

## **Asian Emporiums: A Global Dialogue**

(A course of 48 hours, 3 credits)

The liquid world of Monsoon Asia has benefited from its strategic location in what O.W. Wolters has called 'the single ocean', that is to say, the wide expanse of sea from the Bay of Bengal to the China Sea, connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Since time immemorial people have moved all over the region, especially for the purpose of trade and also for other reasons such as pilgrimages, tributary missions, in quest of the 'white elephant' or other symbols of prowess and prestige, in search of medicinal herbs, to escape from the clusters of tradition and for sheer adventure. Ports and market places, some of which developed into emporiums, became the meeting places of a variety of peoples and cultures, creating a cosmopolitan world that predates the present era of globalization. It was indeed in these very places that all forms of multi-cultural, multi-ethnic and multi-religious dialogues took place, gradually assuming global dimensions which we are experiencing today.

This is an introductory course which aims to familiarize undergraduate students with the world of Monsoon Asia throughout the centuries.

Lectures are expected to be of a general nature, making use of many audio-visual aids, and providing guidelines for further reading. Special lectures will be organized, dealing with specific topics such as the Dongson Culture, Sriwijaya, the Rise and Fall of Ayuthia, the English Country Trade, the Armenian Diaspora, *Tharekat*, Nationalism & Revolution, and Piracy in Southeast Asian Waters.

The course breaks down into six big interrelated topics (8 hours each):

- Monsoon Asia
- Heritage
- Religions and Beliefs
- Cultural Expressions
- Trade and Emporiums
- Government and Politics

### **1 Monsoon Asia** (8 hours)

This section deals with the main geographical aspects of the region, the common as well as different physical features which have shaped Monsoon Asia. River valleys separated one civilization from another, as did islands. However, mountain tribes who regard the mountains as their home and sea nomads who are children of the sea were those who traversed and networked the different river valleys and islands.

A short introduction is necessary to deal with geological factors such as the sunken 'Sunda' continent, the existence of volcanoes, the Wallace line, to explain the physical subdivisions of the single ocean, the existence of gold

mines and other minerals such as copper and tin, oil resources and precious stones.

Suggested sub-themes:

- Mountains and Rivers,
- Islands and Oceans,
- Winds and Currents,
- The Dry Zone

## **2 Heritage** (8 hours)

The heritage of the Asian Emporiums is introduced under the following sub-themes:

- Peoples and Languages. Various ethnic groups and the mosaic of languages are unique to the region. Dispersal of the Austronesian-speaking peoples over the Indian Ocean up to the eastern Pacific. Migrations of the Thai and Viet into the area of the Mon-Khmer, etc. Language pockets in island Southeast Asia as in Timor and Alor, Halmahera, Irian (New Guinea). Introduction of writing systems.
- Customs and Values. Ceremonies of *sirih-pinang* as symbols of friendship, royal regalias, wedding customs, clothing, housing. Social values such as reciprocity, perceptions of honour, revenge and notions of justice.
- Rice and Sago Cultures. How these determined the people's life cycles, day-to-day rhythm and attitudes toward the environment. For example, the wedding ceremony among the Tobelo people, an ethnic group in northern Halmahera, where the exchange of gifts revolves around sago and food made of sago (cakes and the like) brought by the groom's family, and rice, rice cookies, etc. brought by the bride's family – a symbolic meeting of the two cultures.
- Body and Healing Systems. The human body as understood and treated by traditional medicine that has long sustained life.
- Artifacts and Monuments. Prehistoric finds and ancient monuments, focusing on selected 'world heritage' monuments such as Angkor, Pagan, Borobudur and the spectacular architecture of the Ifugao terraced rice-fields rather than on the numerous archeological remains of the region. Architectural styles of some religious buildings that show a continuation of a former period, such as the old mosque in Kudus (Central Java) which has the appearance of a Hindu temple.

## **3 Religions and Beliefs** (8 hours)

The arrival of religions from abroad brought the region into a wider world of fellow believers. However, some characteristics are still discernible that reveal a basically common traditional belief in spirits and ancestral rites. An important feature in this section is the movement of people such as pilgrims, religious teachers and missionaries.

Suggested sub-themes:

- Ancient Beliefs
- Confucianism
- Hinduism
- Buddhism
- Islam
- Christianity

#### **4 Cultural Expressions** (8 hours)

The thoughts and feelings of the people, then and now, have been expressed in various ways: in oral and written form, in folk art as well as the fine arts. This section discusses ancient texts as well court chronicles, folk tales and modern novels. Attention is also given to expressions of dissent as reflected in traditional drama, folk songs and the like.

Suggested sub-themes:

- Oral Traditions
- Literature
- Clothes and Textiles
- Visual Arts

#### **5 Trade and Emporiums** (8 hours)

The dynamics of trade and shipping is the central theme of this section.

Suggested sub-themes:

- Overland and sea-borne trade routes, enabling the movement of commodities such as silk and cotton, spices, ceramics, forest and sea products, and gold and precious stones.
- Different networks of traders: Hakka, Hokkien, Gujarati, Arabs, Persians, Armenians, Portuguese, Spaniards, Dutch, British, American (New England), Japanese, etc. Indigenous trade and shipping: Malays, Makassarese, and Buginese, Minangkabau, etc.
- Ports and emporiums where the first cosmopolitan communities developed.

- Shipping technology and legal instruments (maritime law, etc.).

**6 Government and Politics** (8 hours)

Political structures and their interplay are discussed under the following sub-themes:

- Concept of Mandala and Leadership
- Western Colonialism and Japanese Occupation
- Emergence of Modern Nations
- International Relations, Regional Cooperation (ASEAN)

The Asian Emporiums Course is formally offered in:

1. Thammasat University
2. Gadjah Mada University
3. University of Malaya
4. Chulalongkorn University
5. University of Indonesia
6. University of the Philippines