

HH3039 Maritime Asia in the Longue Dureé

This course surveys the history of the seas in the making of Asian history. It examines the making of Maritime Asia in the *longue dureé*. It posits an alternative framing of Asian history from the perspective of the sea. Instead of focusing on individual oceans and seas, it shall treat the Indian Ocean, littoral and archipelagic Southeast Asia, the East Asian seas and the Pacific within a single analytical frame, and chart the impact of the seas and oceans, as well as the people, commodities, and ideas moving and circulating through these maritime spaces, on Asian history. It shall examine the making of premodern Maritime Asia, and its transformations during the periods of European commercial and imperial expansion between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries. It shall also examine the continued impact of the seas and oceans on modern Asian history today.

Learning Objective

1. To demonstrate the importance of the seas and oceans in shaping Asian history
2. To challenge a re-thinking of Asia from the perspective of the sea and the mobilities concomitant with this environment
3. To explore different dimensions of the Asian seas, oceans, and maritime spaces and their interconnections: trade, shipping, port infrastructure, port cities, religion, environment, governance

Content

This course shall examine the history of Maritime Asia in the *longue dureé*. It shall explore the roles of the seas and oceans in shaping the region's history, away from the older models of land-bound nation-states. In doing so, it focuses on the mobilities of people, ideas, and commodities across these spaces. It shall examine different dimensions of Maritime Asia, from trade, business, and the economic infrastructures, to the social communities living and moving in these spaces and obtaining their livelihoods from them, cultural and religious systems and networks, political systems of governance, the environmental issues connected to the seas and maritime spaces, and the technologies and sciences associated with the traversing of such spaces. It also adopts a diachronic perspective tracing the transformations of Maritime Asia from the pre-modern to the early modern and the modern periods of Asian history, from the connecting of the Indian Ocean, Southeast Asian and East Asian seas to the Atlantic and the Pacific. Even as the centers of political power and the world-system shifted between the sixteenth and twentieth centuries, Maritime Asia continued to be the fulcrum of this global system. Looking at Asia from the perspective of the seas and oceans, as well as the littorals and islands that they connect, highlights the importance of mobility as well as the cross-cultural encounters and cosmopolitan environments that they engender. To understand these dynamics and structures, an interdisciplinary approach will be crucial, bringing together environment, technology, logistics, urban studies, piracy, and governance the advent of air travel and transport, the oceans continue to be the most important spaces for the movement of goods and people, driving the global and Asian economies.

Schedule and Plan

Introduction

18 August: Introduction

25th August: Conceptualizing Maritime Asia in the Longue Durée: Approaches and Issues. [Visit to NLB/National Archives](#) > Resources on Maritime Asia

In this first seminar, we shall explore the idea of Maritime Asia and the *longue durée* approach to its role in the shaping of Asian history, moving away from the territorial spaces of land-bound states to the maritime spaces connecting different parts of the Asian landmass to eastern Africa, the Americas, and archipelagic Asia. Yet, the concept of Maritime Asia changed over time, through its integration into new European projects of commercial and political expansion. In this course, we shall examine different aspects of Maritime Asia through the centuries, from the environment to port cities and societies and cultures, to trade, technology, business, health, knowledge, and state-formation. In addition to the chronological and interdisciplinary approach, we shall study the comparisons and connections between maritime regions that had hitherto been studied in themselves, namely the Indian Ocean, the East Asian seas and maritime Southeast Asia.

1st September: Emporiums, Rivers, and the Sea: Places, Environments, and Societies in premodern Maritime Asia

This second seminar surveys the maritime environments of premodern Asia, and various sources on the port cities and maritime emporiums, as well as the rivers, seas, and littorals in the Indian Ocean, East Asia, and Southeast Asia. From the Austronesian migrations of the prehistoric period to the emporiums of Southeast Asia in Chinese and Arab sources, to the records on major port cities in China such as Quanzhou and Guangzhou, we shall attempt to reconstruct the structures and dynamics of this maritime world.

Premodern Maritime World

8th September: [Activity at Asian Civilizations Museum](#) > Trade, Tribute, and Travel in the making of early modern Maritime Asia:

This seminar moves away from the focus on the port-cities and environments to the commodities and people traveling within these maritime spaces and environments, as well as the political and diplomatic systems created to facilitate such an exchange. It shall examine records of the Asian tributary trade system and the accounts of Chinese and Arab traders, pilgrims and travellers on these maritime spaces.

Early Modern Transformations

15th September. Exploration, War, and Empire: European Expansion, a new world-system, and the transformation of Maritime Asia

For this week, we shall discuss the transformation of Maritime Asia during the age of European explorations, from the perspective of technology, business, and empire. We shall examine the impact of new European ship and armaments technologies and a new commercial vision and strategy in Eurasian trade, especially in the maritime sphere. We will examine the new maritime empires created between the sixteenth and nineteenth centuries.

22 September. Colonial Port Cities: Mestizos, cosmopolitanism, and race in Maritime Asia

This seminar examines the structure and dynamics of European port-cities established in Maritime Asia, and their relations with their respective hinterlands and other local port settlements. We look at the processes of cross-cultural interactions, both between European and local communities, as well as between European and other Asian migrant communities. We examine, in particular, the processes of social and cultural miscegenation and mixing, and the emergence of mestizo societies and cultures in these port cities, looking in particular at dress, literature, food, and religion.

Colonial Transformations

29th September. Colonialism, Technology and Business: Steamships, Dry Docks, and Rail in Maritime Asia

The seminar for this week shall discuss the roles of technology in the transformation of maritime travel, trade, as well as the port in Asia. It examines the impact of steamship shipping on the maritime transport and commercial environment in Asia and the creation of new systems to support the new shipping technologies. Concomitant with this would be the transformation of the communications technologies and environments, as well as the modernization of land transport-systems. These technological changes had far-reaching social, economic, and cultural implications, in these port-cities, both for the colonial and post-colonial periods.

6th October. Recess Week

13th October. Knowledge, Environment & Extraction: Science, Cartography, and Ethnography in the Mapping of the Seas/Oceans

The expansion of colonial rule was accompanied by the establishment of new traditions of knowledge, not only for society, history, culture, and geography. Much as colonialism involved the extension of European control and suzerainty over the land, the colonial gaze was soon turned to the sea, as important repositories of resources, be it fishes and other marine products, and natural minerals and resources. The new colonial states began to see these thalassic and oceanic spaces as territories and new frameworks of sovereignty were created to lay claim to these seas. In many ways, these processes built on earlier debates about the Law of the Sea, although discussions of local custom and ideas also became important in the creation of the new regimes of governance over the seas and littoral waters in the new colonial and autonomous states created in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.

20 October. Disease, health, borders & governance in Asian Port Cities

The scientific knowledge of the sea paralleled the rise of new political regimes which sought to control the movement of people, commodities, and violence over the sea which had characterized the maritime worlds of Asia for the past centuries. Large scale migration of people brought about by improvements in maritime technologies were soon to lead to problems of disease and health, adding to earlier issues of governance such as piracy and smuggling. New institutions of border control, both for humans and for commodities, and instances of anxiety and disruption caused by epidemics and carriers of contagious diseases underlaid the institutions of control and seeing underlying the modern colonial and nation-states.

Modern Transformations

27 October. Maritime & Littoral Communities and Cultures in modern maritime Asia
(Possible **Visit to Nine Emperor Gods Festival temples**)

For this week, we shall examine the impact of the modern transformations of the maritime environments in Asia on the maritime and littoral communities living in these spaces, and the continued importance of the sea to littoral or insular societies. As a case study, we might be visiting selected temples in the Nine Emperor Gods Festival as part of a broader study into maritime and littoral communities and cultures. The festival, with its popularity among the Chinese in Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, as well as its ritual orientation towards the sea, epitomizes the cultural transformations in migrant communities.

3rd November. Creating a New Maritime Order: Territory, Sovereignty, and Law in Navigating the Asian Seas

The creation of colonial empires in Asia laid the foundations for the emergence of a new territorial order and regime that brought new perspectives and definitions to the sea and the communities living in these littoral and thalassic spaces. Competing territorial claims as well as the extension of concepts of sovereignty to the sea and the creation of a new legal framework to govern these spaces, the resources therein, and the ships and people moving through paralleled new processes of globalization during the Cold War and into the new millennium.

10th November. Technologies, Logistics and the Maritime Industry [Visit to Port of Singapore Authority (Tentative)]

While air travel has very much replaced sea transport as the most common means of long-distance (and even short-distance) travel, the sea and maritime transportation remain very important in the global and regional flow of goods in Maritime Asia. As such, new technologies of transport and logistics, such as the rise of the container, have further transformed port infrastructures and the dynamics of the logistics business, as well as our understanding of ports and the maritime in the fortunes of Asian economies. Using the case study of the Maritime Port Authority of Singapore as the end-point of the course's discussion of Maritime Asia, we shall examine the history of Singapore's port as it moves into the 21st century and towards the future, where it has retained its importance despite the economic diversification of Singapore and its transformation into a major industrial and high-tech production economy.

17th November Presentations

Visit to Singapore River: Activity

Visit to Rochor River

> Maritime and littoral societies and communities

Learning Outcome

Students will be asked to rethink Asia and Asian history, from the perspective of the sea. They will be able to adopt an interdisciplinary approach to the study of Maritime Asia. They will also be able to understand the history of Maritime Asia in the *longue durée*, from the contexts of pre-modern Asia to the present. They will understand the significance of Maritime Asia today, even as the world has been transformed by air transportation and travel. They will gain a better understanding of Maritime Asia from an interdisciplinary perspective

Student Assessment

Students will be assessed by 100% Continuous Assessment.

- a. Class participation/Seminar Presentations/Discussions (30%)
The seminar presentations shall be based on readings assigned for each week. They will be evaluated in terms of organization, content, style, and fluency. Depending on the size of the class, presentations will be done by individuals or groups with the marks assigned accordingly. The grade will also include the student's class participation outside of the presentation and discussion. 3% will be deducted for every class missed without a valid reason with the approval of the instructor.
- c. Group Documentation Project / Presentation (35%)
The Group Documentation Project will be based on three components: the proposal (5%), the documentation portfolio (20%), and presentation (10%). The aim of the project is for the group to document the history and heritage of a particular aspect of Maritime Singapore, be it the port, the buildings, technologies, infrastructures, people/communities, occupations, businesses, rituals/religion. The emphasis will be on crafting and executing a research documentation project. It shall focus on collecting oral histories (through videorecordings) and collecting various primary materials (such as photographs, letters, old footage & documentaries etc). The students will be divided into groups to undertake these projects and presentations.
- d. Individual Final Paper (35%)
Each student shall also complete a final paper of at least 3500 words. The final paper assignment shall constitute of an annotated bibliography (10%) and a final paper (25%). The annotated bibliography shall consist of an introduction and an list of primary and secondary sources with annotations. The final paper has to contain a stipulated number of primary sources.

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