EAS 291. Water and the city in Asia (Winter 2014)

Tuesdays 3.30pm – 6.30pm. Room 3117 Bunche Hall

Instructors:

R. Bin Wong, 11292 Bunche Hall, OH: Thurs 3:30-5:00 pm and by appointment

Nicholas Menzies, 11288 Bunche Hall, OH Mon 1:30-3:00 pm and by appointment

The seminar proposes that water has histories as well as physical, social, and cultural meanings which together can help us understand how urban environments are being ordered and contested. Approaching water and the city in Asia from the perspectives of the humanities gives insights into the values, norms and choices about water that shape East Asian cities, and the conventionally objective but no less value-laden methodologies of scientists, planners and engineers.

Format: 10 weekly sessions of three hours each over one quarter. In each session the instructors and/or invited faculty speakers will introduce the topic and the assigned readings followed by class discussion.

Required work: in addition to weekly preparation of the course readings for seminar discussion, students will prepare three 3-5 page papers in weeks 3, 6, and 9. Students will make a brief final oral presentation in week 10. More specific information about these assignments is provided separately.

Grading: each paper and the final oral presentation will count for 20% of your final grade. The remaining 20% of your final grade will be based on your weekly participation.

NOTE: With one exception, readings are posted online to the class web site. For week 6 (Feb. 11th) however, one of the assignments is the novel “How to Get Filthy Rich in Rising Asia: a Novel” by Hamid Mohsin. Students are required to purchase this book and read it before the class meets. As of December 20th, 2013, the book was available online through Amazon at $12.67 (paperback); $19.71 (hardcover); and $9.99 (Kindle).

Week 1 (Jan. 7th) Setting the scene.

During this introductory session, the Instructor of Record will speak for about 40 minutes to introduce the theme of the seminar and to frame a discussion that will explore the extent to which patterns of city-building in Asia are rooted in their earlier, historical development and how norms, values, and social relations about water shape the choices and decisions being made about how to face the challenges of urbanization.

Readings and discussion will focus on:

- Physical characteristics of the historical development of cities in Asia. Water as the place where the city is situated – rivers, canals, ports.
Water and the city. The city as a node connecting production, trade and exchanges carried on rivers, canals, harbors and ports. Water that connects the urban to the rural. Water as the source of food for the people – fishing and water for agriculture.

The city in Asia as a node vs the city in Europe (and elsewhere?) as a center that is separate from and controls a rural hinterland.

Historic and contemporary patterns of urbanization in Asia: in-migration from rural areas; incorporation of existing smaller villages and towns.

Readings:


Week 2 (Jan. 14th) Pure Water. Religion, ritual, health and hygiene

Guest Speaker: William Bodiford, Asian Languages and Cultures

A discussion of purity as a desirable attribute of water embodied in religious and ritual values as well as in quantified, ‘objective’ scientific qualities. How do these values of water shape the treatment of water in the process of urbanization?

- Ritual purity → scientific purity.
- “Purity” as a religious, ritual or philosophical attribute of water. Geomancy in the design of cities.
- “Purity” as a scientific attribute of water. Pure water and health. Hygiene and modernity.
- Urbanization as a threat to purity? ‘Purification’ through engineering, cleansing, ritual.

Readings:


Pp. 14-29: "A world of water and words"
Pp. 31-43: "Social death, social birth"
Pp. 89-102: "Edo: Population"


Pp. 473-479: "Ryogoku Bridge" by Hiraga Gennai.


Pp. 181-218: "The River Sumida"
Week 3  (Jan. 21st)  The ecological footprint of water in the city

“Cities only survive because of human, material, and communications networks with their hinterlands or bioregions.” (from http://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0360132304001131)

The city as a sink for resources from surrounding rural areas and a drain exporting waste out of the built urban environment.

• Urban use of water as an environmental dump. How people experience and adapt and/or resist the effects of toxic urban waste.
• ‘Out of sight, out of mind’. Moving pollution and toxic waste out of the city and on to others. Beijing Olympics. Hong Kong. Minamata.

Readings:
Bai, Xuemei. 2010. Industrial Relocation in Asia: a Sound Environmental Strategy? Environment: Science and Policy for Sustainable Development. 44:5, 8-21
Ch. 5 Fish on Land. pp 240 – 244. Flags of Wandering; pp 255 – 271. The Mother of a Weed

[The session will also use the 1972 photo essay for Life Magazine by Eugene Smith and clips from the documentary film “Minamata, the Victims and their World (1972) by Tsuchimoto Noriaki]

Week 4  (Jan. 28th)  Water in the City — Cinematic Symbolisms of Water as Amenity and Waste

Guest speaker: Aparna Sharma (World Arts and Cultures)

This presentation focuses on the cinematic depictions of water in South Asian and South-East Asian cinemas, proposing a continuity on the grounds of the two regions’ shared ecological landscape. The presentation commences by analyzing how mainstream cinema such as that of Bombay supports a nationalist agenda through its depiction of water as an amenity and marker of national progress. This contrasts with how parallel and new wave filmmakers of India, Thailand and Hong Kong create critical and symbolic representations of water through which we can appreciate city-dwellers’ experiences of navigating tightly constructed cityscapes.

Readings:

*The guest speaker will select and show clips from a wide range of films including documentaries, experimental film and feature films from India, Thailand and Hong Kong.*

**“Whose Voices”** Weeks 5 & 6 will consider who gets access to water and how?

- *The polemics of how water is described and problematized*
- *Differential access to water.*
- *Primacy of politics. Who the players are in the political game.*

**Week 5 (Feb. 4th)** "Whose Voices?” (i) Bottom-up

*Guest speaker: Steve Commins (Luskin School)*

Community participation in urban water services involves far more than the direct delivery of water. A central issue is how different types of participation may contribute to strengthening different types of accountability for sustained service delivery. Effective forms of community participation in service delivery provide both opportunities and incentives for local government officials to respond to community needs. This can create opportunities for more downward accountability, and thus reduce the accountability gap between the citizens and policymakers. Transparency at the local level may also be enhanced through score cards for public services or supporting local independent media to act as monitors of project activities. Street theater as a vehicle for organizing and asserting the communities’ interests and concerns.

*Readings:*


**Week 6 (Feb. 11th)** “Whose Voices?” (ii) Top-down

*Guest speaker: Matt Kahn (Economics / Institute for the Environment and Sustainability)*

Who gets access to water and how and how much will it cost?

- Setting norms and shaping the city through policy, planning, legislation. Differential access to water.
- Formal mechanisms for managing and pricing water in the city. What kinds of spaces do these formal mechanisms create or leave open for other voices?
Readings:
Gunawansa, Asanga and Sonia Ferdous Hoque. (No Date). Right to Water Versus Water Pricing: Challenges in Developing Countries. Unpublished paper. Singapore. Institute of Water Policy, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, Singapore National University.

Week 7  (Feb. 18th)  Describing water in the city. (i) Visual Representations

Guest speaker: Stephanie Pincetl (Institute of the Environment and Sustainability)

• Science vs cultural
• Science and values and philosophy
• Mapping. From the mechanics of mapmaking to notions of situating people, institutions or values in time and space.

Readings:
Ch. 21. The Four Wan and Nine Yeuk (pp. 57 – 59)
Ch. 38. Tung Choi Stree and Sai Yeung Choi Street (pp. 108 – 111)
Ch. 39. Sai Yee Street (pp. 112 – 114)

Week 8  (Feb. 25th)  Describing water in the city. (ii) Written Representations

Guest speaker: Ursula Heise (Dept. English and Institute for the Environment and Sustainability)

• How different forms of writing convey the ways in which people see and respond to the values and challenges associated with water in the city.

Readings:
Introduction. pp. 1 – 31 and footnotes (pp. 459 – 487)
Chapter 1. pp. 32 – 35; pp. 54 – 74 and footnotes (pp. 459 – 487)

During weeks 9 & 10 students will synthesize the preceding discussions to reflect on the meanings of water and its management in Asia’s growing cities today. Students will be invited not only to recognize and to articulate principles underlying urban change, but also to understand how context shapes the implementation of those principles. Students will consider what water issues in Asian cities might mean to our understanding of and responses to global transformations of the human environment.

In addition to the assigned readings for week 9, the instructors will assign clips from “Suzhou River” a feature film by Lou Ye (2002) set in Shanghai.

Week 9 (March 4th)  Are there “Asian” ways of addressing water in cities?

Are the characteristics, attributes and dynamics discussed above observed across different cities in Asia? To what extent they are a post-World War II phenomenon, and can we identify geographical / historical / political / cultural patterns?

- Is there evidence that cities in Asia had a distinctive association (contrasted to the urban / rural separation in Europe) with rural areas and agricultural production mediated through water as a resource and as a medium of transport and communication?
- Was there a pattern of stewardship of resources in pre-industrial times (as proposed by Totman for Japan and Korea) that was ‘broken’ with the onset of industrialization [Thornber suggests that in the literary environmental imagination, at least, this was the case]
- Water as an instrument in international relations (Singapore)
- Is there an “Asian” pattern that is distinct from other places in the world? Compare and contextualize with Los Angeles. With other Pacific Rim cities. With Europe.

Readings:

Week 10 (March 11th) Reflections on water, the city and the humanities in Asia—cultural criticism and political activism as subjects and objects.

Student oral presentations and discussion