a primate city and the implications of this for Thailand as a whole. They will also be able to describe how Bangkok has evolved since its founding. Lastly, they will be able to analyse the ways in which the transportation infrastructure of Bangkok reflects and reproduces social class formations.

Readings and activities:

Ellen Boccuzzi, Ch. 5 'Urban Mobility' in *Bangkok Bound*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm, 2012

Week 10 – Ethnic Minorities in Thailand

In a previous class, groups of students will have selected an ethnic minority in Thailand on which to do a 15-20-minute presentation. In their presentation, they are expected to describe various characteristics of that ethnic group, specifically: location and population, language, religious beliefs, interesting cultural practices, occupations, and relations between that ethnic group and

Thai society and the Thai government. Each presentation is followed by a 5-10-minute Q&A in which all students are expected to participate. See the Appendix for some recommended readings. If necessary, presentations will also be conducted in Week 11.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to understand, interpret and analyze the situation of and challenges faced by a selected ethnic minority group in present-day Thailand.

Readings and activities:

Group presentations on selected ethnic minority groups in Thailand with Q&A

Week 11 – Globalizing Thailand

This topic can be tailored to be done in just one class if an additional class is required for all the group presentations to be completed. This week's topic returns to the question of Thainess and how it continues to evolve in present-day Thailand as the country is increasingly integrated into a globalized world. In particular, students will consider how Thai culture has become increasingly commodified and how Thainess has become one identity option among many that both Thais and non-Thais can utilize.

Expected learning outcomes:

Students will be able to discuss how globalization has affected Thai identity and culture. They will also be able to discuss how scholars have used post-modernist theories to understand the changing nature of Thainess.

Readings and activities:

Kasian Tejapira, 'The Postmodernisation of Thainess' in Shigeharu Tanabe & Charles F. Keyes (eds), *Cultural Crisis and Social Memory: Modernity and Identity in Thailand and Laos*, Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press, 2002

Week 12 - Review

Appendix – Suggested readings for Group Presentations in Week 10

Ethnic Minorities in General

Schliesinger, Joachim, *Ethnic Groups of Thailand: Non-Tai-speaking Peoples*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 2000.

Schliesinger, Joachim, *Tai Groups of Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001.

Akha

Goodman, Jim, *Meet the Akhas*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1996.

Burmese

Pim Koetsawang, *In Search of Sunlight: Burmese Migrant Workers in Thailand*, Bangkok: Orchid Press, 2001.

Myint Wai (comp.), *A Memoir of Burmese Workers: From Slave Labour to Illegal Migrant Workers*, Bangkok: Thai Action Committee for Democracy in Burma (TACDB), 2004.

Chinese

Chan Kwok Bun and Tong Chee Kiong, 'Rethinking Assimilation and Ethnicity: The Chinese in Thailand', *International Migration Review*, Vol. 27, No. 1 (Spring 1993), pp. 140-168.

Cohen, Erik, *The Chinese Vegetarian Festival in Phuket: Religion, Ethnicity and Tourism on a Southern Thai Island*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 2001.

Skinner, G. William, *Chinese Society in Thailand: An Analytical History*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University Press, 1957.

Farang/Westerners

Pattana Kitiarsa, 'An Ambiguous Intimacy: *Farang* as Siamese Occidentalism' in Rachel V. Harrison and Peter A. Jackson (eds), *The Ambiguous Allure of the West: Traces of the Colonial in Thailand*, Hong Kong: Hong Kong University Press, 2010.

Pannapadipo, Phra Peter, *Phra Farang: An English Monk in Thailand*, London: Arrow Books, 2005.

Hill Tribes in General

Boyes, John, and S. Piraban, *A Life Apart: Viewed from the Hills*, Chiang Mai: Jaruek, 1987.

Lewis, Paul, *Peoples of the Golden Triangle: Six Tribes in Thailand*, London: Thames & Hudson, 1984.

McKinnon, John, and Wanat Bhraksasri, *Highlanders of Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1986.

Hmong/Miao

Geddes, William Robert, *Migrants of the Mountains: The Cultural Ecology of the Blue Miao (Hmong Njua) of Thailand*, Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1976.

Tapp, Nicholas, *Sovereignty and Rebellion: The White Hmong of Northern Thailand*, Singapore: Oxford University Press, 1989.

Isan/Northeasterners/Lao

Cohen, Erik, 'Bangkok and Isan: The Dynamics of Emergent Regionalism in Thailand' in Erik Cohen, *Thai Society in Comparative Perspective*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 1991.

Sakurai Yoshihide and Somsak Srisontisuk (eds), *Regional Development in Northeast Thailand and the Formation of Thai Civil Society*, Khon Kaen: Khon Kaen University Book Center, 2003.

Karen

Delang, Claudio O., (ed.), *Living at the Edge of Thai Society: The Karen in the Highlands of Northern Thailand*, London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2003.

Keyes, Charles F., (ed.), *Ethnic Adaptation and Identity: The Karen on the Thai frontier with Burma*, Philadelphia: Institute for Study of Human Issues, 1979.

Khmer

Sato, Yasuyuki, *The Thai-Khmer Village: Community, Family, Ritual, and Civil Society in Northeast Thailand*, Niigata: Graduate School of Modern Society and Culture, Niigata University, 2005.

Malay Muslims

Gilquin, Michel, *The Muslims of Thailand*, trans. Michael Smithies, Bangkok: IRASEC, 2005.

Montesano, Michael J., and Jory, Patrick (eds), *Thai South and Malay North: Ethnic Interactions on the Plural Peninsula*, Singapore: NUS Press, 2008.

Surin Pitsuwan, *Islam and Malay Nationalism: A Case Study of the Malay-Muslims of Southern Thailand*, Bangkok: Thai Khadi Research Institute, Thammasat University, 1985.

Mlabri/Phi-tong-luang

Bernatzik, Hugo Adolf, *The Spirits of the Yellow Leaves: The Enigmatic Hunter-gathers of Northern Thailand*, Bangkok: White Lotus, 2005.

Moken

Ivanoff, Jacques, *Moken: Sea-Gypsies of the Andaman Sea*, Bangkok: White Lotus Press, 1997.

Mon

Foster, Brian L., *Commerce and Ethnic Differences: The Case of the Mons in Thailand*, Athens: Ohio University Center for International Studies, 1982.

Siam Society (comp.), *The Mons: Collected Articles from the Journal of the Siam Society*, Bangkok: Siam Society, 1986.

Sikhs

Sidhu, Manjit Singh, *Sikhs in Thailand*, Bangkok: Institute of Asian Studies, Chulalongkorn University, 1993.

Tai Phuan

Roj Sotesiri, *The Study of Puan Community: Pho Si Village, Tambon Bang Pla Ma, Suphan Buri*, Bangkok: The Office of the Nation Culture Commission, 1982.

Snit Smuckarn & Breazeale, Kennon, *A Culture in Search of Survival: The Phuan of Thailand and Laos*, New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 1988.

Vietnamese

Poole, Peter A, *The Vietnamese in Thailand: A Historical Perspective*, Ithaca, New York: Cornell University, 1970.

Yao/Mien

Chob Kacha-ananda, *Thailand Yao: Past, Present, and Future*, Tokyo: Institute for the Study of Languages and Cultures of Asia and Africa, 1997.

Jonsson, Hjorleifur, *Mien Relations: Mountain People and State Control in Thailand*, Chiang Mai, Thailand: Silkworm Books, 2002.