Course Title: SOCG 218  Social Problems in Asia
Term I, 2014-15

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Course Overview

Social problems are real problems, often with consequences for real people. Nevertheless, all problems exist within the contexts of their particular societies and cultures. What is a social problem and how we seek to solve social problems are influenced by particular social settings, governments’ policy orientation, media, opportunities for social movements, and individual actors’ choices. This course explores the social roots to the problems and how social problems affect and being affected by our social institutions and culture. In particular, we will learn about common social issues in Asian countries such as drug addiction, prostitution, poverty and gender inequalities.

Course Pre-requisite: Understanding Societies or equivalent.

Course Objectives

At the end of the term you should demonstrate competence in:
1. The theoretical frameworks through which sociologists study social problems.
2. The empirical findings of particular social problems.
3. Some possible solutions to social problems.
4. The ability to be critically engaged with the social issues of the day.
5. Locate and/or develop your own ideologies and solutions to social problems.

Class Sessions

Class sessions are of 3-hour duration per week. The class design incorporates a wide range of learning tools to diversify students’ learning experience. Class session will
come with brief lecture, class exercise, group discussion, and documentary screening.

**Assessment & Evaluation**

- **Quizzes** 25% (3% X 8 + 1 bonus point for everyone)
- **Group Project** 20%
- **Final Examination** 35%
- **Class Participation** 20%

**Quizzes (25%)**: There will be **EIGHT** short quizzes (6 questions) each week during Week 3 to 6 and Week 9 to 12. Format of the quizzes is T/F questions. Quizzes will be about the materials that we are going to cover in class on that day, i.e. you have to read the materials that we have not yet covered and be prepared for quizzes. I am using these quizzes to encourage you to read the course materials **before you come to class**. Questions however will be relatively simple and straightforward because I don't expect you to understand everything from the readings. There will be **no make-up** quiz if you are absent from class.

**Group Project (10 + 10%)**: A group of 5 to 6 students will conduct a mini research on a social issue. The project includes the following steps:

1. Form a group of at least 5 but no more than 6 students by the end of **Week 2** (altogether I need EIGHT groups). This group will also function as a discussion group at the beginning of each class (see further information below). You need to assign a group coordinator for further communication so I or my TA does not need to write to everyone all the time. **Give the name of your group members and the group coordinator to your TA by the end of Week 2.**
2. Select a social issue topic from the provided list (a total of eight topics listed at the end of this syllabus).
3. Sign up on the sign-up sheet available from the University's Learning Management System no later than the end of **Week 3** for your choice of topic. The sign-up sheet will be available at the beginning of Week 3.
4. You are expected to **conducted further research** on the topic. The nature of the research is primarily library research – to find out and incorporate what other studies have done on the issue.
5. Identify sociological explanation and discussion of the issue, along with other kinds of explanations, if any (i.e. include economic, political and psychological).
6. Suggest an overall mechanism on how the issue is formed, developed and sustained in the particular country (this overall picture represents the integration of all the perspectives on the issue). This overall picture should lead to an understanding on why the issue so far **cannot** be solved.
7. Suggest a realistic plan on how to solve or lessen the issue. It is unlikely to find a real solution here, so we are just looking for a **reasonable** plan that is at least a good food for thought.
8. I will allocate a 20 minutes **meeting time** with each group before the presentation to discuss any issue that you may have. A sign-up sheet for this meeting will be available on the LMS before **Week 5**.
9. **Present your research** as an in-class group presentation. **Week 7** is for the presentations of the first four topics, **Week 13** is for the other four topics. You will have 25 minutes for the presentation and 10 minutes for Q&A. The presentation is
worth 10% of your final grade. A good presentation is a presentation that the class can learn effectively from what you have presented.

10. A concise report of your research (around 12 pages, standard font size and double spacing, not including bibliography or graphics) should be submitted no later than the last day of the revision week (by 4:00pm). I am looking for a report with reasonable research quality based on secondary data, rather than just a cut and paste product from the materials that you have sorted out. This is worth 10% of your grade. You are welcome to submit the report anytime you want before the deadline. 10% of the final grade of your group project will be deducted every day for the delay of your final report. Send me a softcopy of your report through email and leave a hard copy in my mailbox outside the SOSS Administration Office.

Class Participation (20%):

Part I (15%): Participation is an essential part of your learning experience. As an active participant of the class, you should ask question whenever you see appropriate, express your opinion eagerly, and comment on classmates’ ideas constructively. Through participation, you will learn how to present yourself, and by sharing your ideas, you will also facilitate other classmates’ learning. Rather than using a quantitative approach to evaluate your participation, e.g. counting how many questions you have asked, I am using a ‘subjective impression’ approach. Your level of participation will be evaluated by how much you have ‘impressed’ the class and me, i.e. how much I remember you as an active contributor. You are also supposed to read the assigned articles for all the group project topics and actively participate in the group presentation sections. This is your individual score for the class participation.

Part II (5%): This 5% is a group score. The group that you formed for the group project will also be a discussion group. At the beginning of each class, you will have 20 minutes to discuss the articles as a group. When the group discusses the readings, you are also supposed to submit two questions out of the readings for class discussion. The grade is based on the overall quality of your questions. A good question is a question that could lead to good discussion or debate. Ideally, I would like to have the questions right after the 20 minutes discussion. Remember to put down the name of the group coordinator on the questions so I know which group the questions are from!

Final Examination (35%): The final examination will be in essay question format. You will have the exam questions two weeks before the final exam week. The questions are typically very broad questions that require you to use information from most of the weeks, so don’t expect that you can wait until the last two weeks to only read articles relevant to the exam. All articles will be relevant for the exam.

Attendance

I do not take attendance, because I believe you should know what is the right thing to do for your own learning. While there is no penalty for not coming to class, you will miss some of the quizzes (no make-up quiz), and not to mention you will also miss a lot of information from the class that may need for the exams.

*** Laptops are to be used ONLY for note-taking during class time, and NOT for social networking, email, MSN, etc. I would very much be appreciated if you can follow this rule.
Consultation

I have an open door policy in terms of when you can meet with me. Feel free to stop by my office and chat about anything. However, it is always better if you can email me first to see if I am available at a particular time before you come.

Course Materials

***You are supposed to read all the class materials BEFORE coming to class.

Main Reference: [Not a textbook]
[A copy of this book is reserved at the Library. I also have a couple of copies in my office available for a two-day loan]

Each week you are required to read a set of articles specified in the weekly course agenda. I will provide study questions for each article at least three days before the next class.

Course Agenda

Unless a specific link is provided, all the articles can be found and downloaded from the SMU Library’s e-journal collection]

Week One: Introduction
Theme: How to define “social problems”?

Readings:

Week Two: Sociological Perspective on Social Problems
Theme: We will examine the major theoretical perspectives that are being used for analyzing social problems. The main focus is on “Social Construction theories”.
Readings:
6. “What is Social Policy?”

Week Three: Crime and Juvenile Delinquency
Theme: How different theoretical perspectives handle social problems

This week is our first attempt to analyze a social problem. This collection of articles will give you an introduction on how sociology analyzes social problems, ranging from quantitative to qualitative approaches, from functionalist to social constructionist to institutional analysis.

Readings:

Week Four: Alcohol and Drugs
Theme: The interaction between objective conditions and subjective interpretation

Through alcohol and drugs use as examples, we will go through both the objective conditions and subjective interpretation of these two social issues. Sociologists argue that typically there is no direct linkage between the objective conditions and subjective interpretation of most social issues.
Readings:

Week Five: Prostitution

Theme: How do actors of the issues make sense on what is going on?

*Often, we look at social problems from an outsider's point of view. While we may be objective, we should have a much better understanding of the issue, especially on how did it happen, if we know how the actors being involved make sense on what is going on. This week's theme is "social problem" from the actors’ angle.*

Readings:
http://www.forbes.com/2006/02/11/economics-prostitution-marriage_cx_mn_money06_0214prostitution.html This is a short introduction on the “Theory of Prostitution” article.

Optional:

Visual Materials:
1. Devadasis: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2GFaN9-aizo
2. Prostitutes in Singapore:
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AqNytMa2phQ&list=PLA688FD89F2A7B74D
4. Solution: Legalizing prostitution in Taiwan
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jW15JGdFF4M

Week Six: Gender Inequalities
Theme: Can social problems be resolved?

This week I want to look at how social problems could be solved, and in particular, through social movements. When we discuss social movements, the main focus is on what strategies can be used to mobilize people to serve for certain purposes. Gender inequalities have a very long history being embedded in our male-dominated culture and institutions, and social problems are created because of this. Changes in a few policies here and there will not make much of a difference unless we have some fundamental social and cultural changes. When top-down institutional changes cannot do the job, bottom-up social movements that could lead to a change of fundamental mindset would almost be the only option. While there seems to be a chance for social movements to be successful in Asian developed/developing countries, what is the chance of success of social movements in underdeveloped countries? What are the pros and cons of using social movements as a tool to achieve changes?

Readings:

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Visual materials:
1. Dalit Women http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NUaFQeUIc1o; a more general description on Dalit http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UhUwKXIQ5kM;
2. Dowry Death in India http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=8HGN59gKch8

Week Seven: Review and Group Presentation
Readings: No reading! 😊

Week Eight: Recess

Week Nine: Family and Marriage: non-marriage, early and late marriage, and divorce
Theme: Family Formation as a Personal Choice?

To marry or not to marry? When should someone be married? Who should someone marry to? To divorce or not to divorce? These are issues that should be considered primarily as personal choices and should not have anything to do with social problems. In what way they could be turned into social issues? This week we will study how these personal choices are shaped by external macro level factors, and how the “choices” that are being made, could be considered as “harmful” to some parts of the society. How claims are being made from different stakeholders on these personal choices? In particular, I am interested in looking at how family formation, and its dissolution, is being framed by two other social institutions – government and religion, and at some point, the academia.

Readings:

Optional:
3. More online information on divorce in the Philippines: http://divorceinthephilippinesblog.wordpress.com/

Visual Materials:
1. “Too Young to Wed “ (National Geographic) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7c_zppPutQw
2. “Bangladesh Child Marriage” (A documentary by BBC) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pooQFiaCFAI
3. “Nada al-Ahdal would rather die than be forced into marriage.” (An interview of a 10 year old Yemeni girl who ran away from home because her mother wanted to marry her off) http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TDh2fF4ccwI [additional information: http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2373151/Nada-Al-Ahdal-Escaped-Yemeni-child-bride-11-explains-ran-away-home.html]

Week Ten: Population: Fertility Rates and Ageing
Theme: The framing of social problems

This is a continuation of last week’s discussion on family as new born and elderly are both members of a family. While the two population-related issues are real issues, they could both be framed according to the government’s interests. A low fertility rate could be argued either as a positive or a negative trend, and a high fertility rate could be argued as a non-issue, as we will see in the case of Philippines, but many poor countries on the other hand would think too many people to feed was their problem. Ageing could be framed as a social problem by seeing it as an economic burden but can also be seen as an asset of the society when older people’s experiences were valued. Some suggest the stigma of ageing as an economic burden can be replaced by the concept “successful ageing”, when this concept itself represents yet another kind of stigma.

Readings:
3. Online materials on Philippines birth Control

http://www.sociology.vt.edu/pubs/EmpoweringTheOld.pdf


Optional:


Visual materials:

1. **Reports on efforts to control the Philippines birth rate**
   CNN's Anna Coren reports on efforts to control the birth rate in the Philippines
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhZJiOQZueE

2. **Birth Control Efforts in Rural Philippines**
   Fears of overfishing lead to birth control efforts in villages around the Philippines. This PBS documentary reports on the view of people who have been facing immediate issues of having too many children.
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cQMnzHcgrV8

3. **The Philippines, birth control and the Roman Catholic church (part 1-3)**
   In the next 30 years the population of the Philippines is set to double to 170 million. Contraceptives are frowned on and abortion is illegal but as Sharmeen Obaid-Chinay reveals, every year more than half a million Filipina women are so desperate they undergo harrowing illegal abortions, despite the fact that at least 80,000 end up seriously ill in hospital.
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Tqk_NOr5tos
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-tRHKLOvlQE&feature=relmfu
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lv5ShJ_E12s&feature=relmfu

4. **A Question of Faith**
   In the Philippines, access to contraceptives is largely out of the reach of the poor. A "reproductive health bill" in the legislature that calls for public education on birth control and government subsidies to make it available to everyone has the support of 70% of Filipinos, polls show. But the measure has been blocked for years amid vehement opposition by the Roman Catholic Church.
   http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v8sAdZxrGZo

**Week Eleven: Poverty**
**Theme:** Can we isolate a social problem?
This week we are going to look at the interactive effects of related variables in social problems. The first topic is on Pakistan. I am using this country as a case to illustrate how economists and sociologists/social scientists are having very different approaches in dealing with poverty. The economist’s perspective somehow represents the belief that issue can be isolated, can be taken out and replaced by something else, rather than to see the issue as part of a larger nexus of issues. The more specific topic on poverty is on the issue of “feminization of poverty.” This issue illustrates how poverty, as a result of economic inequality, is intertwining with gender inequality. An amplifying effect can also be expected when poverty interacts with race or age inequalities. We will also investigate microfinance as a commonly available solution for poverty.

Readings:
5. Online articles on women poverty in Japan.

Optional:

Visual Materials:
1. Poverty in Pakistan http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=63RuGHmQCIw
2. Japan's poverty rate hits record high http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=OyKAKrd86mk
4. Single mothers lead Japan's poor population http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=87CqMyDwAqI

Week Twelve: Digital Divide and Environmental Issues

Theme: Business Interests and Social Problems

This week we look at two issues that are traditionally not seeing as social problems. They are at the same time both being interfered by business interests. While the objective (harmful) conditions are obvious, for the Digital Divide issue, business interests may help “making a case” for digital divide to be considered as a social problem in the 1st and 3rd world countries, and
business interests also place a significant role in constructing government and corporations in “disclaiming” their responsibilities in environmental issues.

Readings:

Optional:

Visual Materials:
1. Nicholas Negroponte who is the promoter of the “One Laptop per Child” project, telling us why he thought the program is going to work. http://www.ted.com/talks/nicholas_negroponte_on_one_laptop_per_child_two_years_on.html
Week Thirteen: Review and Group Presentation
Readings: No reading!

Week Fourteen: Revision Week

Week Fifteen: Final Exam

Groups that present in Week Seven [tentative topics]

1. Corruption in Myanmar (make a comparison with one other Asian country of your choice)
2. Child Labor in India
3. Human Trafficking and Prostitution in Southeast Asia
4. Homosexuality and same-sex marriage in Vietnam (make a comparison with one other Asian country of your choice)

Groups that present in Week Thirteen [tentative topics]

5. Declining birth rates and policies to counter it: A comparison between Taiwan (or any other country of your choice) and Singapore
6. Ageing in China (make a comparison with one other Asian country of your choice)
7. Divorce as a social problem (or not?) in South Korea and Japan
8. Environmental Issues in Indonesia (e.g. deforestation, overfishing, pollution, wildlife trade, vanishing natural resources)

END