



Mahidol University
International College

ICIR 216 Religious Movements and Diversity in Asia

Course Description & Aims:

The course introduces students to the religious movements and diversity in Asia. It introduces theories on globalization, localization and commodification of religions. It outlines the world religions practiced in Asia and focuses in detail on the diversity of religious groups, new religious movements, and cults emerging from the main religions in Asia i.e. Hinduism, Buddhism and Islam. The course examines the radicalization of Islam in South and Southeast Asia. The course examines the emergence of Christian evangelical groups in the Philippines and beyond. Students will explore ethno-religious diversity in the region and critically assess its implications on contemporary society, politics and economy in Asia.

Religious diversity in Asia; types of religious movements and cults; genders and the changing religious traditions. Students will understand; analyze; assess the importance of religious movements and diversity in Asia with the help of selected case studies.

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Assessment

Class attendance/participation/homework	10%
In-class quiz on concepts 1	10%
Midterm exam paper	20%
In-class quiz on concepts 2	10%
Student presentation on religious multimedia materials	20%
Final exam paper	30%

Course Learning Objectives

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

1. Describe the diversity and geography of world religions practiced in Asia
2. Identify and examine the various new religious movement and cults within those religions
3. Discuss and evaluate the impact of those groups on their respective societies
4. Compare and contrast radical religious groups and teachings in Asia
5. Analyze and interpret the impact of ethno-religious diversity on Asian societies

Topic No.	Topic
1	Overview on religious diversity in Asia
	Overview on religious diversity in Asia
2	Globalization and localization of religions
	Theories on global and local impacts on religions
3	Religious movements within Theravada Buddhism; Thailand, Myanmar
	Case studies: Dhammakaya, Santi Asoke, Sayadaw Thamanya
4	Hindu-Buddhist cults; Thailand, Myanmar
	Case studies: Ganesh, Brahma/Erawan cults, Sai Baba
5	Religious superstar culture; Thailand
	Case studies: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Phra Maha Yantra, and others
6	Religious movements within Mahayana Buddhism; Vietnam, Taiwan
	Case studies: Thich Nhat Hahn, Suma Ching Hai, Tzu Chi
7	Syncretistic religions in Asia; India, Singapore, Vietnam
	Case study: Theosophy, Cao Dai
8	Revivalism; radicals and conservatives in Islam in South and Southeast Asia
	Case studies: Deobandi movement
9	Religious movements within Islam; Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore
	Case studies: Al Arqam, Ahmadiyya, Gülenists, Sisters in Islam
10	Christian movements in Asia – old and new
	Case studies: Evangelical Pentecostal movements
11	Student presentations on religious multimedia materials
	Student presentations on religious multimedia materials
12	Concluding remarks on globalization, localization and commodification of religions
	Concluding remarks on globalization, localization and commodification of religions

Assessment Methods & Criteria

Class attendance/participation 10%

Students need to have full attention and participate in the discussion

In-class quiz on concepts 1 10%

Midterm exam paper 20%

Take-home essay based on the readings

In-class quiz on concepts 2 10%

Students will analyze websites and/or Youtube clips of a religious group or a personality and present their findings in the class 20%

Final exam paper 30%

An academic paper with proper foot/end-notes and references, based on the readings

Overview on religious diversity in Asia

Topic description: Students will be introduced to the course outline, course requirements, and their expected input. Review and refresh the geography of religious diversity in Asia. Introduction to world religions practiced in Asia

Expected learning outcomes: Describe the geography of the religious diversity in Asia and identify different religious practices in the region.

Readings and activities:

Turner, Bryan S. and Oscar Salemink (eds) (2015) *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*. Routledge, London. Introduction: constructing religion and religions in Asia pp. 1-15.

Veer, P. van der (2014) *The Making of Oriental Religion, The Modern Spirit of Asia. The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*. Princeton University Press, pp. 63-89

Introduction to the the diversity of religions in Asia.

Globalization and localization of religions, theories on global and local impacts on religions

Topic description: Exploration of different theories on globalization. What does globalization mean for religious practices, and how have religions been localized.

Expected learning outcomes: Describe and understand the major theories with reference to globalization, localization, and its impacts on religions in Asia

Readings and activities:

Friedman, Thomas (2014) *The World is Ten years Old. Thinking globally: A global studies reader*. Juergensmeyer, M. (ed.), Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp.11-17.

Mulder, Niels (1996) *Religious Syncretism or Southeast Asian Religion? Inside Southeast Asia. Religion, everyday life, cultural change*. Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, pp. 7-15.

Steger, Manfred (2014) "Globalization: A Contested Concept" *Thinking globally: A global studies reader*. Juergensmeyer, M. (ed.), Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, pp.7-11.

Introduction to the central theories on globalization, localization and syncretism based on the readings.

Religious movements within Theravada Buddhism; Thailand, Myanmar: Dhammakaya, Santi Asoke, Sayadaw Thamanya

Topic description: Exploring the emergence of new religious movements within Theravada Buddhism in Thailand and Myanmar. How do their practices differ from the mainstream? Why are they controversial? As case studies Dhammakaya, Santi Asoke, Sayadaw Thamanya will be examined

Expected learning outcomes: Analyze the emergence of new religious movements. Critically assess and compare how the selected new religious movements differ from the mainstream teachings and practices

Readings and activities:

Heikkilä-Horn, M-L (2015) Santi Asoke *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 261-263

Heikkilä-Horn, M-L (2015) Dhammakaya *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 61-63

Heikkilä-Horn, M-L (2015) Sayadaw Thamanya *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 61-63

Define and describe the selected new religious movements. Compare and contrasts their teachings and the mainstream trends. Students will start preparing to choose one religious group, movement or cult to explore their websites and/or Youtube-clips for a presentation.

Hindu-Buddhist cults; Thailand, Myanmar: Ganesh Cult, Erawan/Brahma Cult, Sai Baba

Topic description: Exploring the emergence of Hindu-Buddhist cults in Thailand and Myanmar. As case studies the cults of Ganesh, Erawan/Brahma and Sai Baba will be examined.

Expected learning outcomes: Analyze the emergence of revivalist religious cults based on traditional beliefs. Critically assess and compare how they differ from the mainstream teachings and what has been their impact on the society

Readings and activities:

Agarwal, Ruchi (2015) Hinduism in Southeast Asia *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 104-108

Kent, Alexandra (2015) Sathya Sai Baba Movement *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 265-267

Keyes, Charles (2008) The Destruction of a Shrine to Brahma in Bangkok and the Fall of Thaksin Shinawatra: The Occult and Thai Coup in Thailand of September 2006. ARI-NUS.

Define and describe the selected Hindu-Buddhist cults. Compare and contrasts their teachings and the mainstream trends. Students will choose one cult and explore their websites and/or Youtube-clips for a presentation.

Religious superstar culture in Thailand: Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Phra Maha Yantra, and others

Topic description: Explore the emergence of religious venerable superstar monks or mediums in Thailand and in wider Asia with examples such as Buddhadasa Bhikkhu, Phra Maha Yantra, Luang Pho Koon, Luang Po Thuad as case studies. Analyze the cults in light of commodification of religions in the region.

Expected learning outcomes: Critically assess the role of the old and new superstar monks in contemporary Theravada Buddhism in Thailand. Compare and contrast the venerable superstar monks, interpret their life stories, teachings and contemporary cults in the society.

Readings and activities:

Jones, William J. (2015) Bhikkhu Buddhadasa *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 18-19

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

Define and describe the selected venerable superstar monks. Compare and contrasts their teachings, what they are famous for, and the examine contemporary cult around them. Analyze the level of commodification of the cult. Students will prepare to choose one of the venerable superstar monks and explore their websites and/or Youtube-clips for a presentation.

Religious movements within Mahayana Buddhism; Vietnam, Taiwan: Thich Nhat Hahn, Suma Ching Hai, Tzu Chi

Topic description: Explore the emergence of religious movements within Mahayana Buddhism with examples such as Thich Nhat Hahn, Suma Ching Hai, Tzu Chi, and other Guan Yin movements

Expected learning outcomes: Understand basics of Mahayana Buddhism, their teachings and practices of ‘socially engaged Buddhism’ in East and Southeast Asia. Compare and contrast the chosen cases and analyze their differences with the Theravada Buddhist movements.

Readings and activities:

Schack, David & Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao (2006) Taiwan’s Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups. *China perspective* 59/2006 pp 1-17.

King, Sallie B. (2015) Engaged Buddhism *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 73-76

Scott, David (2015) Hanh, Thich Nhat *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp.103-104

Define and describe the practices of socially engaged Buddhism in the Mahayana tradition. Analyze the differences to Theravada Buddhist teachings and practices. Students will prepare to choose one of the Mahayana Buddhist movements and explore their websites and/or Youtube-clips for a presentation.

Syncretistic religions in Asia; India, Singapore, Vietnam: Theosophists, Cao Dai

Topic description: Refresh and review the origins of syncretistic beliefs in Asia by outlining the emergence of the Theosophist movement in India and in the Western countries. Students will be also introduced to the contemporary Vietnamese syncretistic movement Cao Dai.

Expected learning outcomes: Describe and understand the emergence and characteristics of Theosophy in Asia. Critically assess the importance of the movements to the contemporary religious Asia. Describe the Vietnamese Cao Dai movement and analyze the syncretistic element of their teachings and practice.

Readings and activities:

Ariarajah, Wesley S (2015) *Syncretism Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 311-313

Mulder, Niels (1996) *Religious Syncretism or Southeast Asian Religion? Inside Southeast Asia. Religion, everyday life, cultural change*. Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai, pp. 7-15.

Define and describe Theosophy and its impact on Asian politics and spirituality in India and outside. Describe basic beliefs and teachings, hierarchical structures and controversies of the Cao Dai movement. Students will prepare and explore Cao Dai movement and its websites and/or Youtube-clips for a presentation.

Revivalism; radicals and conservatives in Islam; Deobandi movement

Topic description: Explore the emergence of radical fundamentalist Islam in South and Southeast Asia particularly by analyzing the Deobandi revivalist movement from the 1800s and its impact on Islam in South Asia and Myanmar. Analyze its relation to Wahhabism and the impact on dakwah missions and the spread of Deobandi madrasas to Southeast Asia.

Expected learning outcomes: Explain and analyze the emergence of fundamentalist Islam in Southeast Asia with reference to the South Asian Deobandi influences and madrasas in Southeast Asia. Compare and contrast their teachings to the more traditional localized interpretations of Islam in Asia and Southeast Asia.

Readings and activities:

Bambang Budiwiranto (2015) *Islam Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 125-131

Bambang Budiwiranto (2015) *Sharia Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 280-283

Bambang Budiwiranto (2015) *Indonesia Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp.116-121

Veer, P. van deer (2014) *Muslims in India and China, The Modern Spirit of Asia. The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp.193-213.

Examine and analyze the emergence of fundamentalist Muslim groups in the region and critically assess how radical Islam differs from traditional localized Islam

Religious movements within Islam; Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore: Al Arqam, Ahmadiyya, Gülenists, Sisters in Islam

Topic description: Explore the emergence of radical new religious movements within Islam in Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore; with examples such as Al Arqam, Ahmadiyya, Gülenists in Southeast Asia, and Sisters in Islam in Malaysia. Analyze how do they differ from the mainstream Islam and why are they controversial.

Expected learning outcomes: Analyze and explain the recent emergence of radical new religious movements within Islam in Southeast Asia, compare and contrast their teachings and practices, and explain why they are controversial

Readings and activities:

Lee, Julian CH and Caryn Lim (2015) Malaysia *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp.164-168

Schäfer, Saskia Lousie (2015) Ahmadiyya *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 1-2.

Schäfer, Saskia Lousie (2015) Sisters in Islam *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 289-291

Discuss and analyze the emergence of radical new groups in Indonesia and Malaysia. Analyze the controversies concerning the movements. Examine the gender perspective of Sisters in Islam. Students will prepare to explore Sisters in Islam and the Gülenist movement and study their websites and/or Youtube-clips for a presentation.

Christian movements in Asia – old and new: Evangelical Pentecostal movements

Topic description: Explore the emergence of old and new Christian movements in Asia; with a special focus on the Evangelical Pentecostal movement and its spread to the rest of Southeast Asia.

Expected learning outcomes: Discuss and explain the the emergence of evangelical Christian groups in the Philippines and beyond. Compare and contrast radical, conservative Christian teachings with the radical, conservative teachings in Buddhism and Islam.

Readings and activities:

Amurao, George (2015) Santo Ingnacia del Spirito *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 263-264

Bautista, Julius (2015) Philippines *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 220-225

Chong Terence and Daniel P.S. Goh (2015) Asian Pentecostalism: revivals, mega-churches, and social engagement, pp. 402-419, Turner, Bryan S. and Oscar Salemink (eds) (2015) *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*. Routledge, London.

Nai-Chiu Poon, Michael (2015) Christianity *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. Athyal, Jesuda M. (Ed). ABC-CLIO, pp. 35-40

Analyze and interpret the emergence of new fundamentalist Christian movements in Asia. Students will explore the fundamentalist Pentecostal movement with local off-shoots and their websites and/or Youtube-clips for a presentation.

Student presentations on religious multimedia materials

Topic description: Student presentations on religious multimedia materials, websites and/or Youtube-clips of selected religious groups, cults, movements or personalities.

Expected learning outcomes: By delivering their presentations the students learn to explain, analyze, and critically assess visual and textual materials with reference to the readings and

earlier discussions on religious diversity, new religious movements, commodification of religions, contrasts to the respective mainstream religious teachings.

Concluding remarks on globalization, localization and commodification of religions

Topic description: Summarize and review religious diversity in Asia, new religious movements, teachings and practices, radical and conservative religious groups, globalization and localization of world religions, commodification of religions and cults.

Expected learning outcomes: Discuss, analyze and critically assess religious diversity in Asia with reference to the traditional religious landscape and the new radical religious movements, cults, schools and teachings. Evaluate the impact of the new religious movements and cults on the respective society and ethno-religious diversity in the society.

Readings and activities:

Athyal, Jesuda M. (2015) *Religion in Southeast Asia. An Encyclopedia of Faiths and Cultures*. ABC-CLIO.

Chong Terence and Daniel P.S. Goh (2015) Asian Pentecostalism: revivals, mega-churches, and social engagement, pp. 402-419, Turner, Bryan S. and Oscar Salemink (eds) (2015) *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*. Routledge, London.

Jackson, Peter A. (2003) *Buddhadasa: Theravada Buddhism and Modernist Reform in Thailand*. Silkworm, Chiang Mai.

Juergensmeyer, M. (ed.) *Thinking globally: A global studies reader.*, Berkeley, CA: University of California Press.

Keyes, Charles (2008) The Destruction of a Shrine to Brahma in Bangkok and the Fall of Thaksin Shinawatra: The Occult and Thai Coup in Thailand of September 2006. ARI-NUS.

Mulder, Niels (1996) Religious Syncretism or Southeast Asian Religion? *Inside Southeast Asia. Religion, everyday life, cultural change*. Silkworm Books, Chiang Mai.

Schack, David & Hsin-Huang Michael Hsiao (2006) Taiwan's Socially Engaged Buddhist Groups. *China perspective* 59/2006 pp 1-17.

Turner, Bryan S. and Oscar Salemink (eds) (2015) *Routledge Handbook of Religions in Asia*. Routledge, London

Veer, P. van der (2014) Muslims in India and China *The Modern Spirit of Asia. The Spiritual and the Secular in China and India*. Princeton University Press, Princeton, pp.193-213.

Students are encouraged to consult text books also beyond the articles chosen to the syllabus for their final in-depth term paper. The lecturer may provide additional readings.