

The Political Economy of Religion and Spirits in Southeast Asia

東南亞政治經濟學的宗教與靈力

Instructor: Courtney Work 教授吳考甯 Wu Kǎoning

Email: cwork@nccu.edu.tw; courtney.k.work@gmail.com

Course Description

This course investigates the variety of lived interdimensional traditions, often referred to as religion, in Southeast Asia. Our investigation will take a bottom up approach to the data and will leave behind the question of how it is that 'superstitions' persist into the modern era. We will grapple instead with the political and economic paths through which local practices became 'superstitions'. By exploring those local practices that continue to be practiced both inside and outside of 'religious' institutions, we investigate the contemporary lived experiences of Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity in Southeast Asia with the intention to discover the extent to which and the manners through which local non-doctrinal practices force both accommodations and excisions. Our inquiries into spirits and religion in the Southeast Asian context will be supplemented by ethnographic data from Taiwan, the land in which this course is taught, adding insights and complexity.

Course Outline

Introduce Course Concepts

- Critical reading and thinking skills
 - o ACE-FA – the Elements of Critical Assessment and Analysis
 - Tools for critically reading a text (or other document) by identifying the Evidence, the Conversation, the Argument, and the Authority (of the author, artifact, performance, or production)
- Participant Observation and the Anthropological Method

In-class writing assignment week 1:

Why am I here studying about religion and spirits in Southeast Asia?

The Making of Religion: Theoretical Grounding

Invention and Imaginaire

Masuzawa, Tomoko. 2005. *The invention of world religions, or, How European universalism was preserved in the language of pluralism*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.

Collins, Steven. 1998. Introduction, in *Nirvana and other Buddhist felicities: utopias of the Pali imaginaire*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press

Read Sections:

I. Some Concepts and Modes of Analysis 1.a Ideology and Power in agrarian/tributary states; 1.b Transcendental Visions: autonomy of ideological power; 1.c Stretching the here and now: soteriology and the state, time, and tradition;

II. The Pali imaginaire in real world history 11.a On the inside and outside of texts; II.b- what is pali?; IIc- what is 'traditional' Theravada Buddhism?; IID- A political biography of Pali Buddhism;

On Purification

Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity*. Stanford: Stanford University Press. Chapters 1 and 6.

Keane, W. (2008). The evidence of the senses and the materiality of religion. *Journal of the Royal Anthropological Institute*, 14(S1), S110–S127.

Douglas, Mary. *Purity and Danger: An Analysis of Concepts of Pollution and Taboo* [1966]. London and New York: Routledge, 2002.

Intro, Chapter 1 & 2 (p, 1-50)

Ethnographic fieldwork:

Participant observation: Record instances of social or institutional boundary marking that you encounter. Does not have to be related to spirits or religion. We're looking for the enactment of social classification systems.

On Power

Sahlins, Marshall. "The Original Political Society." In *On Kings*, edited by David Graeber and Marshall Sahlins, 23–65. Chicago: Hau Books, 2017.

Anderson, Benedict R O'G. "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture." In *Language and Power: Exploring Political Cultures in Indonesia*, 17–77. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990.

Tannenbaum, N. B. (1987). Tattoos: Invulnerability and Power in Shan Cosmology. *American Ethnologist*, 14(4), 693–711.

Mauss, Marcel. 1902 [1972]. *A general theory of magic*. London: Routledge and K. Paul. Chapter 3: The Elements of Magic

In-class writing: 15 minute free write on power

Religion and Academics

Geertz, C. 1973. Religion as a Cultural System. In *The Interpretation of Cultures: selected essays*, 87–125.

Asad, T. 1983. Anthropological Conceptions of Religion: Reflections on Geertz. *Man* 18 (2):237–259.

Descola, Philippe. *Beyond Nature and Culture*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013. Chapter 1: Configurations of Continuity.

Ethnographic fieldwork: What are the characteristics of the powerful people around you. Fellow students, professors, coaches, parents, employers, others.... Watch them. What defines their power? Gather 2 real-time examples (not memories or types), and clearly explain what creates the power you see.

Religion and Kings: Prowess and economic success

Wolters, O. W. 1982. *History, culture, and religion in Southeast Asian perspectives*. Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. *Miscellaneous Notes on 'Soul Stuff' and 'Prowess', a 'Hindu' Man of Prowess*.

Gibson, Thomas. 2007. *Islamic narrative and authority in Southeast Asia: from the 16th to the 21st century*. New York: Palgrave Macmillan. *Chapter 2: The Ruler as Perfect Man in Southeast Asia, 1500-1667*.

Davis, E. W. (2016). *Deathpower: Buddhism's Ritual Imagination in Cambodia*. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapt 3: Rice, Water, Hierarchy: The Wild and the Civil. Chapter 4: Building Deathpower and Rituals of Sovereignty

In-class writing: 15 minute free write on prowess, perfect men, and sovereignty

Spirits and Religion

The Old Religion

Holt, John. 2009. *Spirits of the place: Buddhism and Lao religious culture*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press. Introduction and Chapter 1

Schweyer, Anne Valérie. "Potent Places in Central Vietnam: 'Everything That Comes Out of the Earth Is Cham.'" *Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 18, no. 5 (2017): 400–420.

Work, Courtney. "Chthonic Sovereigns? 'Neak Ta' in a Cambodian Village." *The Asia Pacific Journal of Anthropology* 20, no. 1 (2019): 74–95.

Hayashi, Yukio. "Reconfiguration of Village Guardian Spirits among the Thai-Lao in Northeastern Thailand." In *Founders' Cults in Southeast Asia: Ancestors, Polity, and Identity*, edited by N Tannenbaum and C.A Kammerer, 184–209. New Haven: Yale University Southeast Asia Studies, 2003.

Spirits and Religion

Christianity

Jocano, Landa F. 1965. "Conversion and the Patterning of Christian Experience in Malitbog, Central Panay, Philippines." *Philippine Sociological Review*. 13(2). Pp. 96-119.

Cannell, Fenella. 1999. "The Funeral of the 'Dead Christ'", in *Power and intimacy in the Christian Philippines*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press. (*Grad students add: "Kinship, reciprocity and devotions to the saints"*).

Iteanu, Andre. 2017. "Continuity and Breaches in Religion and Globalization, a Melanesian Point of View". In *The Appropriation of Religion in Southeast Asia and Beyond*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillian.

Ethnographic Fieldwork: Interview 3 people to learn their beliefs or family history with religion (spirit, faith, tradition, belief...).

Tell me about.... ?

Buddhism

Ladwig, P. (2016). Religious Place Making: Civilized Modernity and the Spread of Buddhism among the Cheng , a Mon-Khmer Minority in Southern Laos. In M.Dickhardt &A.Lauser (Eds.), *Religion, Place and Modernity. Spatial Articulations in Southeast Asia and East Asia* (pp. 95–124). Leiden: Brill.

Brac de La Perrière, Bénédicte. "Possession and Rebirth in Burma (Myanmar)." *Contemporary Buddhism* 16, no. 1 (2015): 61–74. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14639947.2015.1013000>.

Kitiarsa, Pattana. "Magic Monks and Spirit Mediums in the Politics of Thai Popular Religion." *Inter-Asia Cultural Studies* 6, no. 2 (2005): 209–26.

Islam

Wessing, R. (2017). The lord of the land relationship in southeast Asia. *Spirits and Ships: Cultural Transfers in Early Monsoon Asia*, 515–556.

Barraud, Cecile. 2017. “A Wall, Even in Those Days! Encounters with Religions and What Became of the Tradition”, in, *The Appropriation of Religion in Southeast Asia and Beyond*. Cham: Palgrave Macmillian.

Pemberton, John. 1994. *On the Subject of ‘Java’*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press. Chapter 4 and Chapter 6.

Ethnographic fieldwork: Interview three people to learn their beliefs about nature.

Discuss the unstructured interview and the work of creating and revising questions

Spirits: Not so supernatural

Only natural

Kaartinen, Timo. 2016. Boundaries of Humanity: Non-human others and animist ontology in Eastern Indonesia. In K. Århem and G. Sprenger (Eds.), *Animism in Southeast Asia*, (219-235). London; New York: Routledge.

Remme, J. H. Z. (2016). Actualizing Spirits: Ifugao animism as onto-praxis. In K. Århem & G. Sprenger (Eds.), *Animism in Southeast Asia* (138–153). London; New York: Routledge.

Janowski, M. (2017). The Dynamics of the Cosmic Conversation: Beliefs about spirits among the Kelabit and Penan of the upper Baram River, Sarawak. In K. Århem & G. Sprenger (Eds.), *Animism in Southeast Asia* (181–204). London and New York: Routledge.

Howell, S. 2016. Seeing and Knowing: Metamorphosis and the fragility of species in Chewong animistic ontology. In K. Århem and G. Sprenger (Eds.), *Animism in Southeast Asia*, (55-72). London; New York: Routledge.

Economy and Markets

Boomgaard, P. 2013 [1995]. Sacred Trees and Haunted Forests in Indonesia—Particularly Java, Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries. In, *Asian Perspectives of Nature: A Critical Approach*, eds. O. Bruun and A. Kalland, 39-53. New York. Routledge.

Graeber, David. “Fetishism and Social Creativity, or Fetishes Are Gods in Process of Construction” 21, no. October (2005): 21–24. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1463499605059230>.

Sprenger, Guido. 2014. Where the Dead Go to the Market: Market and Ritual as Social Systems in Upland Southeast Asia. In, *Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia: Magic and Modernity*, eds. V. Gottowik. Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam Press.

Keane, Webb. "The Value of Words and the Meaning of Things in Eastern Indonesian Exchange." *Man* 29, no. 3 (1994): 605–29. <https://doi.org/10.2307/2804345>.

Knowing the Dead

Week 14: Social Relationships

Langford; J. M. 2009. Gifts Intercepted: Biopolitics and Spirit Debt. *Cultural Anthropology* 24: 681-71 (4):681–711.

Hornbacher, Annette. 2014. Contested *Moksa* in Balinese *Agama Hindu*: Balinese Death Rituals between Ancestor Worship and Modern Hinduism. In, *Dynamics of Religion in Southeast Asia: Magic and Modernity*, eds. V. Gottowik. Amsterdam, University of Amsterdam Press.

Cannell, Fenella. 1999. "The Living and the Dead", in *Power and intimacy in the Christian Philippines*. Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press

Persistence and Presence

Kwon; H. 2008. *Ghosts of War in Vietnam*. Cambridge; New York: Cambridge University Press. Introduction and Chapter 1: Ghosts of War and Chapter 2: Mass excavation.

CBS News report: <https://youtu.be/W0AmOw061A0>

A tape that the US played via helicopter over suspected Vietcong strongholds:

https://youtu.be/4d9H_1ygEv8

(thanks to Joseph Konkell for finding these documents)

Davis, E. W. (2016). *Deathpower: Buddhism's Ritual Imagination in Cambodia*. New York: Columbia University Press. Chapters 5: Binding Mighty Death: The Craft and Authority of the Rag Robe in Cambodian Ritual Technology.

Course Bibliography and Additional readings

- Asad, Talal. 2003. *Formations of the secular: Christianity, Islam, modernity*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Asad, T. 2002. The Construction of Religion as an Anthropological Category. In *A Reader in the Anthropology of Religion*; ed. M. Lambek; 114–132.
- Braun, Erik. 2009. "Local and Translocal in the Study of Theravada Buddhism and Modernity". *Religion Compass*. 3 (6): 935-950.
- Bruce, S. 2013. The Other Secular Modern: An Empirical Critique of Asad. *Religion and Society: Advances in Research* 4 (1):79–92
- Condominas, Georges. 1977. *We have eaten the forest: the story of a Montagnard village in the central highlands of Vietnam*. New York: Hill and Wang.
- Eberhardt, Nancy. 2006. *Imagining the course of life: self-transformation in a Shan Buddhist community*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Endres, Kirsten W. and Andrea Lauser, eds. 2011. *Engaging the spirit world: Popular beliefs and practices in modern Southeast Asia*. New York: Berghahn Books.
- Geertz, Clifford. 1960. *The religion of Java*. Glencoe, Ill: Free Press.
- Hansen, Anne. 2007. *How to Behave: Buddhism and modernity in colonial Cambodia, 1860-1930*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Harris, Ian Charles. 2005. *Cambodian Buddhism history and practice*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Hayashi, Yukio. 2003. *Practical Buddhism among the Thai-Lao: religion in the making of region*. Kyoto, Japan: Kyoto University Press.
- Johnson; A. A. 2014. *Ghosts of the New City: Spirits; Urbanity; and the Ruins of Progress in Chiang Mai*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.
- Kobayashi, Satoru. 2005. An Ethnographic Study on the Reconstruction of Buddhist Practice in Two Cambodian Temples: With the Special Reference to Buddhist *Samay* and *Boran*. *Kyoto Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 42(4):489-518.
- Kitiarsa; P. 2005. Beyond Syncretism: Hybridization of Popular Religion in Contemporary Thailand. *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies* 36 (3):461–487.
- Langford; J. M. 2009. Gifts Intercepted: Biopolitics and Spirit Debt. *Cultural Anthropology* 24: 681-71 (4):681–711.
- Leach; E. R. *Political Systems of Highland Burma: A study of Kachin social structure*. Oxford: Berg Publishers.
- Lithai, Frank Reynolds, and Mani B. Reynolds. 1982. *Three worlds according to King Ruang: a Thai Buddhist cosmology*. Berkeley, Calif: Distributed by Asian Humanities Press/Motila Banarsidass.
- McDaniel, Justin. 2011. *The Lovelorn Ghost and the Magical Monk: Practicing Buddhism in Modern Thailand*. New York: Columbia University Press.

- Mus, Paul. 1975. *India seen from the East: Indian and indigenous cults in Champa*. [Clayton, Vic.]: Centre of Southeast Asian Studies, Monash University.
- Roseman, M. 1998. Singers of the landscape Song, History, and Property Rights in the Malaysian Rain Forest. *American Anthropologist* 100 (1):106–121.
- Siegel, James T. 2006. *Naming the witch*. Stanford, Calif: Stanford University Press.
- Tannenbaum, Nicola Beth, and Cornelia Ann Kammerer. 2003. *Founders' cults in Southeast Asia: ancestors, polity, and identity*. New Haven, Conn: Yale University Press.
- Willford, A. C., and K. M. George. 2005. *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Ithaca: Southeast Asia Program, Cornell University.
- Willford; A. C. 2006. *Cage of Freedom: Tamil identity and the ethnic fetish in Malaysia*. Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press.
- Vries, Hent de. 2008. *Religion: beyond a concept*. New York: Fordham University Press.