Sungkyunkwan University (SKKU) International Summer Semester (ISS) 2026

People, Power, and Progress: Social Changes in Aisa

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SHORT COURSE DESCRIPTION

This course explores the everyday realities and emerging challenges facing young adults across contemporary Asia. Through case studies from South Korea, Japan, China, India, Thailand, Indonesia, Vietnam, the Philippines, Singapore, Malaysia, and more, students examine how rapid economic shifts, changing social values, technological transformation, and political movements are reshaping the experiences of people in their late teens and twenties. Topics include youth unemployment and migration, gender norms and family change, mental health and social identity, digital activism and censorship, and environmental pressures in rapidly urbanizing societies.

Drawing on interdisciplinary perspectives, the course highlights common patterns, while also emphasizing country-specific contexts. Students will analyze how young people are responding to these changes through activism, creativity, and cultural adaptation, and will reflect on what these issues reveal about globalization, inequality, and the future of youth across Asia. The course encourages comparative thinking, cross-cultural dialogue, and critical engagement with some of the most pressing social challenges shaping Asia today. Students' own experiences, whether from Asia or other world regions, will be a critical part of the course, enriching class dialogue and allowing for meaningful cross-cultural comparisons.

READING MATERIALS

Selected electronic readings and videos on the following topics will be distributed either online or in class.

- Theories of social changes and social organizations
- Employment and Economic Pressure
- Mental Health and Social Identity
- Digital Surveillance and Online Expression
- Political and Civic Engagement
- Tourism and Environmental Degradation
- Digital Labor and the Gig Economy

COURSE REQUIREMENTS AND GRADING

Class meetings include discussion of the readings, some brief lectures, workgroups, and student presentations and/or facilitation of discussions and activities. They are interactive, and participation in class is an essential part of the learning process. Active engagement and open communication about ideas are critical for growth and development in this course!

Evaluation

In-Class Quizzes	20 points
Exam 1 (in-class exam)	30 points
Exam 2 (presentation)	30 points
Class attendance/participation	20 points

Grading

60-100%	Pass

Less than 60% Fail

- There will be more than 10 quizzes taken in class across the course, each worth 2 points. Ten highest quizzes will be used for the final grade, totaling 20 points.
- Exam 1 will consist of definitions, short answer questions, and psychological case study. Detailed instructions will be provided in class.
- Each of you will be randomly assigned to a small group. In the final week, each group will discuss/present the key ideas from their group projects. Detailed instructions will be provided in class.
- ***Students must attend at least 80% of all classes to pass***. Arriving late or leaving early will be considered missing. Each class missed with non-emergency will result in a two point reduction per each from the final grade. It is expected that students will notify the instructor in advance or after when and why they miss a class. The instructor will decide whether any missing is an emergency.
- ***Academic honesty is required at all times.*** Plagiarism is unacceptable. Plagiarism is using another person's ideas or creative work without giving credit to that person. It includes 1) paraphrasing information from a source without referencing the source, 2) copying and pasting Internet information, graphics or media into your work without citing the source, 3) using someone else's homework, papers you or someone else has written for another class, or buying papers or research you did not do and turning it in as if you had done the work yourself, and 4) not putting quote marks around parts of sources you copy exactly. If your instructor believes you have committed an act of academic misconduct, s/he may give you a penalty grade, which is defined as any grade based on a charge of academic misconduct. A penalty grade may include, but is not limited to, a failing grade on an assignment or in the course.

COURSE SCHEDULE

– WEEK I –

Monday (29 June)
Introduction

Tuesday (30 June)
Demographic Shifts I: Low Birth Rates & Delayed Marriage
- Case studies: South Korea, Japan
- Changing family values and gender roles

Wednesday (1 July)
Demographic Shifts II: Migration & Urbanization
- Case studies: China, Vietnam, India
- Rural-to-urban migration; mega-city transformations

Thursday (2 July)
Economic Pressure I: Youth Unemployment & Precarity
- Case studies: Singapore, India

– WEEK II –

Monday (6 July)
Economic Pressure II: Gig Economies & Brain Drain
- Case studies: Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia

Tuesday (7 July)

Mental Health I: Stress, Loneliness & Hikikomori

- Case studies: Japan, South Korea

Wednesday (8 July)

Mental Health II: Identity, Gender Expectations & Youth Culture

- Case studies: China, India, Thailand

Thursday (9 July)

Mid-term exam

– WEEK III –

Monday (13 July)

Research Method Session: Studying Youth Across Cultures

- Mixed methods, comparative research
- Ethics & positionality in cross-cultural research

Tuesday (14 July)

Technology, Digital Activism & Surveillance

- Case studies: China, Vietnam, South Korea
- Online resistance, censorship, youth digital citizenship.

Wednesday (15 July)

Youth Politics & Social Movements

- Case studies: Thailand, Hong Kong, India
- Protests, democracy struggles, generational political divides.

Thursday (16 July)

Gender & Social Equity

- Case studies: India, South Korea, Malaysia
- Safety, patriarchy, LGBTQ+ inclusion, feminist activism.

– WEEK IV–

Monday (20 July)

Environment, Climate Action & Sustainability

- Case studies: Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand
- Climate vulnerability, pollution, youth-led environmental movements.

Tuesday (21 July)

Group Presentations (Round 1)

Wednesday (22 July)

Group Presentations (Round 2) & Course Wrap-Up