



Mahidol University
International College

ICIR 217

Culture and Power

Course Description & Aims:

This course discusses, analyzes and compares dimensions and categories of ‘power’; the dynamics of open and hidden forms of power at the global, state, national, community, and personal level; origins and limitations of coercive power in stateless societies; hierarchy and surveillance; domination and resistance; impacts of “culture and personality” to contrasting mindsets and modalities of political leadership; legal cultures and inscriptions of power; politics of cross-cultural dialogue; civilizationalism and cultural nationalization; local vs. global culture; and the troubled relationship between cultural relativism and universal Human Rights.

Instructor: Dr Kenneth Houston

Email: (Kenneth.bre@mahidol.ac.th)

Office: Room 13 (MUIC, Building 2)

Office Hours: TBA (see SSD schedule)

Course Learning Objectives

At the completion of the course the student will be able to:

1. CLO1 describe the dynamic relationship of power and culture
2. CLO2 explain the cultural dynamic of political power on the global, national, communal and personal level
3. CLO3 discuss issues of domination and resistance
4. CLO4 analyze and critically discuss the politics of cross-cultural dialogue and the troubled relationship between cultural relativism and universal Human Rights

Course Learning Outcomes (CLOs)

Assessment	AI Level	% Overall Grade
Class Participation	AI-1	10%
Group Work	AI-2	60% (3x20%)
Final Examination	AI-1	30%

Topic No.	Topic
1	Introductions, outline of the course. Assessment requirements. Rationale and learning objectives. Admin Dramatizing Culture and Power – Video
2	Reading & Discussion: What does culture mean to <i>you</i> ? Culture and Education The concept of ‘culture’ – an exploration
3	Introduction to cultural topography and rationale for ‘Cultural Mapping’
4	Power in Political Science: The faces of power
5	Foucauldian & post-structural ideas about power
6	Interpretive Turn in the analysis of power
7	Revision & Review – Reading the Real World through Culture & Power
8	Case Study 1 – Cultural Topography and Cultural Mapping
9	Case Study 2 – Power Analysis using the Faces of Power
10	Case Study 3 – Power Analysis – Post Structural/Interpretive
11	Global Survey – Problems, Politics, Power
12	Course Review and Revision Workshop on Final exam
13	Final exam

Week 1

Topic description: This week will be devoted to ensuring students have a solid grasp of the core learning objectives and rationale of the course. Students will be introduced to the course outline, allocated their respective groups, and activities

Expected learning outcomes: Students will lay essential practical groundwork in order to be able to critically assess the influence of culture on the power structure in domestic and international politics. In addition, an understanding of cultural relativism will aid students in recognising the resistance of the universal norms and values of democracy and human rights in a particular country.

Readings:

- Maori Education Article
 - Maori Education Article critique
- Both uploaded to G Drive

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 2

Topic description: Students will be able to grasp some of the fundamental critical approaches to the study of culture, with a specific eye on its relevance to international affairs. The main dimensions of culture and the relevance of culture to social and political processes are explored.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to critically assess the available tools of cultural studies, account for fundamental debates in the field and consider the academic and scholarly merits of various perspectives.

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 3

Topic description: Cultural analysis is systematized in this course through the conceptual framework known as Cultural Topography, developed by US Intelligence. Through this approach students are given a practical method of analysing the cultural dimension to important contemporary or historical issues in global affairs.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to understand, develop, utilize and deploy an important conceptual tool. The addition of this conceptual and analytical framework to

their repertoire will significantly enhance their ability to critically evaluate political and international issues.

Readings:

- Cultural Topography Article
 - Cultural Topography Chapter
- Both uploaded to G Drive

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 4

Topic description: In this week, students will explore the concept of power, understood in this context as social power. Students will unpack the assumptions sometimes associated with the term and explore the tensions and contradictions in the philosophical discussion of the concept.

Expected learning outcomes: Students are expected to improve their literacy of a core concept in the study of politics and society, beyond the thin descriptions and definitions often associated with the specific field of IR.

Readings:

- Review of Power by Peter Morriss
 - Power Analysis: A Study of Participation at the Local Level in Tanzania
 - The Power Cube (www.powercube.net)
- Available in G Drive

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits

Week 5

Topic description: In this lesson, students will delve deeper into the idea of power and examine the various definitions and discussions of the subject from a range of disciplinary perspectives, focusing in particular on political science definitions such as hard and soft power, the three faces of power from the literature on political science.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will be able to consider the ways in which the IR and political science literature can help us understand power dynamics in the social world.

Readings:

- Nye, J. (2005). Soft power: The means to success in world politics. Public Affairs.

- Nye, J. S. (2010). The future of power: And use in the twenty-first century. Public Affairs.
- Keohane, R. O., & Nye, J. S. (2011). Power & Interdependence (4th ed.). Pearson.
- Bachrach and Baratz, Second Face of Power (G Drive)
- The Grammar of Social Power (G Drive)

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 6

Topic description: In this week's discussion, students will explore the broader qualitative interpretive perspective and post structural concepts of power, how it is understood in Foucauldian terms, and grapple with its closer relationship to the issue of culture.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will critically assess the merits and limits of the post-structural perspective on power.

Readings:

- Suurmond Discourse Analysis & Conflict (G Drive)
- Clarissa Hayward De Facing Power (G Drive)
- Nobody to Shoot (G Drive)
- Bent Flyvbjerg Rationality and Power (G Drive)

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 7

Topic description: Review & Midterm

Week 8

Topic description: This week students will undertake group work and test their knowledge and skills in the sphere of culture through the execution of a cultural topography or cultural mapping of either a local or global issue.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will acquire enhanced analytical skills through practice in the application of a conceptual framework to empirical evidence.

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 9

Topic description: This week, students will undertake a practical analysis of a global affairs topic through deployment of the traditional analysis of power as understood in terms of IR and mainstream political science.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will acquire enhanced analytical skills through practice in the application of a conceptual framework to empirical evidence.

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 10

Topic description: This week students will undertake group work and test their knowledge and skills in the sphere of power through the execution of a power analysis accounting for post structural points of view.

Expected learning outcomes: Students will critically evaluate challenges to the promotion and protection of human rights across the globe, with reference to the rejection of its universality.

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 11

Topic description: This week students will undertake group work and test their knowledge and skills in the sphere of power through the execution of an interpretive analysis of selected source material drawn from international and global affairs. Students will briefly present their findings on the second class of the week having undertaken a close analysis of these sources.

Expected learning outcomes: Student will critically assess contemporary case studies and real challenges with respect to the promotion and protection of human rights.

Activity: Students will participate in class discussion to engage with issues derived from the lecture and assigned readings. These questions are designed to help students understand this week's concepts and express their understanding in their own words. Students' contribution will be counted towards their overall participation credits.

Week 12

On the last week of classes, prior to the final assessment week, students will be given an opportunity to review the course and engage in workshop preparation for the final exam (worth 40%).

Appendices

*MUIC Policy for AI Use in Assessments

To align with MUIC's AI Policy on Teaching and Learning, this course follows a structured approach to AI usage in assessments to promote responsible engagement with technology while maintaining academic integrity. The permitted level of AI use is specified for each assessment activity:

AI Assessment Level		Description
1	<i>No AI</i>	The assessment is completed entirely without AI assistance in a controlled environment. Students rely solely on their existing knowledge, understanding, and skills.
2	<i>AI Planning</i>	AI is used for pre-task activities like brainstorming, outlining, and initial research. The focus is on using AI effectively for planning, synthesis, and ideation, while students independently refine and develop ideas.
3	<i>AI Collaboration</i>	AI is used to assist in completing tasks, including idea generation, drafting, feedback, and refinement. Students critically evaluate and modify AI outputs to demonstrate understanding.
4	<i>Full AI</i>	AI can be extensively used to complete tasks, with students directing AI to achieve assessment goals. Critical thinking and engagement with AI for problem-solving are essential.
5	<i>AI Exploration</i>	AI is employed creatively to solve tasks, generate novel insights, or explore innovative solutions. This level encourages students and educators to co-design unique AI-driven assessment approaches.

Lecturer's responsibility for course work grading

The responsibility for grading coursework lies solely with the course lecturer. All grades awarded reflect the professional judgment, academic expertise, and independent evaluation of the lecturer to ensure fairness, accuracy, and integrity in the assessment process.

Student's Acknowledgment of AI Use

For any assessment permitting AI (Levels 2-5), students must include an AI Acknowledgment Statement when submitting their work. Failure to disclose AI use where applicable may result in penalties or an F grade:

I acknowledge the use of [provide AI tool used here] to

- Generate ideas, outline, and for initial research*
- Data analysis and visualization*
- Language and grammar assistance*
- Programming and coding*
- Design graphics, layouts, or presentations with AI design tools*
- Generate visual or multimedia elements*
- Customize content formatting*
- Create music, sound effects, or other audio elements*

- Generate citations or bibliographies
- Others (please specify)

..... [Student's Signature]

..... [Student's Full Name]

Assessment Criteria:

1. Classroom Participation 10%

Classroom participation is based on attendance, preparation for class and the quality of students' participation in class discussions.

Assessment Criteria – Participation

<i>The student regularly attends class and can provide relevant documentation for any absences. The student is always prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student proactively contributes to class on a regular basis by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions, demonstrating an exceptional understanding of the assigned readings.</i>	9-10 points Excellent (A)
<i>The student regularly attends class and can provide relevant documentation for most absences. The student is often prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student actively contributes to class frequently by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions, demonstrating a good understanding of the assigned readings.</i>	8 points Good (B)
<i>The student usually attends class and can provide relevant documentation for some absences. The student is sometimes prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student occasionally contributes to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions, demonstrating a fair understanding of the assigned readings.</i>	7 points Fair (C)
<i>The student usually attends class and can provide relevant documentation for some absences. The student is only rarely prepared for class with assignments and required readings and does very rarely contribute to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions.</i>	6 points Poor (D)
<i>The student misses class frequently and cannot provide relevant documentation for absences. The student is never prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student does very rarely contribute to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions.</i>	4-5 points Fail (F)
<i>The student misses most classes and cannot provide relevant documentation for absences. The student is never prepared for class with assignments and required readings. The student does not contribute to class by offering ideas and/or asking relevant questions.</i>	1-3 points Fail (F)
<i>The student is absent from all classes.</i>	0 points

2. Group Work 50%

Building on the conceptual and theoretical material outlined for the first half of the trimester, students will then participate in group work where they can apply these ideas to real world scenarios. This will sharpen students' analytical and communication skills, enhance literacy on both culture and power, as well as build their ability to apply conceptual frameworks to complex real world cases. The week will be divided into plenary group work (group work that takes place within the classroom setting for the first contact period of the week), followed by class discussion/presentations of the results of their analysis (this will take place in the second class session of the week).

Assessment Criteria – Group Work

<i>The presentation clearly and convincingly summarizes the main issues of the assigned case study. The presentation is based on an excellent understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is clearly structured and freely delivered in a convincing and confident manner. The handout and the use of visual aids (if any) support the purpose of the presentation and are not distracting. No AI use has been detected.</i>	45-50 points
Excellent (A)	

<i>The presentation clearly summarizes the main issues of the assigned case study. The presentation is based on a very good understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is structured and freely delivered in a convincing manner. The handout and the use of visual aids (if any) support the purpose of the presentation and are not distracting. No AI use has been detected.</i>	40-44.5 points
Good (B/B+)	

<i>The presentation summarizes the main issues of the assigned case study. The presentation attempts to base the analysis on decent understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is mostly well-structured and freely delivered. The handout and the use of visual aids (if any) support the purpose of the presentation and are usually not distracting. No AI use has been detected.</i>	35-39.5 points
Fair (C/C+)	

<i>The presentation summarizes some of the main issues of the assigned case study. However, the presentation does not base the analysis on a competent understanding of the theoretical framework assigned. The presentation is mostly well-structured and freely delivered. The handout and the use of visual aids (if any) generally support the purpose of the presentation. Occasional AI use has been detected.</i>	30-34.5 points
Poor (D/D+)	

<i>The presentation fails in its attempt to summarize key issues from the assigned case study. The material presented is off-topic and does not contain relevant factual information. The presentation lacks structure and is fully read-out from a prepared script and delivered in an unsatisfactory manner. No handout has been prepared. Extensive AI use has been detected.</i>	<30 points
Fail (F)	

3. Final Exam 40%

The final exam is a timed examination one Week 13. This will be a written examination without the use of computer. The exam will follow an essay answer format on subject matter encountered throughout the course. This is an individual exercise.

Assessment Criteria – Final Exam

<i>The written answer demonstrates an exceptional level of awareness of the issues studied in class. It is well structured and written in a clear and unambiguous style of English. Argumentative claims are convincingly substantiated with examples and references to relevant concepts and theories from class and associated readings.</i>	36-40 points Excellent (A)
<i>The written answer demonstrates a reasonably good level of awareness of the issues studied in class. It is well structured and mostly written in a clear and unambiguous style of English. Argumentative claims are often substantiated with examples and references to relevant concepts and theories from class and associated readings.</i>	32-35.6points Good (B/B+)
<i>The written answer demonstrates a satisfactory level of awareness of the issues studied in class. It is reasonably structured and mostly written in a clear and unambiguous style of English. Argumentative claims are sometimes substantiated with examples and references to relevant concepts and/or theories from class and associated readings.</i>	28-31.6 points Fair (C/C+)
<i>The essay demonstrates only a basic level of awareness of the issues studied in class. However, some attempts have been made to structure the essay and it is mostly written in comprehensible English. There are occasional attempts to substantiate argumentative claims with examples or references to concepts and/or theories from class and associated readings.</i>	24-27.6 points Poor (D/D+)
<i>The essay demonstrates only a vague level of awareness of the issues studied in class and it lacks structure. However, the essay is written in a more or less comprehensible style of English. The essay is mostly descriptive and lacks argumentative qualities.</i>	<24 points Fail (F)
<i>No essay has been submitted.</i>	0 points