

**Course Title:** Power, Democracy and Legitimacy in Southeast Asia  
**Meeting Times:** TBA  
**Instructor:** Andrew Johnson  
**Office Hours:** TBA  
**Credits:** 3 credits

### **Prerequisites**

This course does not presume any previous experience in Southeast Asian Studies

### **Course Overview**

In 2006, tanks rolled into Bangkok and deposed a popularly-elected government in a military takeover of power. While many Thais saw this as a denial of their right to an electoral democracy, others cheered the soldiers as those restoring legitimacy to the Thai government. Both supporters and opponents of the coup described themselves as champions of democracy. How can this be?

Despite the deep engagement that the Thai debate had with Thai concepts of morality, power, and legitimacy, the Thai situation is not unique. The tension of what constitutes a legitimate source of power is one which resonates with many such “emerging” or “quasi” democracies. Yet legitimacy and power are deeply cultural features. In this course, we will take a historical and anthropological approach to the question of the cultural underpinnings of political legitimacy. We will examine state formation in Southeast Asia, state violence, and the always difficult question of legitimacy. How has power been thought of, challenged, and contested in the region?

### **Course Requirements and Grading**

#### *Attendance and participation (25% of final)*

Attendance will be mandatory and recorded. More than two absences will significantly lower a student’s final grade. Students will be expected to have read the assigned materials *before* class and be prepared to discuss their ideas in class (and not simply show up).

#### *Précis (20% of final)*

Students will be asked to produce a one-page response paper each week, addressing their reflections upon the week’s assignments. These papers should also ideally include a question or series of questions about the issues raised in the readings. These are due to me via email on the Sunday before class.

#### *Presentation (15% of final)*

Students are required to present one of the readings in the syllabus, facilitating the class discussion. This is not a powerpoint presentation, nor a summary of the reading,

but rather a 10-minute presentation analyzing the reading, its relevance to the themes of the course, and the questions which it raises.

### *Research Project (40% of final)*

The final research paper will allow students to apply their own creativity and understanding of Southeast Asia to bear upon a specific topic of their own choosing: e.g. a historical or current crisis or issue and how this challenges or contributes to notions of power and legitimacy which we explore in the course. Specific examples might include: sovereignty disputes over the Spratley Islands; the growth of spirit “cults” associated with capitalism in Vietnam; or the fracturing of Lao political parties during the 1970s. Essays should be no more than 9,000 words in length.

This is a graduate-level course, although advanced undergraduates are welcome to attend. Undergraduates taking the course will have a slightly reduced assignment load.

## **Academic Integrity**

The School of International & Public Affairs does not tolerate cheating and/or plagiarism in any form. Those students who violate the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct will be subject to the Dean’s Disciplinary Procedures.

[http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources\\_services/student\\_affairs/academic\\_policies/deans\\_discipline\\_policy.html](http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources_services/student_affairs/academic_policies/deans_discipline_policy.html) 4

Please familiarize yourself with the proper methods of citation and attribution. The School provides some useful resources online; we strongly encourage you to familiarize yourself with these various styles before conducting your research:

[http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources\\_services/student\\_affairs/academic\\_policies/code\\_of\\_conduct.html](http://sipa.columbia.edu/resources_services/student_affairs/academic_policies/code_of_conduct.html)

Violations of the Code of Academic & Professional Conduct should be reported to the Associate Dean for Student Affairs.

## **Course Schedule**

(\*) Denotes a book to be read in entirety

(#) Denotes a book from which we will read excerpts or an article.

Readings are due *on the day which they are listed*.

This course is laid out in three major sections. The first of these deals with an involved case study of the 2006 Thai coup d’etat. We begin in the first section by looking at the events of September 2006 and move on to discuss the causes, ideology behind the coup, and the ramifications. The second section deals with issues of power and legitimacy in the region on a larger scale with a special focus on the search for moral/religious sources of power and with Bali as a particular case study. Finally, the third section deals with the breakdown of legitimacy: violence both by states directed at

its citizens or the violence of revolutions to ask how such violence can be re-incorporated or appropriated into legitimating power.

## **Readings and Schedule of classes**

**(Note: I will insert dates once I know how many times/week my class will meet)**

(\*) Denotes a book to be read in entirety

(#) Denotes a book from which we will read excerpts or an article.

Readings are due *on the day which they are listed*.

This course is laid out in three major sections. The first of these deals with an involved case study of the September 2006 Thai coup d'état. We begin by looking at the event itself and move on to discuss the causes, ideology behind the coup, and the ramifications. The second section deals with issues of power and legitimacy in the Southeast Asian region on a larger scale with a special focus on how moral/religious ideas ground power. Finally, the third section deals with an interrogation of what legitimates state power. We will ask how violence both by states directed at its citizens or the violence of revolutions to ask how such violence can be re-incorporated or appropriated into legitimating power.

### **SECTION I**

#### **Week 1 (Sep 10): Introduction**

In the first week, I will give a short overview of the class and my expectations, as well as go over some general introduction for students not familiar with Southeast Asia as a region.

#### **Week 2 (Sep 17)**

##### **The 2006 Thai coup d'état (and resultant violence)**

How did both the coup supporters and the coup opponents see their efforts as restoring legitimacy to a flawed system? What assumptions did these efforts rest upon?

#Ferarra, Federico. 2010. *Thailand Unhinged: unraveling the myth of a Thai-style democracy*. Equinox books

#Pattana Kitiarsa. 2006. "In Defense of the Thai-Style Democracy" (to be distributed)

#Hewison, Kevin and Kengkij Kitirianglarp. "Thai-Style Democracy: The Royalist Struggle for Thailand's Politics". 2010. In Ivarsson and Isager, eds., *Saying the Unsayable*. NIAS Press.

#### **Week 3 (Sep 24) (continued)**

#Kasit Piromya. 2012. "Thailand's Rocky Path towards a Full-Fledged Democracy" in *Bangkok May 2010: Perspectives on a Divided Thailand*, Michael Montesano et al, eds., Singapore: ISEAS press.

#Pavin Chachalavapongpun. 2009. "Confusing Democracies: Diagnosing Thailand's Democratic Crisis 2001-2008", in *Political Change, Democratic Transitions and Security in Southeast Asia*, (edited by Mely Caballero-Anthony), London: Routledge.

#Pravit Rojanaphruk and Jiranan Hanthamrongwit. 2010. "Distorted Mirror and Lamp: The politicization of the Thai media in the post-Thaksin era," in Marc Askew, ed., *Legitimacy Crisis in Thailand*. Chiang Mai: Silkworm Books, pp:161-197.

#### **Week 4 (Oct 1)**

##### **Interpreting the coup: Democracy, Dhammocracy, and Things Between**

As should be clear from the first introduction to the Thai political crisis, a deeper understanding of Thai notions of kingship and power are needed to get at the motivations behind the coup and notions of "Thai-style Democracy". Here, then, we will examine kingship in Thailand, looking at the role that the monarchy has played in Thailand's political realm. How do notions of kingly power conflict with notions of democratic mandate?

#Anderson, Benedict. 1976. "Withdrawal Symptoms"

#Surin Maisirikrod. 1999. "Joining the Values Debate: The Peculiar Case of Thailand." *SOJOURN* (14:2).

#Surin Maisirikrod and Duncan McCargo. 1997. "Electoral Politics" in Kevin Hewison, ed., *Political Change in Thailand: Democracy and Participation*. Routledge.

#### **Week 5 (Oct 8)**

\*Handley, Paul M. 2006. *The King Never Smiles: A biography of Thailand's Bhumibol Adulyadej*. New Haven: Yale University Press.

#### **Week 6 (Oct 15)**

\*Thongchai Winichakul. 1994. *Siam Mapped: A History of the Geo-Body of the Nation*. Honolulu: University of Hawai'i press.

## **SECTION II**

### **Power and Legitimacy in Southeast Asian History**

In this and the rest of the course, we move on from an in-depth look at Thai politics to address the question of power and legitimacy in a larger Southeast Asian context. How have Southeast Asian states justified their position? How does this hold change as societies undergo transformation?

#### *Power and Moral Authority*

#### **Week 7 (Oct 22)**

Building upon our Thai example, here we will look at the crossover between ideas of moral authority and political power. How is the Thai example comparable with those from elsewhere in the region? Is there a "regional" perspective on legitimacy and power?

\*Alagappa, Muthiah, ed. 1995. *Political Legitimacy in Southeast Asia: The Quest for Moral Authority*. Stanford University Press.

#### **Week 8 (Oct 29)**

Choose **three** of the following chapters:

#Anderson, Benedict. 1976. "The Idea of Power in Javanese Culture" in *Culture and Politics in Indonesia*. Cornell University Press.

#Abalahin, Fishel, George, Willford & George in Willford, Andrew and Kenneth M. George, eds. *Spirited Politics: Religion and Public Life in Contemporary Southeast Asia*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.

**Week 9 (Nov 5)**  
**Academic Holiday**

**Week 10 (Nov 12)**

*Case Study: Singapore*

\*Barr, Michael D. and Zlatko Skrbis. 2008. *Constructing Singapore: Elitism, Ethnicity, and the Nation-Building Project*. NIAS Press.

**Week 11 (Nov 19)**

*Comparison: Thailand and Bali*

Here, we will look at the idea of the spectacle at the heart of statecraft: how are the symbols of power manipulated in a way that lends validity to certain sources and not to others? What role does colonialism play in introducing new sources of validation and denying others? We will take as our primary case study pre-Dutch Bali as well as Thailand.

\* Wiener, Margaret. 1995. *Visible and Invisible Realms: Power, Magic, and Colonial Conquest in Bali*. University of Chicago Press.

**Week 12 (Nov 26)**

#Jackson, Peter. 2004. "The Thai Regime of Images" *SOJOURN: Journal of Social Issues in Southeast Asia*, Vol. 19.

#Anderson, Benedict. 1990. *Imagined Communities*. New York: Verso.

**SECTION III**

**Violence**

But what happens when the legitimacy of the state breaks down? Weber, as we have seen, describes sovereignty as the monopoly of the use of violence. How is such violence legitimated, and how can the trauma and dislocations generated be re-integrated into the idea of legitimate power?

**Week 13 (Dec 3)**

#Bowie, Katherine Ann. 1997. *Rituals of national loyalty: an anthropology of the state and the village scout movement in Thailand*. New York: Columbia University Press.

#Hansen, Anne Ruth. 2008. "Gaps in the World: Harm and Violence in Khmer Buddhist Narrative" in *At the Edge of the Forest: Essays on Cambodia, History, and Narrative in Honor of David Chandler*. Ithaca: Cornell Southeast Asia Program.

**Week 14 (Dec 10)**

#Siegel, James. 2006. *Naming the Witch*. Stanford University Press.

## Doing well in the course

When I grade, I am *not* looking for a list of facts to check off that you have gotten from the readings, nor am I looking for you to provide a summary of the readings. Rather, I look for very specific things. First of all, 1) **do you understand the points taken by the authors whom you cite?** This means not just stitching together the key quotes from the text, but showing an appreciation for the logic which the author uses in constructing his or her argument. This also does *not* mean that you have to agree with the author! Pointing out oversights or flaws in authors' arguments is a great way to engage better with the readings, so long as you back up your criticisms (i.e. it's not enough to say "I don't buy it," but one should say "I don't buy it *because*..."). Secondly, and on a related point, 2) **can you bring the author's insights into dialogue with others which we have read in the course and provide your own insight and analysis?** Ask yourself, what might the author of this week's readings say about last week's? Do the two ideas support each other? Are they contradictory? Finally, 3) **is the writing clear?** Does your writing flow logically and coherently? Are there mistakes in the grammar, punctuation, or other technical features of the writing?

**An A** paper shows not only an understanding of the source material, but real creativity in analysis, incorporating the student's own insights in a way that engages, questions, and builds upon the texts cited.

**A B** paper shows a clear understanding of the texts and a generally good breadth of knowledge. The student's analysis is present and logical, and the paper is technically correct.

**A C** paper has some flaws. For instance, the student does not build his or her own analytical argument and instead simply revisits points already made by previous authors *or* the student fails to understand some of the texts which he or she cites *or* there are serious flaws in grammar or organization.

**A D** paper has several of the flaws described above.

**An F** paper is unreadable, plagiarized, or otherwise unacceptable.

I am always available for consultation should you need some help either writing or in reading the texts. Another valuable resource which you have at Columbia is the Writing Center, and I urge you to make use of it. This is especially useful for those of you for whom English is not a first language.

It may be tempting to put off assignments until the night before class. I urge you not to. Getting the readings done early and getting an early start on writing projects will allow you to consult with me or the Writing Center, give you more time to reflect upon them, and ultimately give you a better final project than a last-minute rush job. Late assignments will be penalized a grade level *per day* unless there is an overwhelmingly compelling reason (and not just a cold, a test in another class, et cetera).

If you have any questions, concerns, or need help with any aspect of the course, please do not hesitate to contact me. I am available for consultation outside of office hours as well (within reason).