

PIA3060: SPECIAL TOPICS IN ASIAN STUDIES I

Effective Term

Semester A 2025/26

Part I Course Overview

Course Title

Special Topics in Asian Studies I

Subject Code

PIA - Public and International Affairs

Course Number

3060

Academic Unit

Public and International Affairs (PIA)

College/School

College of Liberal Arts and Social Sciences (CH)

Course Duration

One Semester

Credit Units

3

Level

B1, B2, B3, B4 - Bachelor's Degree

Medium of Instruction

English

Medium of Assessment

English

Prerequisites

Nil

Precursors

Nil

Equivalent Courses

AI3060 Special Topics in Asian Studies I

Exclusive Courses

Nil

Part II Course Details

Abstract

Why is giving money to the newly-wed couple considered to be inappropriate in some countries but a norm in some others (such as Hong Kong)? Why don't we pay our spouse for sex? Why isn't there a pension for housewives and

househusbands, but domestic helpers may have minimum wage protection? Are online payment systems such as Alipay more advanced than other payment methods such as the Octopus card? Why would a representative of the French King was designated to count the numbers of the young women and girls in the street in Geneva in 1780s? Why was public toilet counted as business instead of public facilities in the city of Canton (Guangzhou) early 20th century?

Underneath these questions are the assumptions that money is an objective, standard measurement of values, and that the economic sphere is separated from the social, the cultural and the political spheres. Discussions in this course this year challenges these assumptions and examines these questions. This course is not about economic theories about free market and transactions. Instead, taking an interdisciplinary approach, we will engage a series of social theories and case studies by historians, anthropologists and sociologists. The theme of this year is “Money Matters: Culture, Society and Economy.” We will unravel the idea of money as the objective measurement and look into the ethical, emotional, gender and other dimensions in money transactions. We will investigate how economic activities are shaped by, and shaping, cultural value and power structure. Some of the topics such as bride wealth have been well explored in existing literature, but other topics such as online payment or virtual currency are emerging phenomena that we will explore together. In doing so this course will familiarize students with some concepts and debates that are key to understand the intersections between the economic, the socio-cultural and the political.

Course Intended Learning Outcomes (CILOs)

	CILOs	Weighting (if app.)	DEC-A1	DEC-A2	DEC-A3
1	Grasp a vocabulary in social science literature;	25	x	x	
2	Be exposed to various social theoretical approaches to economic activities;	25	x	x	
3	Develop conceptual tools to think about the intersection between the economic, the social and the political;	20	x	x	
4	Develop critical analysis on the ethical, emotional and gender dimensions in everyday economic practices;	20	x	x	
5	Apply the above-mentioned critical perspectives to specific case studies	10		x	x

A1: Attitude

Develop an attitude of discovery/innovation/creativity, as demonstrated by students possessing a strong sense of curiosity, asking questions actively, challenging assumptions or engaging in inquiry together with teachers.

A2: Ability

Develop the ability/skill needed to discover/innovate/create, as demonstrated by students possessing critical thinking skills to assess ideas, acquiring research skills, synthesizing knowledge across disciplines or applying academic knowledge to real-life problems.

A3: Accomplishments

Demonstrate accomplishment of discovery/innovation/creativity through producing /constructing creative works/new artefacts, effective solutions to real-life problems or new processes.

Learning and Teaching Activities (LTAs)

LTAs		Brief Description	CILO No.	Hours/week (if applicable)
1	Lectures & tutorials	Introduce and explain concepts, theories, histories, and debates through use of diverse pedagogical strategies; Provide students with opportunities to synthesize readings, raise questions and debate in a critical yet respectful manner	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
2	Readings	Expose students to various approaches to specific issues in political sociology	1, 2, 3, 4	
3	Essay	An exercise for students to synthesize, reflect upon and apply ideas learned in the course	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
4	Group Projects	An exercise for students to synthesize, reflect upon and apply ideas learned in the course and work as a team	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	
5	In-class Exam	An exercise for students to synthesize readings and apply ideas learned in the course	1, 2, 3, 4	

Assessment Tasks / Activities (ATs)

ATs		CILO No.	Weighting (%)	Remarks ("- " for nil entry)	Allow Use of GenAI?
1	Class and tutorial participation	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	25	-	No
2	Individual Essay	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	25	-	No
3	Group Projects	1, 2, 3, 4, 5	25	-	No
4	In-class Exam	1, 2, 3, 4	25	-	No

Continuous Assessment (%)

100

Examination (%)

0

Assessment Rubrics (AR)**Assessment Task**

1. Class and tutorial participation

Criterion

Demonstrate preparedness for class, articulate ideas and engage in discussion.

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Good participation record, adequate familiarity with readings, excellent capacity to articulate ideas and debate.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Records of absence, good familiarity with readings, good capacity to articulate ideas and debate.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Records of absence, some familiarity with readings, adequate capacity to articulate ideas and debate

Marginal (D)

Records of substantial absence, limited familiarity with readings, limited capacity to articulate ideas and debate

Failure (F)

Records of substantial absence, little or no familiarity with readings, little or no capacity to articulate ideas and debate

Assessment Task

2. Individual Essays

Criterion

Summarize, analyse and evaluate arguments

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent capacity to summarize, analyse and evaluate arguments in assigned works

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good capacity to summarize, analyse and evaluate arguments in assigned works

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Adequate capacity to summarize, analyse and evaluate arguments in assigned works

Marginal (D)

Limited capacity to summarize, analyse and evaluate arguments in assigned works

Failure (F)

Fail to summarize, analyse and evaluate arguments in assigned works

Assessment Task

3. In-class exam

Criterion

Synthesize and reflect upon ideas learned in the course

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent capacity to synthesize and reflect upon ideas discussed in readings and in class discussion.

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good capacity to synthesize and reflect upon ideas discussed in readings and in class discussion.

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Adequate capacity to synthesize and reflect upon ideas discussed in readings and in class discussion.

Marginal (D)

Limited capacity to synthesize and reflect upon ideas discussed in readings and in class discussion.

Failure (F)

Fail to synthesize and reflect upon ideas discussed in readings and in class discussion.

Assessment Task

4. Group Projects

Criterion

Synthesize, reflect upon and apply ideas learned in the course

Excellent (A+, A, A-)

Excellent capacity to use concepts, theories and approaches to analyse specific cases and articulate arguments in a reflexive manner

Good (B+, B, B-)

Good capacity to use concepts, theories and approaches to analyse specific cases and articulate arguments in a reflexive manner

Fair (C+, C, C-)

Adequate capacity to use concepts, theories and approaches to analyse specific cases and articulate arguments in a reflexive manner

Marginal (D)

Limited capacity to use concepts, theories and approaches to analyse specific cases and articulate arguments in a reflexive manner

Failure (F)

Fail to use concepts, theories and approaches to analyse specific cases and articulate arguments in a reflexive manner

Part III Other Information**Keyword Syllabus**

Economic activity, money, ethics, emotion, politics, market and intimate life, technology, technocracy and modernity, gift.

Reading List**Compulsory Readings**

	Title
1	Malinowski, Bronislaw: "Kula: The circulating Exchange of Valuables in the Archipelagos of Eastern New Guinea" (Reprinted in George Dalton Ed. Tribal and Peasant Economies 1967, pp. 171-184), The Natural History Press, Garden City, N.Y.
2	Mitchell, Timothy. 1999. "Society, Economy and the State Effect." In The Anthropology of the State: A Reader, edited by Aradhana Sharma and Akhil Gupta, 169-186. Malden, MA; Oxford: Blackwell Pub.
3	Bornstein, Erica. 2012. Disquieting Gifts: Humanitarianism in New Delhi, Stanford studies in human rights. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press.
4	Zelizer, Viviana A. R. 2005. The Purchase of Intimacy. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press. (Selected pages)
5	Sinn, Elizabeth. 1989. Power and Charity: The Early History of the Tung Wah Hospital, Hong Kong, East Asian historical monographs. Hong Kong; New York: Oxford University Press. (selected chapter)

6	Bayly, C.A. 1986. "The Origins of Swadeshi (Home Industry): Cloth and Indian Society, 1700-1930." In <i>The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective</i> , edited by Arjun Appadurai, 295-322. Cambridge ; New York: Cambridge University Press
7	Blake, C. Fred. 2011. <i>Burning Money: The Material Spirit of the Chinese Lifeworld</i> . Honolulu: University of Hawai'i Press.(selected chapter).
8	Ortiz, Horacio. 2017. "A political anthropology of finance: Profits, states, and cultures in cross-border investment in Shanghai." <i>HAU: Journal of Ethnographic Theory</i> 7 (3):325-345.

Additional Readings

	Title
1	Appadurai, Arjun. 1986. <i>The Social Life of Things: Commodities in Cultural Perspective</i> , Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. (Introduction)
2	Polanyi, Karl. 2001. <i>The Great Transformation: The Political and Economic Origins of Our Time</i> . 2nd Beacon Paperback ed. Boston, MA: Beacon Press. (Selected Pages)
3	Simmel, Georg. 2004. <i>The Philosophy of Money</i> . Translated by Tom Bottomore and David Frisby from a first draft by Kaethe Mengelberg. Edited by David Frisby. 3rd ed. London; New York: Routledge. (selected pages)
4	Mauss, Marcel. 1990 [1950]. <i>The Gift: The Form and Reason for Exchange in Archaic Societies</i> . Translated by W.D. Halls. New York: W.W. Norton.
5	Malinowski, Bronislaw. 1968. "Malinowski on the Kula," in Edward E. LeClair, Jr. and Harold K. Schneider, eds., <i>Economic Anthropology</i> , New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 17-39.
6	Spang, Rebecca L. 2015. <i>Stuff and money in the time of the French Revolution</i> . Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press. (chapter 1)
7	Yan, Yunxiang. 1996. <i>The flow of gifts: reciprocity and social networks in a Chinese village</i> . Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press. (Selected pages).
8	Sahlins, Marshall David. 1972. "The Original Affluent Society." In <i>Stone Age Economics</i> , 1-39. Chicago: Aldine-Atherton
9	Chu, Julie Y. 2010. <i>Cosmologies of Credit: Transnational Mobility and the Politics of Destination in China</i> . Durham, NC: Duke University Press.(selected pages).
10	Benthall, Jonathan. 2012. "Charity." In <i>A Companion to Moral Anthropology</i> , edited by Didier Fassin, 359-375. Hoboken, New Jersey: Wiley-Blackwell.
11	Bowie, Katherine A. 1998. "The Alchemy of Charity: Of Class and Buddhism in Northern Thailand." <i>American Anthropologist</i> 100 (2):469-481.
12	Smith, Joanna Handlin. 2009. <i>The art of doing good: charity in late Ming China</i> . Berkeley: University of California Press. (selected pages).
13	Zheng, Yangwen. 2005. <i>The social life of opium in China</i> . Cambridge, UK ; New York: Cambridge University Press. (selected pages)
14	Zelizer, Viviana A. R. 1994. <i>The Social Meaning of Money</i> . New York: BasicBooks (selected pages).
15	Rudrappa, Sharmila. 2015. <i>Discounted Life: The Price of Global Surrogacy in India</i> . New York; London: New York University Press.(chapter 4: Bodies as Commodities).