



Historical & Political Context of Thailand

Course Details

Course Designator & Number: THAI 4101

Number of Credits: 4

Language of Instruction: English

Contact Hours: 60

Instructor: Napakadol (Ik) Kittisenee, M.A.

Course Description

This course explores the history of modernization, conditions of social transition, and current issues that characterize Thailand and influence relationships among various social groups. Students will enhance their understanding of the process of modernization and multi-level adjustment of Thai society in different historical contexts. Cultural diversity, political transition, and economic development are integral in analyzing and understanding these topics.

Thailand is unique in southeast Asia for its lack of colonization. It also has a long history of development in southeast Asia, serving as a regional hub for international development. This course will examine the development process in Thailand, its political and social history, and especially the current struggles of modernity and as an emerging economy in southeast Asia.

While many of the basic issues of development have been successfully dealt with (literacy is high, clean water and basic needs are met, etc.), Thailand is now dealing with growing inequality, challenges of post-modernity, and increasing demand for popular participation in politics within a patron-client-based society.

Course Objectives

The objectives for this course are to:

- gain an overview of the history of Thailand with a focus on key transition periods;
- understand the background of the current political, social, and economic situation;
- and enhance students' analytical skills in regards to observations from field studies and other sources of information, such as films and mass media.

Methodology

The course will integrate course lectures and readings with group discussions and seminars. Experiential field studies will also be an important component of the course. Guest lecturers will also be invited to share their experiences with students. Keeping up with readings, materials presented in class, and assignments is critical for success during this course.

Required Reading / Materials

- Embree, John F. 1950. "Thailand: A Loosely Structured Social System," *American Anthropologist*, Vol.52, pp.181-193.
- Eosewong, Nidhi. 2003. "The Thai Cultural Constitution," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, Issue 3 (March).
- Evers, Hans-Dieter (ed.). 1973. *Modernization in Southeast Asia*, Singapore: Oxford University Press.
- Feungfusakul, Apinya. 2008. "Making Sense of Place: A Case Study of Vendors and Small Entrepreneurs in the Chiang Mai Night Bazaar," *Imagining Communities in Thailand: Ethnographic Approaches*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1973. *Interpretation of Culture: Selected Essay*. New York: Basic.
- Johnson, Andrew A. 2017. "Land and Lordship: Royal Devotion, Spirit Cults and the Geo-Body," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, Issue 22 (September), *Thai Cosmic Politics: Locating Power in a Diverse Kingdom*.
- Keyes, Charles F. *Millennialism, Theravada Buddhism, and Thai Society*, *The Journal of Asian Studies* Vol. 36, No. 2 (Feb., 1977), pp. 283-302.
- Keyes, Charles F. "Mother or Mistress but Never a Monk: Buddhist Notions of Female Gender in Rural Thailand," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 1984), pp. 223-241.
- Marston, John A.. 2014. *Ethnicity, Borders, and the Grassroots Interface with the State: Studies on Mainland Southeast Asia in Honor of Charles F. Keyes*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
- Tosakul, Ratana. 2010 "Cross-border marriages: experiences of village women from Northeastern Thailand with Western men," in *Asian Cross-border Marriage Migration: Demographic Patterns and Social Issues*, Amsterdam University Press, IIAS.
- Winichakul, Thongchai., *The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects, 1885-1910*, lead article in *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton, London: Curzon Press, 2000: 38-62.
- Yoshinori, Nishizaki. 2002. "Provincializing Thai Politics," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, Issue 1 (March), *Power and Politics*.

Grading

Grading Rubric

Letter Grade	Score or Percentage	Description
A	93–100	Achievement that is outstanding relative to the level necessary to meet course requirements.
A-	90–92	Achievement that is significantly above the level necessary to meet course requirements.
B+	87–89	
B	83–86	
B-	80–82	Achievement that meets the course requirements in every respect.
C+	77–79	
C	73–76	
C-	70–72	Achievement that is worthy of credit even though it fails to fully meet the course requirements.
D+	67–69	
D	60–66	
F	0–59	Represents failure (or no credit) and signifies that the work was either (1) completed but at a level of achievement that is not worthy of credit or (2) was not completed and there was no agreement between the instructor and the student that the student would be awarded an I.

Summary of How Grades Are Weighted

Assignments	Percentage of Grade
Attendance and class participation	10%
Unit essays (5% each)	40%
Field studies	25%
Final presentation	25%
Overall grade	100%

Assessment Details

Attendance & Class Participation

Students are expected to be active and engaged during the classes, which means asking questions, completing the readings beforehand, and participating in class activities. Due to the intensive nature of the MSID classroom phase, attendance is required, and skipping class is discouraged. Missing a significant number of classes will result in a grade reduction. This is worth 10% of the grade.

Weekly Essays

Each weekly essay focuses on a group of related issues, seminars, readings, and field studies. Students will be introduced to the writing style expected to be used for all of the weekly essays and other written assignments for the course. At the end of each week students will write a short essay (2-3 pages) about the content from that week. The essays should follow the following rubric:

- What particular issue / seminar / reading did you find particularly interesting during this Unit and why?
- How does this issue relate to the larger topic of this theme?
- How does this issue relate to the broader issues of international development?
- What questions does this raise for you related to this theme that you would like to explore further?

Each essay is worth 5%, for a total of 40% of your grade. Essays are due on the Monday following the week, with the final week 8 essay due on the final Friday. Students will receive feedback on weekly writing assignments with the expectation that feedback will be incorporated into second drafts and future writing assignments for the course.

Field Studies

Each course will have a number of short field studies as well as a larger weeklong Extended Field Study. In addition to the weekly essay, students will be expected to be engaged and active learners during the field studies. This means asking questions, being an active and engaged member of the

group, completing assignments specific to the field study, and following all cultural, safety, and related guidelines for the field study. This is worth 25% of your grade.

Final Presentation

The final presentation is a 10-minute presentation of a topic of your choice related to the theme of your course. You should be working to collect information and material for the presentation during the entire course, using field studies, independent research, and course readings and seminars.

The final presentation should include and will be assessed on the following rubric:

- What is the issue that you are interested in?
- How is this related to the theme of your course?
- How is this related to the broader issues in international development?
- What did you learn during your research on this topic?
- What further questions did this project raise for you?

This is worth 25% of your grade.

This is due on the last day for the course, the final Friday of week 8.

Course Content

Unit 1

Cross-Cultural Learning Workshop

- The purpose of this workshop is to provide students with a practical and experiential understanding of what it means to be culturally competent and able to be “culture learners” during the semester. Each session will be based on handouts, short videos, interactive discussions, and exercises to help students become better able to understand their own culture as well as Thai culture.
- Readings for this week will be handed out in class
 - Seminar 1: What is culture and fundamentals of culture: We tend to assume that our culture is just “the way things are” when in fact, many cultural ideas and practices can be quite different. This session will give us some of the tools and understanding of what constitutes culture, and how we might use cultural analysis to understand and compare our own cultures with our new host culture in Thailand.
 - Seminar 2: Comparing Thai and American cultures; Acting cross-culturally: This session will use a compare/contrast framework to look at some of the key differences between how American culture broadly defined, and how Thai culture think about how the world works, including hierarchy, patron-client relationships, and the presentation of self. We will also spend time examining how this plays out in day-to-day interactions, and how students can learn how to respect Thai culture and when and how to act appropriately.
 - Seminar 3: Cultural adjustment and culture shock: Adjusting to a new culture is not always easy, and usually involves quite a bit of adjustment. This session will look at ways to help navigate some of the challenges of learning about and living in a culture that may look superficially similar to your home culture, but which is very different in some fundamental and challenging ways.
 - Seminar 4: Building resilience; Stress and coping: Our goal is that students are able to thrive in the challenges of cross-cultural learning and living. This session will talk about how to navigate the inherent stress of cross-cultural living, and what positive and health coping strategies students can use to become more resilient.
 - Seminar 5: Living in Thailand: Host families, food, and transportation: This session gets into some of the practical things about living in Thailand that can help students adapt to daily life. We will focus specifically on host families, living in community, the role of food in Thai culture, and how to get around in Chiang Mai and elsewhere.

Unit 2

Ancient Thai and Southeast Asia

- The creation of the Thai nation
- Anthropological perspectives on The Thai state
- Thailand in Southeast Asia and ASEAN
- Current Thai administration and policies
- Readings
 - Tosakul, Ratana. 2019, "Chapter 10 The Translational Anthropology of Thailand." In *Southeast Asian Anthropologies: National Traditions and Transnational Practices*. Edited by Eric C. Thompson and Vineeta Sinha. Singapore: NUS Press. 292-321.
 - Winichakul, Thongchai, 'The Others Within: Travel and Ethno-spatial Differentiation of Siamese Subjects, 1885-1910.' lead article in *Civility and Savagery: Social Identity in Tai States*, ed. Andrew Turton, London: Curzon Press, 2000: 38-62.
- Assignment
 - Essay for week 1 is due this week.

Unit 3

Thai Social Structure

- Villages, cities, and Nations: Thai society at different levels of organization
- Patron-Client relationships in Thailand
- Democratization and economic growth and shifts in Thai society and identity
- Reading
 - Embree, John F. 1950. "Thailand: A Loosely Structured Social System," *American Anthropologist*, Vol.52, pp.181-193.
 - Eoseewong, Nidhi. 2003. "The Thai Cultural Constitution," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, Issue 3 (March).
- Assignment
 - Essay for week 2 is due this week.

Unit 4

Extended Village Field Study

- Students will have a 5-day village field study in a rural community outside Chiang Mai City.

- Hands on learning and teaching will be directly with local community members and leaders.
- Students will stay with a host family.
- The goal of the village trip is to understand rural development and their challenges and best practices as well as local culture, the differences between rural and urban development and how government policies support development in this village.
- For this course you need to pay particular attention to these specific questions during this field study:
 - What is the history of this community? Where are the people here from?
 - What jobs/occupations do the people in this community have? If they are farmers, are there other non-agricultural jobs that they do as well as farm?
 - What is the ethnic composition of this community? How do people identify themselves?
 - What is the common language spoken at home? Does this differ from Central Thai that is the official state language and the language taught in schools? How might this impact the community and its sense of self identity?
- Activities may change, depending on the availability and needs of local community members, but will likely include the following:
 - Village Mapping: Learn about how the village is organized and how this affects their community management, housing and how it adapts to the environment, observing the environments and resources of the community such as schools, local hospital or clinic, meeting hall, temple or church, farms etc.,
 - Local Food in Northern Thailand: Become familiar with various edible plants and how the surrounding environment provides the nutritional needs of local community.
 - Community based Tourism (CBT): Learn about culture and community resource management, how they developed CBT, how they proposed a blueprint for CBT management that is appropriate for their culture.
 - Traditional cultural practices such as weaving, natural dye, bamboo weaving and cultural preservation practices and sustainable development
 - Service activity with the community (with school) as a hands-on project building relationships with the community.
 - Half day hike to learn about the natural resource management of the community.
 - Village meetings: Learning about how to collect data through asking questions that related to your course and areas of interest.
- Assignment
 - Essay for week 3 is due this week.

Unit 5

National and Ethnic Identity

- Ethnicity and groups in Thailand
- Thai identity and regionalism
- Daily life and society: Markets and street life
- Pop Culture in Thailand and its importance
- Readings
 - Marston, John A. 2014. *Ethnicity, Borders, and the Grassroots Interface with the State: Studies on Mainland Southeast Asia in Honor of Charles F. Keyes*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
 - Feungfusakul, Apinya. 2008, "Making Sense of Place: A Case Study of Vendors and Small Entrepreneurs in the Chiang Mai Night Bazaar," in *Imagining Communities in Thailand: Ethnographic Approaches*, Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books.
 - Cohen, Anjalee. 2009, "Dek Inter" and the "Other": Thai Youth Subcultures in Urban Chiang Mai," in *Sojourn: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, 24(2), 161-185.
- Assignment
 - Essay for week 4 is due this week.

Unit 6

Gender, Sexuality, and Identity

- Gender in Thailand
- Identity and sexuality in Thailand
- Thai family structure
- Patron - Client relationships
- Reading
 - Keyes, Charles F. "Mother or Mistress but Never be a Monk: Buddhist Notions of Female Gender in Rural Thailand," *American Ethnologist* Vol. 11, No. 2 (May, 1984), pp. 223-241.
 - Lapanun, Patcharin. 2012, "It's Not Just About Money: Transnational Marriages of Isan Women (ไม่ใช่เพียงเพราะเงิน: การแต่งงานข้ามชาติของผู้หญิงอีสาน)," in *Journal of Mekong Societies*, 8(3), 1-28.
 - Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2007, "Muai Thai" cinema and the burdens of Thai men" in *South East Asia Research*, 15(3), 407-424.
 - Tosakul, Ratana. 2010 "Cross-border marriages: experiences of village women from Northeastern Thailand with Western men," in *Asian Cross-border Marriage*

Migration: Demographic Patterns and Social Issues, Amsterdam University Press, IIAS.

- Assignment
 - Essay for week 5 is due this week.

Unit 7

Religion and Spirituality

- Buddhism, Social Values, and Thai Religiosities
- Islam, Christianity, and other religious traditions in Thailand
- Animism and traditional practices
- Practical spirituality and contemporary discourse
- Reading
 - Johnson, Andrew A. 2017. "Land and Lordship: Royal Devotion, Spirit Cults and the GeoBody," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, Issue 22 (September), Thai Cosmic Politics: Locating Power in a Diverse Kingdom.
 - Kitiarsa, Pattana. 2012, "Chapter 5 Luang Pho Khun: A Postmodern Monk," in *Mediums, Monks, and Amulets: Thai Popular Buddhism Today*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, 81-109.
- Assignment
 - Essay for week 6 is due this week.

Unit 8

Final Class Seminars

- Contemporary Thai politics
- Limits of discourse around Thai politics
- Thai social movements and political engagement
- Presentations
- Readings
 - Thailand: History, Politics and the Rule of Law, by James Wise, Marshall Cavendish International (Asia), 2020
 - Yoshinori, Nishizaki. 2002. "Provincializing Thai Politics," *Kyoto Review of Southeast Asia*, Issue 1 (March), Power and Politics.
- Assignment
 - Essay for week 7 due on Monday and the essay for week 8 is due on Friday
 - Final presentations

Policies

Attendance Policy

Students are expected to be on time and attend all classes while abroad. Many instructors assess both attendance and participation when assigning a final course grade. Attendance alone does not guarantee a positive participation grade; the student should be prepared for class and engage in class discussion. See the on-site syllabus for specific class requirements.

University of Minnesota Policies & Procedures

Academic integrity is essential to a positive teaching and learning environment. All students enrolled in University courses are expected to complete coursework responsibilities with fairness and honesty. Failure to do so by seeking unfair advantage over others or misrepresenting someone else's work as your own can result in disciplinary action. The University Student Conduct Code defines scholastic dishonesty as follows:

Scholastic Dishonesty

Scholastic dishonesty means plagiarizing; cheating on assignments or examinations; engaging in unauthorized collaboration on academic work; taking, acquiring, or using test materials without faculty permission; submitting false or incomplete records of academic achievement; acting alone or in cooperation with another to falsify records or to obtain dishonestly grades, honors, awards, or professional endorsement; altering forging, or misusing a University academic record; or fabricating or falsifying data, research procedures, or data analysis.

Within this course, a student responsible for scholastic dishonesty can be assigned a penalty up to and including an "F" or "N" for the course. If you have any questions regarding the expectations for a specific assignment or exam, ask.

Student Conduct

The University of Minnesota has specific policies concerning student conduct. This information can be found [on the Learning Abroad Center website](#).