

# CET Syllabus of Record



**Program:** CET Vietnam: Development Studies

**Course Title:** Visualizing Southeast Asia

**Course Code:** HC/MDST 390

**Total Hours:** 45

**Recommended Credits:** 3

**Primary Discipline / Suggested Cross Listings:** Media Studies / Asian Studies, Communication, Anthropology, Sociology, Environmental Studies, Gender Studies

**Language of Instruction:** English

**Prerequisites/Requirements:** None

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## Description

This course investigates and problematizes the visual portrayals of history, culture and contemporary societies in Southeast Asia, with a focus on Vietnam. Through photography, filmography, new media, and other visual representations, we will consider the interweaving of cultural identities, historical processes of development, and many socio-political issues in Southeast Asian societies. The course also introduces students to important visual works that have shaped discussions on Vietnam's development, and which have contributed to a more multifaceted, nuanced "Vietnamese identity". These visual works will be supplemented by key texts on Vietnamese identity, and course participants will confront and supplement these texts further with their own practical fieldwork, street photography, and visual and ethnographic encounters in Vietnam.

We reflect on the media representations that pervade contemporary images of Vietnam and attempt to answer questions, such as: *How do media portrayals of urban Vietnam and rural Vietnam reflect the ways in which economic development has shaped perceptions of social progress, tradition, equality, power relations, and the attitudes of the citizens in Vietnam?*, and *How do we make sense of experiencing and conducting research in Vietnamese society today?*

This course provides students the opportunity to focus on and document their academic interests and personal experiences during their time in Ho Chi Minh City. The program's Traveling Seminars offer unique opportunities to learn about and document alternative perspectives on contemporary Vietnam. Site visits and guest lectures during the Traveling Seminars have included:

- Learning about different communities in Vietnam, including migrant workers, displaced children, victims of forced eviction due to urbanization projects, Vietnam's LGBTQ community, artist communes, religious minorities, and senior citizens, among others;

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- Opportunities for visual documentation of ritual and festival activities;
- Documenting the environmental impacts of urban planning and the challenges of rapid economic growth to both rural and urban communities.

We help all students to (1) articulate their proposed research interest and subject of visual documentation, and (2) develop visual portfolios connected to their majors, research interests, internships and daily experiences in Vietnam.

### Objectives

During this course, students gain:

- An appreciation for the diversity of cultures and identities in Southeast Asia, as represented through historical and contemporary works of visual media;
- A detailed investigation into the role of visual studies and media images in depicting and shaping narratives of power and representation of war and political conflict in rural and urban Vietnam;
- A practical, fieldwork and workshop-based primer to documentary photography/video methodologies.

### Course Requirements

#### **Attendance**

Attendance, as detailed in the CET Vietnam Attendance Policy.

#### **Participation**

Active participation is essential in this course. Students create a Field Photography (visual archive: photography, video, documentary) for in-class presentation (5 minutes each) and a Final Project (final visual documentary project together with a write-up of maximum 1000 words about the project -- description and analysis). Students must read all required materials before coming to class and be ready to discuss topics and their own photography/video work in detail with other students, workshop participants and faculty.

#### **Methods of Evaluation**

The course grade is determined as follows:

- Field Photography: 30% (in-class presentation)
- Participation: 30%
- Final Project (visual portfolio): 40% (to be presented to the whole class at the end of the course as an exchange of knowledge).

#### **Suggestions** for Field Photography and Final Project:

Capture visual expressions / depictions of or one of the most outstanding cultural traits of Vietnamese culture in Ho Chi Minh City then present to the class. You may want to base on the

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topics of this course and the readings to find subjects of your interest and find the right field sites for your projects. Make sure you have some analysis rather than only description.

### Primary Texts

Anderson, Benedict R. O'G 1991 *Imagined communities: Reflections on the origin and spread of nationalism*. London: Verso. (Introduction)

Bui, TH 2016 'The influence of social media in Vietnam's elite Politics', *Journal of Current Southeast Asian Affairs*, vol. 35, no. 2.

Douglas Harper 2012. *Visual Sociology*. Routledge: London and New York, pp. 8-17 (chapter on Visual Ethnography )

Emerson, Donald. 1984. "Southeast Asia: What's in a name?" *Journal of Southeast Asian Studies*, 15 (1): 1-21.

Harms, E 2013 'Eviction time in the new Saigon: Temporalities of Displacement in the Rubble of Development', *Cultural Anthropology*, vol. 28, issue 2, pp. 344-368.

Harms, E 2012 'Beauty as control in the new Saigon: Eviction, new urban zones, and atomized dissent in a Southeast Asian city', *Journal of The American Ethnological Society* , vo. 39, issue 4, pp. 735-750.

Harrison, R 2006 'Southeast Asia on Screen: Introduction, cinema as an emerging field in South East Asian Studies', *South East Asia Research*, vol. 14, issue 2, pp. 133-146.

Hatley, BL. 2009. 'Love, religion and social difference: Two films about polygamy and Indonesian Society', in Verlag S GmbH, Michalik Y, and Coppens L (eds), *Asian Hot Shots: Indonesian Cinema*, Schuren, pp. 46-63.

Healy, D 2006 'Laments of Warriors' wives: Regendering the war in Vietnamese Cinema', *South East Asia Research*, vol. 14, no. 2, pp. 231-259.

Healy, D 2010 'From triumph to tragedy: visualizing war in Vietnamese film and fiction', *South East Asia Research*, vol.18, no.2, pp. 325-347.

Kitiarsa, P. 2007. "Muai Thai" cinema and the burdens of Thai men, *South East Asia Research*, vol.15, no. 3, 407-424.

Luvass Brent 2017 'Ethnography and Street Photography', *Society for Visual Anthropology* (Retrieved from <http://www.anthropology-news.org/index.php/2017/03/10/ethnography-and-street-photography-two-arts-of-serendipity/>)

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Nina Hien 2013 'The Good, the Bad, and the Not Beautiful: In the Street and on the Ground in Vietnam', *Local Culture/Global Photography*, vol. 3, issue 2.

Nualart, C 2016 'Queer art in Vietnam: from closet to pride in two decades', *Palgrave Communications 2*, vol. 2.

Pink, S 2001 *Visual Ethnography: Images, Media and Representation in Research*. Sarah Pink. 2001. SAGE Publications., pp. 17-29.

Slater, TJ 1991 'Teaching Vietnam: The Politics of Documentary' in Anderegg, M (ed.), *Inventing Vietnam: The War in Film and Television*, Temple University Press, pp. 269-290.

The girl in the picture: Kim Phuc's journey from war to forgiveness.  
<http://edition.cnn.com/2015/06/22/world/kim-phuc-where-is-she-now/index.html>

The Vietnam War review: <https://www.theguardian.com/tv-and-radio/2017/sep/26/the-vietnam-war-review-a-complex-story-made-immediately-comprehensible>

Thomas, M 2002 'Out of Control: Emergent Cultural Landscapes and Political Change in Urban Vietnam', *Urban Studies*, vol. 39, issue 9, pp. 1611-1624.

Wade, PW 2015 'The 'living room war' in the escalation period: Romance, irony, and the narrative ambivalence in Vietnam War era photo journalism', *Media, War and Conflict*, vol.8, issue 3, pp. 312-328.

Wimal Dissanayake. 1992. 'Cinema, Nation and Culture in Southeast Asia: Enframing a relationship', *East-West Film Journal*, vol. 6, no. 2.

### Supplementary Texts

Harrison, Rachel. 2005, 'Amazing Thai film: The rise and rise of contemporary Thai cinema on the international screen', *Asian Affairs*, vol. 36, no.3, pp. 321-338.

### Outline of Course Content

#### Theme 1: Southeast Asia: A Changing Region (1 week)

- An introduction to the region: geographical, cultural, and socio-political

#### Theme 2: Brief introduction to visual practice in the study of Southeast Asia (1 week)

- How do visual images work, and what are their connections to reality, history and memory?
- What are the impacts of image worlds on individual and collective experience, social and political life?
- Visual culture, especially through mass media, for 'imagined communities': How visual

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expressions and depictions of socio-political and cultural life play their role in tradition, national identity and modernity.

### Theme 3: Representing Everyday Life and Issues of Urban Development in Ho Chi Minh City (1 week)

- Why is street photography seen as a key for “real encounters”? Are its images and representations more “genuine” and “truer” than in other forms of photography or cinema?
- How can street photography contribute to field research and ethnography, and help document livelihoods, social change and inequality?
- Visual documenting of urban developments, capture the issues of Ho Chi Minh City with your cameras.

### Theme 4: Visual Ethnography: Insights into the subjects of study (1 week)

- **Capture daily life like a pro** – by Cuong Tran. The talk will provide students with techniques in using the camera for the best visual effects and contents.

### Theme 5: ‘Reach Out’ with Cuong Tran (1 week)

- Students will have a chance to approach people and city landscapes in some areas of Saigon to practice their photography skills.

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### Theme 7: Vietnam War: Media and Reconciliation (1 week)

### Theme 8: Re-imagine Vietnam’s gender landscape amidst various perspectives (1 week)

- What are the visual impacts from films and photography on people’s perspectives on LGBT community and the ‘problem’ of being ‘gay’ or ‘other’.

### Theme 9: From Images and Footages on Facebook to Collective Sentiment and Activism: Aspects of Vietnam’s Civil Society. (2 weeks)

- How ‘*Muai Thai*’ cinemas illuminate Thai men’s desire to reclaim their patriotic heroism, which is needed to restore the country’s troubling image and its struggling ventures on the global stage’ and how National Identity is celebrated on screen.
- How particular aspects of Indonesian social life and the celebration of Indonesia’s contemporary Islamic identity are depicted through films -- with a focus on polygamy and how ‘women have the power to make choices about their lives’.

### Theme 10: Environmental Issues in Southeast Asia (1 week)

- Discussion on cross-border haze, Mekong river, and many other environmental issues in

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the region – through images and documentaries.

### Theme 11: Southeast Asian Cinema: Insights into the Societies (Thailand) (1 week)

- Discussion on how ' Muai Thai cinemas illuminate Thai men's desire to reclaim their patriotic heroism, which is needed to restore the country's troubling image and its struggling ventures on the global stage' and how National Identity is celebrated on screen.

### Theme 12: Democracy in Burma through 'Burma VJ: Reporting from a closed country.' (1 week)

- Going beyond the occasional news clip from Burma, the acclaimed filmmaker, Anders Østergaard, brings us close to the video journalists who deliver the footage. Though risking torture and life in jail, courageous young citizens of Burma live the essence of journalism as they insist on keeping up the flow of news from their closed country. Armed with small handycams the Burma VJs stop at nothing to make their reportages from the streets of Rangoon. Their material is smuggled out of the country and broadcast back into Burma via satellite and offered as free usage for international media. The whole world has witnessed single event clips made by the VJs, but for the very first time, their individual images have been carefully put together and at once, they tell a much bigger story. The film offers a unique insight into high-risk journalism and dissidence in a police state, while at the same time providing a thorough documentation of the historical and dramatic days of September 2007, when the Buddhist monks started marching.